



***Cooperation methods and tools
applied by European Structural and Investment Funds
programmes for 2014-2020
to support implementation of the European Union
Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region***

SECOND INTERIM REPORT

Task 2 – Interviews

May 2015

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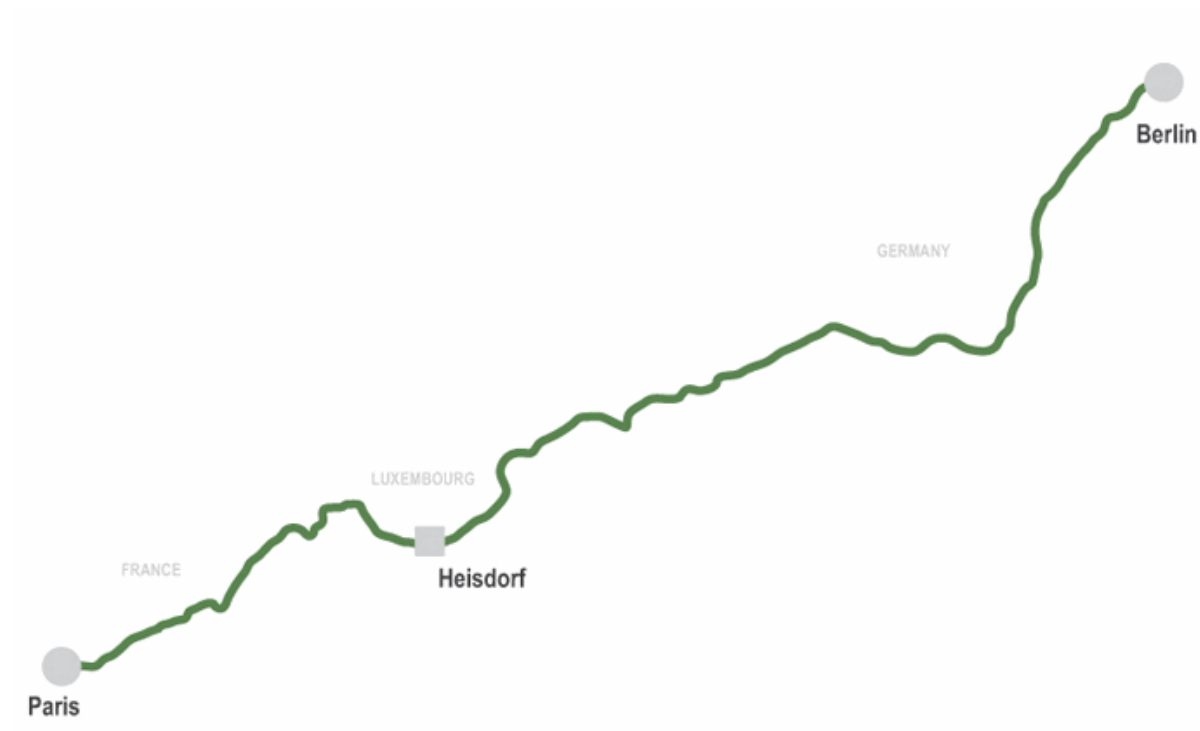
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REPORT



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List of abbreviations

BSN-ESF	Baltic Sea Network for European Social Fund programmes
CF	Cohesion Fund
CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CS	Communication Strategy
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESI Funds	European Structural & Investment Funds
ESF	European Social Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
HA	Horizontal Action
HAC	Horizontal Action Coordinator
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IB	Intermediate Body
IP	ESI Funds Programme Investment Priority
MA	Managing Authority
NCP	EUSBSR National Contact Point
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Policy Area
PAC	Policy Area Coordinator
R&D	Research and Development
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TO	ESI Funds Programme Thematic Objective

1. Introduction

The second interim report summarises the results of interviews made with Managing Authorities of the Operational Programmes and the Cooperation Programme. They were intended to make it possible to explore the intentions of the authorities behind the written text in the programmes and how foreseen procedures have been or will be adjusted to facilitate the implementation of projects pursuing EUSBSR objective and whether communication activities on the EUSBSR are foreseen.

The interviewees represented different functions within the ESI funds programme: strategic decision-making, elaboration of the OP/CP and programme implementation. The national experts who led the interviews tried to gather persons representing these different functions for a single interview.

Most of the OPs/CP have not finalised all implementation provisions. In these exchanges each expert asked for clarifications on the descriptions and procedures described in the OP/CP and on how they are foreseen to be implemented. The second objective of this dialogue was to identify the intentions behind the mostly vague formulations in the OPs/CPs.

The interviews were led face-to-face with the exception of Sweden and Denmark. In the case of the OP 'Upper Norrland', interviewees were spread between Umeå and Östersund, making it more meaningful to gather them in a Skype conference; preliminary discussions on the National Regional Fund Programme showed that primarily focused on the European Spallation Source in Lund and would therefore be of limited relevance for the EUSBSR. In the Danish case, the location of the Managing Authority for the ERDF and ESF programmes in Silkeborg implied that a face-to-face interview did not appear as a cost-efficient solution.

Table 1. List of ESI Funds covered by the study

Country	Operational programme / Cooperation Programme	Funds
Denmark	Operational Programme Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Businesses. National Programme for the European Regional Fund - 2014-2020	ERDF
	ESF Operational Programme	ESF
Estonia	Operational Programme for Cohesion Policy Funding 2014- 2020	ESF, ERDF and CF
Finland	Sustainable Growth and Work 2014-2020 (Operational Programme Mainland Finland)	ERDF and ESF
	Rural development programme for Mainland Finland	EAFRD
	EMFF programme	EMFF
Germany	Regional Operational Programme for 'Mecklenburg- Vorpommern'	ERDF
Latvia	Operational Programme 'Growth and Employment'	ESF, ERDF and CSF
Lithuania	Operational Programme for EU Structural Funds Investments for 2014-2020	ESF, ERDF and CF
	Lithuanian Rural Development Programme 2014-2020	EAFRD
Poland	Operational Programme 'Infrastructure and Environment' (national programme)	ERDF and CF
	Operational Programme 'Digital Poland' (national programme)	ERDF
	Operational Programme 'Knowledge Education Development'	ESF
	Regional Operational Programme for Pomorskie Voivodeship	ERDF and ESF
	EMFF programme	EMFF
Sweden	National regional fund programme for investments in growth and jobs 2014-2020	ERDF
	Regional Operational Programme for Upper Norrland	ERDF
Poland Germany Lithuania Sweden and Denmark	South Baltic Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (Interreg territorial cooperation programme)	ERDF

2. References to the EUSBSR in the programming phase

The first issue addressed in each interview was the influence of the EUSBSR in the programming phase. A series of eight questions was selected to explore whether parties involved in the development of each programme try to envisage its actions in a wider Baltic context (see Text Box 1). We wished to focus on macro-regional cooperation as a lever to achieve national and regional ambitions, and on the attention paid to ambitions at the level of the Baltic Sea Region in individual programmes, rather than on thematic overlaps between the EUSBSR and each OP or CP.

By way of consequence, the influence of the EUSBSR was first addressed from an organisational perspective, by enquiring whether different forms of macro-regional cooperation were envisaged during the programming phase. In a second phase, we asked whether the selection of priority axes, investment priorities and specific objectives would contribute to the EUSBSR in the opinion of the interviewee. This made it possible to understand how each interviewee approaches the notion of 'contribution': is it understood as 'implementing measures within the same thematic field' or 'reflecting the same ambitions at the level of the programme area', or are there reflections on 'multi-level governance' or 'government' of which ESI Funds programmes and the EUSBSR would components?

The remaining six questions addressed more concrete aspects of the programme elaboration process, such as involvement of PACs and HACs and discussions on the possibility of funding cooperation with actors outside the programme area. Many of the interviewees specified that they could only answer these questions given their own perspective on the programme elaboration process, which they described as complex and multifaceted.

Text Box 1. Questions on the programming phase

1. Was macro-regional cooperation envisaged in the programming phase? If yes, how?
2. Which thematic objectives, priority axes, investment priorities and specific objectives do you think will contribute to the EUSBSR? For each of these, under which objectives and sub-objectives of the EUSBSR will these contributions sort?
3. How were main stakeholders of the EUSBSR, e.g. NCP, PACs or HACs or others, involved in the programming process / design?
4. Was the EUSBSR considered in the selection and formulation of a specific objective or investment priority?
5. Was there coordination during the programming process with PACs / HACs? Did they propose specific measures?
6. Was there any coordination with other ESI Funds programmes within the country and/or outside the country with regard to the EUSBSR? How was this organised? Which ones? What issues did the coordination focus on? What types of coordination/cooperation were agreed on?
7. Were there discussions concerning the possibility of funding cooperation with actors outside the programme area? How was macro-regional cooperation foreseen in the programming phase?
8. Were there any discussions among the programme bodies or other programme stakeholders concerning the possibility of dedicating a part of the budget to transnational activities or projects with direct contribution to the EUSBSR?

The answers to each question are listed in Table 2. As far as the two first more organisational questions are concerned, a majority of interviewees declared that macro-regional cooperation was considered during the programming phase and that this led to the formulation of a macro-regional or at least transnational cooperation perspective. The exceptions are:

- the OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Businesses' and the ESF OP for Denmark¹, which consider transnational cooperation as a topic for ETC programmes, which represent a relatively large proportion of ESI Funds available in Denmark compared to other programmes;
- the OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern', which considers macro-regional cooperation as an issue for ETC programmes, and also mentions that problems were encountered spending funds under the transnational measure under the 2007-2013 ESF programme because of a lack of demand.
- the Polish OPs 'Infrastructure and Environment' and 'Digital Poland' and the Polish EMFF Programme, which all consider that their respective areas of intervention do not call for cooperation across national boundaries.

The Polish OP 'Infrastructure and Environment' additionally invokes a series of legal and regulatory reasons for not envisaging macro-cooperation as an option in the programme elaboration phase:

- regulations on public procurement do not make it possible to give actors from the Baltic Sea Region priority when applying technical solutions from, other countries. Actors from across the EU must be treated equally.
- Two thirds of programme allocations come from the Cohesion Funds, for which the interviewee considers that article 70(2) is of limited relevance².
- Investments financed by the Cohesion Fund must be located in Objective 1 regions, which limits the geographical scope of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

The programme advocates a model with cooperative 'pre-projects' under an ETC programme feeding into their own activities. These comments suggest that further dialogues on the diversity of cooperation models that could be envisaged in the Baltic Sea Region could open new perspective for macro-regional cooperation as part of ESI Funds programmes.

Interestingly, the Finnish EMFF Programme makes a distinctly different assessment of cooperation perspectives and opportunities compared to its Polish counterpart (see above). The interviewees consider that the new programming period opens up new perspectives for cooperation as maritime spatial planning, integrated maritime surveillance and marine knowledge are fields of intervention

¹ Throughout the report, the terms 'programme' and 'OP' are used as shortcuts for 'the persons interviewed from the programme'

² No elements to support this claim could be found in the CPR

within which cooperation is particularly relevant. They would also like to follow up previous successes of the flagship project on aquaculture together with actors in Sweden and Denmark.

It is recurrently mentioned that cooperation is an issue at the level of individual projects rather than at the level of the programmes. However, some interviewees also emphasize that they considered it premature to address the issue of transnational cooperation in detail during the programming phase. During the programme elaboration phase, the Swedish OP ‘Upper Norrland’ adopted macro-regional cooperation in relation with the EUSBSR as a criterion for project selection for all of its five priorities. According to the interviewed MA, the unspecific description of this cooperation leave for the regional partnerships (of which the first meetings are currently taking place) to determine how such provisions should be implemented. Regional actors also emphasize that the involvement of local and regional actors in Baltic issues and in the EUSBSR keeps diminishing, and that the likelihood of a bottom-up emergence of substantial macro-regional cooperative initiatives is low.

Some interviewees describe the formulation of a rationale for cooperation already at the programme elaboration stage. One example is the Lithuanian OP ‘EU Structural Funds Investments’. The interviewees point out that cooperation should be developed in areas where this appears natural. They point out that cooperation may involve exchange of experience only and that it is important to follow-up these initial exchanges. However, they also emphasize that actual cooperation depends on specific project initiatives, and that the function of the programme is primarily to encourage cooperation across national boundaries when it is useful. For example, when interviewed about the OP ‘Sustainable Growth and Work’, the Finnish Baltic Sea Ambassador Erja Tikka insists on the importance of macro-regional cooperation in the field of youth unemployment. She uses the example of inter-regional co-operation between universities of applied sciences and enterprises with German partners offering apprenticeship opportunities. She states that *“the most obvious links between the EUSBSR and the programme and opportunities for cooperation are internationalisation of Finnish enterprises, clean-tech business and research, bio-economy, smart transport and energy solutions and cooperation between educational institutions and universities”*. This reflects a relatively precise idea of the types of cooperation to be privileged by the programme, even if a wide range of concrete cooperation modalities may nonetheless be envisaged within individual projects.

Polish national guidelines for programme elaborations imposed a focus on intra-regional partnerships. In spite of this, the OP ‘Pomorskie Voivodeship’ has developed an elaborate approach of macro-regional cooperation and has been designated as an exemplar of EUSBSR inclusion in ESI Funds programmes by the National Working Team on the EUSBSR established by the Polish NCP. Its typology of relations between the Programme and the EUSBSR (see Text Box 2) can help formulating priority axes.

Text Box 2. Typology of relations between the Programme and the EUSBSR defined by the Polish OP ‘Pomorskie Voivodeship’

“Compliance – the relation between ROP and EUSBSR is on **general level, indirect and merely theoretical** – it concerns general thematic areas, like education, environment. There is only a coincidence between topics and issues financed under ROP and highlighted in the EUSBSR.

It will be probably the vast majority of projects in ROP 2014-2020.

Coordination – the relation is **more direct** and the coordination would be done **on the level of the region** by the regional authority (ROP MA) to strengthen the synergy of both: ROP projects and other interregional/cross-border projects (mainly ETC, but not only). It is done to avoid the duplication of the projects, results etc.

Direct link – the relation between the ROP and EUSBSR is direct (e.g. the ROP is able to finance projects of transnational/cross-border partnerships which even **may become flagship projects or projects supporting flagship projects** etc.)”

Both the Finnish and Lithuanian rural development programmes suggest that international cooperation is already widely developed, and that the EUSBSR only adds an additional dimension to established networks and cooperation habits. However, some limitations are mentioned. The field of 'rural renewal', which involves the improvement of quality of life in rural areas is according to the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme a field of intervention within which they have limited experience. Therefore, the actors involved in the programme elaboration wish to test it within national borders first, before possibly envisaging international cooperation in the next programmes. The Finnish Rural Development Programme considers the possibility of funding transnational cooperation under EAFRD measure 16³ as an opportunity but points out that only some countries have enabled funding of transnational projects.

Generally all programmes derived the selection of thematic and specific objectives from the regional or national needs and not from the EUSBSR. However, the EUSBSR was considered in the formulation of priority axes of some programmes, especially in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and in the Polish OP 'Infrastructure and Environment' and OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'.

Some programmes emphasize the limited influence of the EUSBSR:

- The Swedish OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs', which focuses on the European Spallation Source and therefore considers the relevance of the EUSBSR to be limited.
- The Swedish OP 'Upper Norrland' considers that national guidelines and European regulations were too restrictive to allow EUSBSR objectives and sub-objectives to significantly influence the selection of priority axis and investment priorities. They therefore mainly checked that there were no contradictions between the OP and the EUSBSR.
- The OP 'Digital Poland', which considers that it may only incidentally contribute to the achievement of some EUSBSR objectives.
- The Polish EMFF Programme, which will only indirectly contribute to the EUSBSR.
- The Finnish EMFF Programme, which states that the EUSBSR did not influence the selection of objectives.

³ Measure 16 (Art. 35 of the EAFRD regulation sets the frame for cooperation eligible under EAFRD

Additionally, according to the Lithuanian NCP, the EUSBSR as such did not have any influence on the formulation of specific objectives or investment priorities for the Lithuanian programmes. The objectives of the EUSBSR are very wide and can be found in most strategic documents, not only the EUSBSR. The fact that there are no contradictions between the Lithuanian OPs and the EUSBSR should not be interpreted as the result of a direct influence.

The Polish OP 'Knowledge Education Development' identifies a series of priority axes that overlap thematically with EUSBSR PAs. However, it is specified that the only direct contributions to the EUSBSR will be under priority axis 'social innovation and international cooperation', which is the only one to foresee transnational cooperation, and under priority axis 'efficient policies', which will fund the elaboration of maritime spatial plans. Contributions to the EUSBSR are therefore understood as presupposing transnational collaboration or a process that follows guidelines defined at the level of the Baltic Sea region.

The Danish programmes during the interview repeated statements from the OP highlighting that their focus is on only two sub-objectives of the EUSBSR, as specified in the first interim report. It will furthermore be up to regional growth forums to decide whether they wish to focus on priority axis and investment priorities linked to these two sub-objectives.

Overall, the involvement of EUSBSR actors in programme elaboration is limited according to a majority of interviewees. This also includes countries where the partnership agreement and/or the OPs describe a significant involvement of EUSBSR. For example, in the case of Lithuania, interviewees stress that the only personal representation of EUSBSR actors in the 'Commission for the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds 2014-2020' is the NCP from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other ministries that play a role as PACs participate, but their representatives are not the ones that are involved in the EUSBSR. The Latvian interviewee emphasizes that the 36 out of 39 policy area and horizontal action focal points are either in the ministries or in public organisation directly subordinated to the ministries. These 36 focal points coordinate their positions with colleagues involved in OP elaboration internally. Direct involvement of EUSBSR actors in ESI Funds programmes is therefore not needed. Similar arrangements probably occur in a number of countries.

Similarly, in Poland, the interviewee for the OP 'Knowledge Education Development' refers to an "*indirect involvement of some PACs and HACs*" through transfers of experience and use of good practices with regards to macro-regional cooperation that have been accumulated during the previous programming period. The Baltic Sea Network for the European Social Fund (BSN-ESF) is said to have contributed to disseminate such information which has later been applied in the programme elaboration phase.

In Sweden, the MA of the OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs' involved the Swedish PAC Innovation while the MA of the OP 'Upper Norrland' had no interaction with any PAC or HAC despite the fact that the region Västerbotten was HAC Involve at that time.

Sometimes, the role of coordination bodies mentioned in partnership agreements is toned down in the interviews. In Finland, the role of the 'Cohesion 2014+ working group' is limited to "*one meeting*". The Danish interviewees did not mention the involvement of PACs in the cooperative process of programme elaboration organised in 2013, which is referred to in the partnership agreement.

The Estonian interviewee describes a more systematic involvement of a National EUSBSR Working group, including the NCP, representatives of the Managing Authority and other ministries as well as PACs, throughout the programme elaboration process. The Polish OP 'Infrastructure and Environment' also claims that the 'Polish National Working Team on the EUSBSR' played an important role in the elaboration of the OP. PA Nutri has also commented the draft OP. Furthermore, both the Finnish and Lithuanian rural development programmes refer to a dialogue with PA Agri.

Only very few programmes consider that there was a discussion about the possibilities to fund partners or activities outside the programme area, even in countries that have stated that they will use this opportunity (Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Poland). The recurring issue is simply that the added value for the programme area itself needs to be identified. The OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship' states that while it will allow funding outside the region only if a direct impact on the region can be clearly identified. The OP 'Upper Norrland' allows this but they have not decided how to implement such a scheme. They point out that this is a sensitive issue; the regional partners will need to be convinced of the added-value of spending part of the funds outside the programme area. Mostly, when it is envisaged, discussions on the implementation of this possibility have been postponed to the first Monitoring Committee meetings.

Conclusion

Overall, the interviews confirmed the results and impressions from the analysis of the OP/CP carried out as part of Task 1. Some programmes explicitly reject the idea of contributing to the EUSBSR in any direct way. The EUSBSR is generally considered as a framework against which OP priority axes and investment priorities are checked (to avoid any contradictions) and as a possible lever for regional and national development. Ambitions to generate concrete and direct impacts of EUSBSR relevance are more punctual.

Reflections on macro-regional cooperation are at a relatively basic level for most programmes. However, there are some exceptions (e.g. Lithuania, Finland, OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'), which may serve as sources of inspirations for other programmes. Generally, macro-regional cooperation is considered as an issue to be addressed at project level, which calls for extensive efforts to convince potential applicants of the added-value of such cooperation.

A Swedish interviewee referred to the Estonian proposal to make it possible to commit programmes to joint flagship agreements already in the programme elaboration phase. He regrets that this solution was not adopted, as it would have made a substantial commitment of the programmes to the EUSBSR possible. However, considering the role of intermediate bodies in the decision making procedures of some programmes, it could be challenging to implement such a solution.

Table 2. Answers to questions regarding the programming phase

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Macro-regional cooperation envisaged in elaboration	Theme 2: which TO, (sub) objectives will contribute to EUSBSR	Theme 3: Involvement of EUSBSR stakeholders	Theme 4: EUSBSR considered for objectives or IP	Theme 5: Coordination with PACs and HACs	Theme 6: Coordination with other ESI Funds programmes	Theme 7: Discussion on funding cooperation	Theme 8: Discussion on dedicating a budget to the EUSBSR
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	No, transnational cooperation through ETC, programmes focus on regional needs Limited role of the EUSBSR due to reduced funding, Focus on regional needs, impact is incidental	Contribution to 4 PAs with national coordination (Safe, SME, Energy, Ship), direct contribution to EU 2020 and competitiveness, Generally the Regional Growth Forums decide whether they are going to support the EUSBSR, regional programmes are invited to implement transnational projects	No	No	No	No, programmes are considered as national	No	No
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'	Yes, support to EUSBSR was one of the criteria to select measures that led to the priorities of the OP	See analysis of the OP	The national working group on EUSBSR was involved in meetings and the discussion about the objectives	yes	Yes	Yes, joint development of the OP	EUSBSR was on strategic basis for the OP	No answer

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Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	Was envisaged all along the programming phase	The objectives of the EUSBSR and the OP are in general the same, PA1, IP2 => PA2 SME and Internationalisation PA2, IP4 => PA Innovation PA4, IP9 => PA Education	Ambassador for Baltic Sea Affairs was involved in the working group preparing the OP, No PACs or HACs were involved actively.	No, programme bases on regional needs. A co-operative dimension and impacts at the level of the Baltic Sea Region are seen quite obvious but the EUSBSR was not considered in the selection of a specific objective or investment priority in the programme	One meeting between the NCP, PACs and HACs with the MA to discuss the programme, no active involvement	No coordination with other funds (specifically related to EUSBSR)	Are conscious about the possibilities, but would not fund partners or regions outside Finland, 'sister projects' are the most likely form of cooperation	No dedicated budget because of the reduced funding for Finland
	Rural Development Programme	Yes, in cooperation measure 16 and in Leader (depends on local players)	Priorities were chosen to national needs, the EAFRD Programme and EUSBSR have common goals (e.g. recycling of nutrients)	No involvement of representatives from EUSBSR, but the unit responsible for EAFRD is also PA Agri	No direct influence, Selection according to national needs, but the objectives are similar	Only the PA Agri through the double responsibility	Not specifically related to EUSBSR	For the first time the possibility to finance transnational cooperation, but actions outside Finland must be by other countries	No separate funds, was not discussed in the programming phase,

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Finland (continued)	EMFF Programme	Yes, is a strategic choice of the programme, more cooperation possible, not only in fishery, but also in maritime sector	Links are loose, Cooperation is important in administration and research. Sustainable aquaculture is one important topic	No involvement. There was co-operation with Leena Anttila, who is Finland's PA Agri coordinator	EUSBSR did not influence the selection of the objectives of the programme, basic idea is that the programme contributes to the EUSBSR because the objectives are the same	No coordination	An EU FP project ERA-NET analysed the possibilities to increase effectiveness of the programme through cooperation	Finland has been willing to increase trans-national cooperation. We have not had a model for cooperation in the programme and it has to be developed.	No dedicated budget
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	Political decision to focus on regional needs, cooperation through ETC; But cooperation not excluded	Contribution only through the selected Thematic Objectives as described in the OP, see analysis	No involvement	No	No	Coordination with other ESI Funds from M-V, not outside the region	Cooperation projects are not excluded, but no funding for partners outside the region	No discussion about a dedicated budget
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	Was discussed in the programming phase	'Exact interfaces' are rather uncertain at the moment, can be seen when the first call for projects with specific EUSBSR objectives is launched	Direct cooperation was not very close, but regular coordination between the three Baltic States	Objectives are similar, attempt to connect OP and PA	Direct cooperation was not very close	Cooperation between three Baltic States, but more on a strategic level, attempt to harmonise how EUSBSR is included in the three OPs	There was a discussion but it is not made possible	No dedicated budget

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Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	Used EUSBSR for justification of the TOs, cooperation was envisaged in some thematic areas, e.g. Transport (Rail Baltica) or Education	Comment under each Priority axis whether this objective contributes to the EUSBSR (see analysis)	NCP was involved in the commission preparing the OP	Have chosen all 11 Thematic Objectives, Used EUSBSR for justification of the TOs	Only the NCP was involved, reminded the Commission to include aspects of the EUSBSR in the OP	Coordination with other ESI Funds in Lithuania, not outside the country	Is not explicitly mentioned, but is a legitimate type of action, actual implementation depends on ministries and on the selection criteria they propose to the MC	No discussion about a dedicated budget, there are no decisions on selection criteria made See ETC relevant for many themes
	Rural Development Programme	The ministry always had the aspect of cooperation in mind, but see it difficult to support cooperation outside Leader	Especially In Leader, limited in other measures, will see if possible in the fields of ecology and rural renewal	PAC Agri (Finnish Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture) was involved as well as Lithuanian representatives, Emphasis on the importance of involving these players	Specific objectives in RDP are strictly regulated, but they tried to indicate and establish links between the OP and the EUSBSR as much as possible	PAC Agri organises annual meetings were cooperation aspects were discussed, are also in a regular exchange with MAs from other countries	Not mentioned	If at all the possibility will only be used in Leader	No discussion about a dedicated budget

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Poland	OP 'Infrastructure and Environment'	Not envisaged due to the nature of the programme (investments on national level) and to the funding source (mainly CF)	Save the Sea (sub objectives: Clear water in the sea and Rich an healthy wildlife), Connect the Region (sub objectives: Good transport conditions, Reliable energy markets)	<i>Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR</i> led by the Polish NCP was involved. MA presented the progress of the programming in the working group, Only national PACs commented on the draft, no foreign PACs were involved	EUSBSR has been considered in the selection and formulation of many priority axes, can be seen in the description of the axes in the OP	See Theme 3	No coordination besides the working group, but coordination with Lithuania on energy grids and Rail Baltica		
	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	Yes, especially in priority axis on social innovation	Several Priority axes contribute indirectly, e.g. Young people at labour market, Direct contribution in axis Social innovation and international cooperation (support inter-national mobility) and in axis efficient public policies, support to maritime spatial plans will be funded	No stakeholders involved directly. The OP was also presented to the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR	EUSBSR was considered in the formulation of the axis social innovation and international cooperation, but experiences were analysed for Poland and good practices were capitalised, e.g. through the BSN-ESF network.	No direct coordination, see Theme 3	No coordination besides the working group, but some cooperation with other MAs in the Baltic, e.g. In the BSN_ESF network and esp. with Sweden	In the priority axis social innovation and international cooperation partners from other countries can receive funding when the participation is beneficial and contributes to the objectives of the OP	No dedicated budget, Budget in priority axis social innovation is not limited on Baltic Sea Region

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Macro-regional cooperation envisaged in elaboration	Theme 2: which TO, (sub) objectives will contribute to EUSBSR	Theme 3: Involvement of EUSBSR stakeholders	Theme 4: EUSBSR considered for objectives or IP	Theme 5: Coordination with PACs and HACs	Theme 6: Coordination with other ESI Funds programmes	Theme 7: Discussion on funding cooperation	Theme 8: Discussion on dedicating a budget to the EUSBSR
Poland (continued)	OP 'Digital Poland'	Not envisaged due to the nature of the OP (purely national investments)	Only indirect contribution through the creation of general conditions	No involvement	No (see Theme 1), but experience from other countries was used in the programming	No coordination necessary because there was no involvement	No, OP Digital is the only OP in the EU, dedicated only to digital infrastructure	No	No
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	Cooperation has been discussed, but the elaboration of the OP was regional	Relations have been defined at three levels: - Compliance - Coordination - Direct links (see Text Box 2 p. 9)	NCP was consulted, The OP was also presented to the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR, OP was considered as a blueprint for the inclusion of the EUSBSR	Was considered in the selection and formulation of priority axes 1 Innovation, 2 SME, 8 Conversion, 10 Energy, 11 Environment	No PACs were involved in the programming process	There were discussions and meetings, but led to no formal coordination schemes	There was a discussion and funding with ERDF outside the region is possible => direct impact necessary	As result of the discussion intention to earmark funds for transnational projects under certain axes (see Theme 4) Themes to be selected in a flexible manner
	EMFF Programme	Not envisaged due to the nature of the programme, measures are regarded as more national than transnational	Only indirect contribution to PA Agri and PA Bio	No involvement	Has not been considered due to the limited contribution of the programme to the EUSBSR	Have not been directly involved	There was no coordination with other programmes from the BSR, but only a discussion of the OP in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR	There was no such discussion	No in depth debate due to the nature of the OP

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Macro-regional cooperation envisaged in elaboration	Theme 2: which TO, (sub) objectives will contribute to EUSBSR	Theme 3: Involvement of EUSBSR stakeholders	Theme 4: EUSBSR considered for objectives or IP	Theme 5: Coordination with PACs and HACs	Theme 6: Coordination with other ESI Funds programmes	Theme 7: Discussion on funding cooperation	Theme 8: Discussion on dedicating a budget to the EUSBSR
Poland (continued)	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	Yes, but limited to the European Spallation Source (ESS)	Priority axis 1 with the ESS, the main part is not relevant for the EUSBSR	PAC Innovation was involved	No	No	The programme was designed as a complement to regional programmes	Not to the knowledge of the interviewee	No
Sweden	OP 'Upper Norrland'	No	EUSBSR is mentioned in all priority axes, but only very vague	Region Västerbotten was leader for HA Involve, but no other PACs or HACs were involved	No significant influence, But checked that there were no contradictions between OP and EUSBSR	No	No	OP allows it, but is not decided how to implement it, what would be the added value for the region	No
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	CP is clearly orientated on cooperation	All priority axes will contribute. Cannot say yet where the strongest contribution will be due to the bottom-up approach in project development	PACs Nutri, Tourism, Transport and Ship were involved, HAC Sustainability PACs were very active partners, more than expected, they were looking for synergies, made critical remarks. Participation was of added value	Needs of the programme area defined the selection of TO, but objectives are naturally coherent	CP was presented on three conferences of the EUSBSR, PACs did not make proposals for projects so far	Not for the programming but regular exchange in Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR	Not included in the CP, will be part of the programme manual, MA recommends rule that partners from participating MS outside the programme area can participate, others not	No dedicated budget

3. Programme implementation phase

3.1. Cooperation with other ESI Funds programmes in the same country and other Member States of the Baltic Sea Region

Cooperation and coordination between ESI Funds programmes, both within and across national boundaries, is likely to enhance the efficiency of contributions to the EUSBSR. The first bulk of questions dealing with the implementation phase of the programme therefore sought to identify such cooperation and coordination mechanisms at programme level (see Text Box 3).

Text Box 3. Questions on cooperation with other ESI Funds programmes

1. Have mechanisms for coordination or cooperation been established that could help to make contributions of ESI Funds programmes to the EUSBSR possible? If yes, targeting which kind(s) of coordination or cooperation?
2. Do you have a dialogue/exchange with other funds / programmes operating at EU, national, regional or cross-border level?
3. Is there a cooperation foreseen among the ESI Funds programmes within your country? Do you plan to cooperate with other ESI Funds programmes in other Member States? If yes, with which programme? How? On which topics? What do you hope to achieve with this cooperation?
4. Who from the ESI funds decision makers participates in the EUSBSR events? Does that bring any new perspective for your programme?

A number of respondents highlighted the importance of the previously mentioned Baltic Sea Network for the European Social Fund (BSN ESF). However, its practical relevance is toned down by the Danish interviewees, which point out that joint calls on e.g. social inclusion are difficult to implement in practice because of the large number of involved authorities. Some interviewees mention the perspective of establishing a parallel type of forum for the ERDF, which was suggested by the Swedish representative at the EUSBSR NCP meeting in Tallinn in December 2013. There is also a coordination of ESI Funds programmes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Outside of these initiatives, exchanges of information making it possible to arrive at a cooperation model or at least on concrete cooperation initiatives are limited.

Otherwise, the dialogue between Managing Authorities and projects in the Baltic Sea Region is said to be very limited. This is paradoxical, considering that a number of interviewees recognise that this would be the way forward to support the EUSBSR. Finnish interviewees advocate coordinated or complementary 'sister projects', but argue that some EUSBSR flagship projects do not have a clear link and interface with ESI Funds programmes. Furthermore, EUSBSR events are perceived as a 'different world' of strategic policymaking, which is not so relevant for ESI Funds programmes. This is reflected in the ways MAs and EUSBSR networks are organised: the MA of the Swedish OP 'Upper Norrland' for example has no direct connection to formal EUSBSR networks, neither nationally nor internationally. Connections in view of establishing macro-regional cooperation initiatives therefore entirely depend on regional levels of motivations with regards to the EUSBSR.

The situation is quite different in Poland, where MAs play an active role in the 'National Working Team on the EUSBSR'.

The Lithuanian partnership agreement ambitions to implement "*joint calls for project applications contributing to the implementation of the EUSBSR*". During the interviews, this was presented as a solution to make it possible for partners from different countries to simultaneously apply for funding for projects that are joint, carried out in cooperation or otherwise coordinated. However, the interview did not make it possible to further explore how to establish the required coordination mechanisms between MAs. The challenges are numerous. For example, joint calls would need to be adapted to different programmes' selection of thematic objectives, priority axes and investment priorities. Additionally, the representative of the Lithuanian Ministry of Finance points out that the additional administrative burden of implementing joint calls may discourage individual MAs from following this path. Encouragements and information on potential benefits are needed to overcome these obstacles. The Lithuanian NCP mentions that his Estonian counterpart is expected to initiate a meeting on the possibility of joint calls as part the closing event of the Estonian presidency of the NCP network.

The Estonian interviewee considers that macro-regional cooperation should be facilitated by a more coordinated approach from different units of DG REGIO, and by a more flexible and wider approach to transnational cooperation in the ESF. The current ESI funds regulation forcing national authorities to choose areas of cooperation at the beginning of the programming period under one priority axis has led Estonia to avoid adopting a priority axis labelled 'transnational cooperation'. It was said that it would be a major task amending the OP if a chosen approach does not work out. The Polish OP 'Knowledge Education Development' on the contrary considers its priority axis 'social innovation and international cooperation' as a "*very efficient and flexible mechanism ensuring the achievement of the programme's ambition with regards to its contribution to the EUSBSR*".

The reduction of available funding from the ERDF and ESF in more affluent regions is identified as an additional factor of reduced focus on transnational dialogue and cooperation, e.g. from the Finnish and Danish perspectives.

Both regional OPs 'Upper Norrland' in Sweden and 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern' in Germany are rather sceptical with regards to perspectives for cooperation. The OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern' argues that cooperation is not the focus, and that any cooperative initiatives are expected to come from project applicants. The OP 'Upper Norrland' defends a similar position, and emphasizes that it will be up to the regional partnership to determine the extent to which project applicants will be encouraged to incorporate a macro-regional cooperation. The Polish OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship' states that it sought to establish a cooperation with other national programmes, but that there was no interest in going beyond an exchange of ideas and opinions.

While the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme highlights 'Leader' as the primary measure leading to EUSBSR-relevant cooperation, the corresponding Finnish programme considers that cooperation between ESI Funds has primarily been administrative and has not been specifically related to the EUSBSR.

Conclusion

Only a few programmes plan to establish mechanisms for coordination. The exchanges between Managing Authorities of the three Baltic States seek to establish such coordination mechanisms. The Polish interviewees recurrently mention the importance of the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR organises exchange between the Polish programmes including the ETC programmes. Corresponding cooperative organisations in other countries receive less attention from the interviewees.

There seem to be striking differences of perspective between countries, especially with regards to transnational cooperation measures under the ESF and the importance of 'Leader' for macro-regional cooperation in the context of rural development programmes. It would be useful to enquire further about these apparent differences, to check whether they are linked to the role and functions of the interviewees or are of a more structural nature.

The participation of Managing Authorities in EUSBSR events is rather limited. Efforts still seem needed to organise events of relevance for ESI Funds programmes and projects that will bridge the gap identified between 'the two worlds' of EUSBSR and ESI Funds programmes. Meetings organised by PACs and HACs focusing on a specific issue or theme for which ESI Funds cooperation would be relevant, and targeting the MAs of OPs which could contribute to address it and/or relevant potential project applicants could be a way forward.

Table 3. Answers on cooperation with other ESI Funds programmes

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Mechanisms for coordination	Theme 2: Dialogue with other funds/programmes	Theme 3: Cooperation among ESI Funds	Theme 4: Participation in EUSBSR events
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	Two options for projects with transnational dimension, but Danish model does not allow partners from outside Denmark	Dialogues with other programmes are not considered meaningful, transnational cooperation is for ETC, Denmark has observer status in the ESF BSN network	ERDF and ESF are one programme in Denmark, no cooperation outside Denmark	Two representatives from the MA are involved in the EUSBSR and exchange information in the MA
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'	Measures must prove their contribution to the EUSBSR objectives, Coordination in EE is organised by Ministry of Foreign Affairs as NCP, working group with all ministries coordinate the programmes	Close cooperation with MAs from LT and LV, also to EUSBSR issues	EE has a combined programme	No answer
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	Coordinated and complementary 'sister projects' are the most likely kind of projects Reduced funds makes it more difficult to support cooperation outside the programme region	Yes, in the BSN-ESF, Finland has been active in this network	ERDF and ESF are a joint programme and have a lot of synergies	Yes, MA participated, but see the regional programmes and the EUSBSR strategy level as two different worlds, EUSBSR is more at policy level, flagship projects have no clear links to the structural funds
	Rural Development Programme	Coordinated and complementary 'sister projects' are the most probable way	There has always been cooperation, mainly on administrative level	There has always been cooperation, mainly on administrative level	Yes, Director General and Ministerial Adviser, but events do not contribute to EAFRD programmes, ERDF gets more attention

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Mechanisms for coordination	Theme 2: Dialogue with other funds/programmes	Theme 3: Cooperation among ESI Funds	Theme 4: Participation in EUSBSR events
Finland (continued)	EMFF Programme	Coordinated and complementary 'sister projects' are the most probable way ERA-NET can be seen as a model	Maritime policy for the first time in the programme, other administrations were involved	Want to have more cooperation, there were discussions, but no concrete actions	The Counsellor for Fisheries took part, but discussions were more general, no concrete results
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	No specific mechanisms, not needed because cooperation is not in focus	The cooperation with other MAs is rather limited	ERDF and ESF in M-V have similar objectives, cooperation between these funds but not outside M-V	No-one from the MA
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	Coordination with EE and LT in the preparation phase to harmonise the approach, objectives and priorities	See theme 1	Coordination between ESI Funds and EMFF as well as ETC is ensured in Latvia	Several MA representatives took part in EUSBSR events, generally useful to understand EUSBSR
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	MA does not know mechanisms right now, probably joint calls and direct cooperation in the future (must reach project applicants and ministries, change of attitude), until then 'Sister projects' are more likely NCP sees existing networks as important; At the next NCP network event they want to discuss joint calls also with ETC, want to encourage more smaller bottom-up initiatives		Close cooperation with MA EAFRD	
	Rural Development Programme	For Leader it is crucial to have joint calls, want to have calls at the same time in two different countries, funding is given separately by each country		Close cooperation with MA ERDF and ESF	

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Mechanisms for coordination	Theme 2: Dialogue with other funds/programmes	Theme 3: Cooperation among ESI Funds	Theme 4: Participation in EUSBSR events
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure and Environment'	No mechanisms foreseen, for large infrastructure investments on national level not necessary	Only in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR, No coordination with other countries	Only in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR	No, knowledge was required in Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR
	OP 'Digital Poland'	No mechanisms due to the nature of the OP	No coordination due to the nature of the OP	No coordination due to the nature of the OP	No
	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	Main aspect will be calls under the axis social innovation and international cooperation, plan a precise guide for Intermediate Bodies	Only in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR	Only in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR and in the BSN-ESF network	
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	All type of projects according to the ESTEP study can be funded, even partners from outside BSR, Preferences will be given to projects supporting EUSBSR in future calls In the implementation praxis only these Priority Axes will be open for foreign partners where a direct link to the EUSBSR is indicated	Only in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR; with only few exceptions other programmes are not interested in cooperation	Only in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR; with only few exceptions other programmes are not interested in cooperation	No
	EMFF Programme	Programme has not been sent to European Commission, premature to answer this question	Programme has not been sent to European Commission, premature to answer this question	Programme has not been sent to European Commission, premature to answer this question	No
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	Only as described in the OP (almost the same as in Denmark, but partners outside Sweden can be funded)	The Swedish representative at the EUSBSR NCP meeting suggested to organise a meeting of national ERDF programmes to constitute an BSN-ERDF	There is the intention to organise national discussion between the programmes because there is a striking difference between Swedish regions in the interest to the EUSBSR	

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Mechanisms for coordination	Theme 2: Dialogue with other funds/programmes	Theme 3: Cooperation among ESI Funds	Theme 4: Participation in EUSBSR events
Sweden (continued)	OP 'Upper Norrland'	Not yet		Tillväxtverket will organise a national EUSBSR networking meeting and produce a report in April 2015, but it will not include MAs directly	
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	Cooperation mechanisms are based on the ETC regulation, NCP will advise project partners on mainstreaming follow-up measures from regional or national programmes of tested solutions from the South Baltic	Have exchange with other programmes, mainly with Central Baltic and BSR, mostly about management issues in the past, want to strengthen thematic exchange	Exchange in the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR, Cooperation planned with Central Baltic, e.g. joint communication events	Participate regulatory in all kind of EUSBSR events, use this to communicate project results

3.2. Project Development

This part of the interview focused on how the organisation of project development process of each programme could take into account the EUSBSR. This issue is quite different depending on whether project development is approached in a bottom-up or top-down way. The first two questions therefore seek to set the context.

The following three questions focus on measures taken to encourage projects of EUSBSR relevance, with a particular focus on envisaging a diversity of macro-regional cooperation and coordination models.

In this process, it is also important to determine the foreseen respective roles of different actors (potential project applicants, other regional stakeholders, PACs, HACs...).

Text Box 4. Questions on project development

1. Is the project development decentralized (bottom-up) or more centralized (top-down)? Do project ideas generally come from potential project applicants?
2. Which influence does the MA or sectoral ministries have on the project development?
3. What measures (methods and tools) are foreseen to ensure that proposals contributing to the EUSBSR are developed?
4. Which cooperation models have been / could be envisaged to implement the relevant measures related to the EUSBSR? (Please refer to the ESTEP study (pp. 33-34) for examples of cooperation models)
5. Is the involvement of PACs, HACs or Flagship Project Leaders (FPL) planned for the development of projects that contribute to the EUSBSR?

Managing Authorities have in general very limited influence in the project development. In Lithuania and Poland MAs offer support and guidance. The same can be said for sectoral ministries. The only identified example of a ministry having an active role in the development of projects concerns the innovation component of the Finnish EMFF Programme. In Lithuania, ministries can encourage applicants to engage in closer cooperation.

Only some programmes foresee specific measures to encourage proposals that contribute to the EUSBSR. The Estonian Managing Authority announces in the calls if projects with a cooperation aspect can and should apply. In this case the application form has a special section and reporting form.

In Lithuania the Ministry of Finance has prepared a document which emphasizes that the complementarity between measures in the OP and the EUSBSR must be ensured. The document also instructs ministries to include a priority criteria for projects contributing to the EUSBSR. The Ministry of Finance also stressed that ministries should pay attention to the opportunity to spend parts of the funding outside the country. The Lithuanian Ministries of Education and Science and the Ministry of Communication propose some thematic fields contributing to the EUSBSR (listed in Table 4).

The Polish OP 'Knowledge Education Development' states that it will support potential beneficiaries to internationalise their project ideas and partnerships with partner search meetings and a data base. The Managing Authority will also help to find suitable partners from Poland if a foreign organisation is looking for partners.

In the OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship' the Managing Authority tries to steer the project development with the formulation of criteria and earmarking a budget for transnational cooperation projects.

The other programmes do not foresee specific measures to support the development of projects contributing to the EUSBSR.

Also the involvement of PACs and HACs in the development of projects is very limited. The Finnish OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work' states that it must be the own initiative of the PACs to develop projects and to find the right partners. The Polish MAs provided relatively detailed answers on foreseen cooperation models. The OPs 'Infrastructure and Environment' and 'Digital Poland' are convinced that joint strategic planning is the main type of cooperation that will be developed, but they do not consider this a being constitutive of truly international projects. For the OP 'Infrastructure and Environment' the ideal solution would be to combine an ETC project focusing on transfers of knowledge and good practice with a national Polish project carrying out investments that make use of gained knowledge. An ETC project could for example also help the programme to pilot an innovative investment. A key problem seems to be the lack of possibility of a direct combination of ETC and national projects. The cooperation between MAs should also be improved.

The OP 'Knowledge Education Development' foresees both fully integrated transnational projects, in which planning, decision-making, funding and implementation is done jointly, and projects with joint planning and decision making only, but separate funding and implementation. Under the priority axis 'social innovation and transnational cooperation', partners from outside Poland can also receive full funding. Projects with joint strategic planning only would, from the perspective of the interviewees, not qualify as macro-regional cooperation.

Other programmes did not wish to advocate specific cooperation models. In most cases, the interviewees gave the impression that they were not accustomed to thinking in terms of cooperation models, and therefore not in a position to provide reflections on this topic. The issue was also sometimes dismissed as being of relevance for individual project applicants rather than at the programme level.

Conclusions

Project development is largely organised as a bottom-up process. Therefore, the influence of sectoral ministries or other governmental institutions on project development is rather limited. Most programmes will neither establish measures to ensure that proposals contribute to the EUSBSR nor foresee specific cooperation models. It seems that programmes do not have a special emphasis on cooperation and the project development is mainly bottom-up. For this reason, they do not foresee any specific plan to develop cooperation projects or have really thought about how and which kind of projects they want to fund.

No programme except for the South Baltic Cooperation Programme plans to involve PACs or HACs in the project development process. Most of the interviewees stated that PACs and HACs can submit EUSBSR related project proposals on their own initiative but are not encouraged to do this or otherwise supported by the MA.

Table 4. Answers on project development

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Bottom-up or top-down approach	Theme 2: Influence MA or sectoral ministries	Theme 3: Measures for proposals contributing to EUSBSR	Theme 4: Cooperation models	Theme 5: Involvement of PACs, HACs or FPL
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	Varies from region to region, when there is a bottom-up approach and the programme authorities expressed interest in EUSBSR, there is no lack of applicants, but there is strong competition between ETC and ERDF/ESF	Limited, projects are developed regionally	None in particular, MA informs regions about EUSBSR	No formal transnational cooperation of ERDF and ESF in Denmark, Have observer status in ESF-BSN	PACs may apply, but this is considered unlikely, PACs SAFE and SHIP are very active, may lead to projects, other PACs more passive
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'	Bottom-up with calls for proposals		In calls for proposals it is announced if cooperation projects are wanted and it is included in the selection criteria	They advocate stronger criteria for projects relevant for EUSBSR, e.g. multi-partner approach or relevant for more Member States	PACs and HACs are represented in the ministries, in many cases they are also responsible for developing projects/measures
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	Bottom-up and decentralised,	Even national projects are not managed from ministries, selection of projects are done by IBs	Contribution to EUSBSR is part of the application form		Involvement on their own initiative but not organised. MA would appreciate a more active involvement
	Rural Development Programme	Decentralised programme, bottom-up	The Ministry has no role in the implementation of projects	No specific measures	No cooperation models used	Not organised, would be impossible due to the big number of projects

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Bottom-up or top-down approach	Theme 2: Influence MA or sectoral ministries	Theme 3: Measures for proposals contributing to EUSBSR	Theme 4: Cooperation models	Theme 5: Involvement of PACs, HACs or FPL
Finland (continued)	EMFF Programme	Both approaches, innovation projects are centrally conducted, others completely decentralised	Ministry has an active role in innovation projects	It can be said that the whole programme contributes to EUSBSR, because the objectives are the same, but no processes or tools to ensure that the projects are contributing to the EUSBSR	No specific	Not thought about involvement, have to find out if it benefits the programme
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	Bottom-up	Advice from IBs but for most measures influence is limited	No specific measures	No cooperation models used	PAC Tourism is developing a project, but funding not decided, probably financed with national funds
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	Bottom-up and decentralised	Very limited opportunities to influence project development process, in case subordinated institutions develop projects, the influence is higher	No specific measures	No specific cooperation models used, but there might be projects that are implemented in only one country but have an impact on a bigger area, or 'sister projects'	Not answered
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	More centralised	Ministries have possibilities to guide applicants to closer cooperation, most ministries treat EUSBSR as a requirement; NCP can only spread information	National ruling instructs project ministries to pay attention to the possibility to spend parts of the budget outside Lithuania, keeping EUSBSR objectives in mind.		Currently not planned

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Bottom-up or top-down approach	Theme 2: Influence MA or sectoral ministries	Theme 3: Measures for proposals contributing to EUSBSR	Theme 4: Cooperation models	Theme 5: Involvement of PACs, HACs or FPL
Lithuania (continued)	Rural Development Programme	Depends on the measure. Leader is clearly decentralised and bottom-up	Do not have much possibilities to guide projects to more cooperation, can only inform applicants and ask them to describe obvious links to the EUSBSR	No measures are foreseen due to the lack of capacity of the MA to guide projects towards EUSBSR	No cooperation models used	No due to the lack of capacity of the MA to guide projects towards EUSBSR
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure and Environment'	Bottom-up with calls for proposals, but in many fields top-down, e.g. large scale infrastructures	MA offers support to project ideas, to find relevant international know-how	No plans to organise calls dedicated to activities directly implementing objectives of the EUSBSR	Mainly complementary projects ⁴ , but MA doesn't consider them as international, Combination of ETC and OP are considered as an ideal model (ETC for acquiring know-how or for transnational dissemination)	Involvement is not envisaged
	OP 'Digital Poland'	Bottom-up with calls for proposals	MA offers support to project ideas	There are no plans to organise calls dedicated to the EUSBSR	Mainly complementary projects, but MA doesn't consider them as international,	Involvement is not envisaged

⁴ The term complementary project refers to the type of projects described in the ESTEP study. Projects of this kind are funded and implemented nationally but follow joint objectives of the partners, e.g. national TEN-T section

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Bottom-up or top-down approach	Theme 2: Influence MA or sectoral ministries	Theme 3: Measures for proposals contributing to EUSBSR	Theme 4: Cooperation models	Theme 5: Involvement of PACs, HACs or FPL
Poland (continued)	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	Bottom-up, but with a yearly action plan also a top-down approach	MA offers support to project ideas	MA offers support to internationalisation of the project ideas, MA will also search for appropriate Polish partners in case of a foreign request	Mainly joint and coordinated projects, complementary projects are also possible, but MA doesn't consider them as international, difficult to have coordinated calls among different BSR countries	Involvement is not envisaged
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	Bottom-up	MA offers support to project ideas, to find international partners etc.	Through formulation of criteria and considering earmarking an EUSBSR-related budget	All types of projects are welcome	Involvement will be limited, MA will give contacts to project applicants and raise awareness to EUSBSR
	EMFF Programme	Too premature to talk about it	Too premature to talk about it	There are no plans to organise calls dedicated to the EUSBSR	Mainly complementary projects, but MA doesn't consider them as international,	Too premature to talk about it, in previous programme not involved
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	Partly bottom-up, partly top-down	Limited outside the top-down cases	Doesn't apply to the programme	Only the two-fold solution to implement transnational projects described in the OP	No formal decision
	OP 'Upper Norrland'	Bottom-up with open calls,	Limited, regional civil servants do not focus on pro-active project development	Reluctance against criteria for EUSBSR relevance	In the previous period proposals with a combined strategic focus (across programmes and geographical areas) were requested, but no proposals were made	

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Bottom-up or top-down approach	Theme 2: Influence MA or sectoral ministries	Theme 3: Measures for proposals contributing to EUSBSR	Theme 4: Cooperation models	Theme 5: Involvement of PACs, HACs or FPL
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	Bottom-up	JTC gives advice, does not develop projects, gives also advice to get in touch with PACs/HACs	JTS sends list of projects to PACs,	Apply cooperation models as foreseen in the ETC regulation	Not at the current level from the programme side, programme actively communicated the option to PACs/HACs, it is up to them to develop projects, maybe at a later stage the JTS becomes more proactive (in case of gaps)

3.3. Project Selection

Managing Authorities have to draw up and apply appropriate selection procedures and criteria that ensure the contribution of operations to the achievement of specific objectives.

The first question enquired about the ways in which the selection process is organised in the Member State or region. Its purpose was to understand the context in which EUSBSR relevance could be considered. The two last questions focused on how the EUSBSR is taken into account, trying to determine whether each interviewees understanding of notions such as 'EUSBSR relevance', 'cooperation' and 'macro-regional benefits' (see Text Box 5).

Text Box 5. Questions on project selection

1. How is the decision making process organised generally? Who decides on funding?
2. Will the monitoring committee decide about selection criteria related to the EUSBSR? If yes what will these criteria be? How would the interviewee define 'EUSBSR relevance', 'cooperation' and 'macro-regional benefit'?
3. Will there be a priority for projects with contribution to EUSBSR? If yes, who decides about the contribution? Do you plan to get a statement from PACs or HACs that will have an impact on the decision?

Project selection processes are organised quite differently from programmes to programme. Typically, statements from programmes with a centralised decision making process will be different from those that have adopted a more decentralised approach. The answers are therefore not entirely comparable.

However, most programmes expressed an intention to formulate specific selection criteria related to the EUSBSR. The Danish MA stated that it cannot influence the selection criteria, as they are chosen by the regional growth forums. Similarly, in the Swedish OP 'Upper Norrland' selection criteria are defined by the regional partnerships, and the Finnish OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work' points out that the regional intermediate bodies will decide to what extent they will prioritise EUSBSR relevant projects.

The Latvian MA has elaborated a 'unified criteria methodology', in which common selection criteria are defined, including criteria on EUSBSR-relevance. The specific evaluation criteria for each call for proposals will be developed and proposed by the sectoral ministries, and it is up to them to include additional criteria on EUSBSR relevance into particular calls for proposals or not. After the criteria are approved by the Monitoring Committee, the sectoral ministries organise an assessment process according to the approved criteria and, if necessary, provide interpretations of these criteria. Should the sectoral ministries decide to get statements from the PAC or HAC, they will be able to do so.

The Lithuanian OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments' declares that projects contributing to the EUSBSR will be given additional points in the selection process. The Polish OP 'Infrastructure and Environment' foresees to apply the same solutions, but specifies that details on how it will be implemented have not yet been decided on. The MA of the OP 'Infrastructure and Environment' sees a problem in defining and measuring this contribution, giving the example of a wastewater treatment plant in the South of Poland that might have a bigger impact on the water of the Baltic Sea than one closer to the coast. All other Polish national programmes (except for the 'social innovation and

cooperation' measure of the OP 'Knowledge Education Development') declare that they consider contributions to the EUSBSR as a "*side-product*" of their project activities, and that they will not make attempts at identifying potential EUSBSR relevance in the project selection phase.

Statements made by some programmes may be interpreted as ambivalent:

- The Polish OP 'Knowledge and Education Development' suggests to have special criteria under priority axes 'social innovation' where transnational cooperation is embedded. However, the MA wants to keep the mechanisms flexible, with possible changes in criteria from call to call.
- The OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern' will have some specific selection criteria linked to the EUSBSR. However, it at the same time states that it does not see a necessity for giving priority to EUSBSR relevant project, as it considers that there are sufficient funds for all projects whether or not they contribute to the EUSBSR. Therefore, the role of EUSBSR-related selection criteria is not clear.
- Estonia will generally give priority to projects which contribute to the EUSBSR when the choice is between two applications that contribute equally to a given measure. However, it is also stated that contributions to the EUSBSR are identified at the level of measures, rather than at the level of individual projects.

The Lithuanian OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments' is the only programme that discusses the involvement of PACs in the decision-making process. In Poland they will have no direct influence but may be consulted as external expert for the project assessment.

Conclusion

A majority of programmes have the intention to include selection criteria reflecting EUSBSR relevance. In most of the programmes the discussion has just started, so the MAs could not give more details. It is noteworthy that the adoption of such selection criteria will depend on the attitude of IBs in programmes with decentralised management. A significant proportion of these IBs are said to be reluctant to include EUSBSR relevance as a selection criterion.

Table 5. Answers on project selection

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Decision making process	Theme 2: Selection criteria EUSBSR relevance	Theme 3: Priority for projects with contribution to EUSBSR
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	Regional Growth Forums select projects, funding is formally allocated by the MC	MA has no mandate to influence selection criteria chosen by Regional Growth Forums	Depends on the Regional Growth Forum
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'		EUSBSR will be considered in the selection criteria	Generally yes, EUSBSR priority is applied on measure level
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	IBs make decisions	EUSBSR will be included in selection criteria in some special objectives of the programme	IBs will decide if they prioritise these projects
	Rural Development Programme	Centres for Economic Development, Transport and Environment and Leader groups make decisions	There will be criteria related to the EUSBSR, but no approval the MC yet EUSBSR relevance: implements goals of the strategy, improves the state of the BSR and increases prosperity	No priority
	EMFF Programme	Centres for Economic Development, Transport and Environment make decisions. The ministry is only involved in the bigger projects especially in innovation actions.	Discussion about selection criteria has not started yet, but EUSBSR will not necessarily have a big role in the selection criteria EUSBSR relevance: project should increase economic development and include cooperation aspect (interviewee's own description)	Possible, no decision yet
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	IBs prepare the decision, the Ministry of Economy decides	Selection criteria are not decided yet, but there will be very general criteria for the EUSBSR, applicants can receive a bonus when they can proof a contribution	No need to give priority, because MA estimates that there is sufficient funding

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Decision making process	Theme 2: Selection criteria EUSBSR relevance	Theme 3: Priority for projects with contribution to EUSBSR
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'		MA has elaborated "unified criteria methodology", incl. EUSBSR; each call will have specific evaluation criteria, can be also particular criteria for EUSBSR relevance EUSBSR relevance: project by its content and scope corresponds to the Action Plan	flagship projects get additional points, but also projects that are not on this list but are considered of high relevance might get a bonus
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'		No selection criteria decided yet, but projects contributing to EUSBSR will get additional score	Involvement of PACs in the decision process is under discussion, but could be involved
	Rural Development Programme	Project selection committee recommends projects, ministry decides and National Payment Agency signs the contract, Leader projects are decided by Local Action Groups	Criteria are set in the Partnership Agreement	No priority, do not rank cooperation in BSR higher than with other countries
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure and Environment'		Additional points for projects contributing to the EUSBSR is foreseen, problem is to measure the contribution There might be even a bonus for projects that use BSR experience, but OP is mainly supporting development in Poland, EUSBSR is a by-product	No priority, PACs and HACs have no direct influence on decision, can be external experts for evaluating projects
	OP 'Digital Poland'	A selection committee selects projects, MA will prepare suggestions	No special selection criteria Have not made an attempt to formulate a macro-regional benefit	No priority, PACs and HACs have no direct influence on decision, can be external experts for evaluating projects

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Decision making process	Theme 2: Selection criteria EUSBSR relevance	Theme 3: Priority for projects with contribution to EUSBSR
Poland (continued)	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	A selection committee selects projects, MA will prepare suggestions	Especially under priority axes social innovation there will be criteria related to the EUSBSR, but will kept flexible, can be changed, no concrete formulations yet Have not made an attempt to formulate a macro-regional benefit, such benefit will not be a criterion for granting projects. Transnational projects are seen as a vehicle to improve social development in Poland	No priority, PACs and HACs have no direct influence on decision, can be external experts for evaluating projects
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	Projects will be selected by the MA	Selection criteria are not decided yet, but projects that support Pomorskie region and BSR will get extra credits ROP will not finance BSR projects, but projects supporting the development of Pomorskie region, so they have not made an attempt to formulate a macro-regional benefit	No priority, PACs and HACs have no direct influence on decision, can be external experts for evaluating projects
	EMFF Programme	Projects will be selected by IBs	No selection criteria discussed, too early to talk about Have not made an attempt to formulate a macro-regional benefit	Too early to talk about it
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	Formally projects are selected by the MA, in practice by the MC	There is a clear definition in the Partnership Agreement	Not decided yet. Earliest April 2015
	OP 'Upper Norrland'	Regional ESI Funds partnerships prioritise projects, MA decides on projects	MC included "EUSBSR relevance" as a selection criteria, even it is not really clear what it entails There will be probably a call with specific focus on EUSBSR	Not decided yet

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Decision making process	Theme 2: Selection criteria EUSBSR relevance	Theme 3: Priority for projects with contribution to EUSBSR
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	MC will decide, MA signs the contracts	Will have specific selection criteria, probably the same as in 07-13 (see programme manual)	<p>Not decided yet, recommendation from the MA will be not to make changes from 07-13 period, the JTS assessed whether projects are considered relevant for EUSBSR, there were no extra points for EUSBSR projects but a lower score where the relevance was obvious but not mentioned</p> <p>No formal inclusion of PACs; There might be conditions for the projects to work closer with PACs</p>

3.4. Communication Strategy

According to Art. 115 of regulation (EU) 1303/2013, the MAs are responsible for drawing up communication strategies. This regulation does not oblige the MAs to include macro-regional strategies in their communication strategies. However, it is compulsory to inform potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under the OP and to communicate around the role and achievements of cohesion policy to the public. Therefore it would be consistent to include the EUSBSR as one element of information in the communication strategy.

The set of questions in this section first enquired whether the EUSBSR will be part of the communication strategy. The interviewers then sought to find out if any specific campaigns and events were already planned and if the Managing Authorities foresee to involve stakeholders or organisations in the communication activities.

Text Box 6. Questions on project selection

1. Will the EUSBSR be part of the communication strategy? If yes how?
2. Are there any specific events or campaigns planned for potential applicants to promote:
 - a) the EUSBSR
 - b) the possibilities to apply for projects contributing to the EUSBSR
 - c) transnational cooperation possibilities
 - d) the impact of the supported projects?
3. Could it be envisaged or do you plan any joint communication activities with organisations communicating on the EUSBSR or stakeholders of the EUSBSR, e.g. NCPs, HACs, PACs?

Only the Lithuanian OP ‘EU Structural Funds Investments’ has adopted a communication strategy at the time of the interviews. The EUSBSR is neither part of the strategy nor mentioned in the annual working plans. However, the programme considers to inform potential beneficiaries of EUSBSR related issues in a campaign targeting potential applicants.

In most of the programmes, the elaboration of the communication strategy has not started yet. None of the available drafts or on-going discussions foresee a specific focus on the EUSBSR. All Polish programmes except for the OP ‘Digital Poland’ at least intend to include the EUSBSR in their communication plans. However, the interviewees were not able to go into more details.

The Finnish OP ‘Sustainable Growth and Work’ and the OP ‘Mecklenburg-Vorpommern’ will consider the EUSBSR when relevant. In Finland there is an agreement with the Ambassador for the Baltic Sea Affairs that this institution will be communicating on the EUSBSR.

Only two Finnish programmes mention specific events foreseen to communicate about macro-regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. The Managing Authority of the OP ‘Sustainable Growth and Work’ plans a specific call for Southern Finland on EUSBSR-related projects. Dedicated events are foreseen to advertise this call. The ‘EMFF programme’ thinks about joint events with other

programmes, e.g. with the focus on maritime policy. The cooperation with NCPs, PACs or HACs is not very distinctive in all programmes. The Finnish OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work' had joint activities in the past but there are no decisions made yet.

Most programmes have not decided about joint activities with EUSBSR actors due to the fact that they have not yet finalised the communication strategy. The OP 'Knowledge Education Development' for Poland sees the National Contact Point as a communicator of the programme and its events and conferences with focus on the Baltic context of the programme. However, it does not plan to invite NCP, PACs or HACs to their events.

During the interview with the Managing Authority and JTS of the 'South-Baltic Cooperation Programme', the JTS had the idea to invite PACs to the kick-off meeting of the Cooperation Programme and to organise a workshop on practical solutions to ensure that the 'South-Baltic Cooperation Programme' supports the EUSBSR.

Conclusion

The interviews generally suggest that the EUSBSR will not have a special role in the regional or national communication strategy of the respective programmes even when the programmes intend to support the EUSBSR. It is too early to get a full picture of the foreseen communication activities. The statements were rather vague. However, the interviewees did not exclude anything. Thus there seems to be the possibility to strengthen the communication activities of the programmes in relation to the EUSBSR. However, a number of interviewees seem to await initiatives from the EUSBSR in this respect.

Table 6. Answers on communication strategy

Country	Programme	Theme 1: EUSBSR part of the communication strategy (CS)	Theme 2: Any specific events planned	Theme 3: Joint activities with NCP, PACs or HACs
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	No	MA informs regional programme authorities about EUSBSR	No
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'	Draft version of the CS is ready, interviewee did not know state of affairs		
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	Not emphasised in the CS, EUSBSR mentioned where relevant	There will be a specific call in Southern Finland on EUSBSR, before that will be an event for applicants	There has been joint activities with the NCP
	Rural Development Programme	EUSBSR has not been specifically highlighted. There are themes and contents that contribute to the EUSBSR objectives.	Cooperation is possible through the Rural Network department	Cooperation is possible through the Rural Network department
	EMFF Programme	CS not elaborated, EUSBSR might be included	There could be joint events, especially in maritime policy	There could be joint events, especially in maritime policy
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	EUSBSR will be to some extent element in the CS, the selection criteria and the bonus could be communicated	Nothing is decided yet	It is thinkable, but nothing decided
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	There will not be emphasis on EUSBSR in CS, but ministries could include it into the CS	Separate CS for event in June in Jurmala	Not decided yet
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	CS is already approved and published, NCP was consulted, But EUSBSR is not included in the CS	MA will have an information campaign, where potential applicants are also informed about EUSBSR, NCP should be more involved	No joint events planned
	Rural Development Programme	CS is under preparation, EUSBSR will not be mentioned, ES forbade MA to refer explicitly to EUSBSR	EUSBSR will be mentioned in events for applicants as an option for international projects, but not promoted exclusively,	No joint events planned
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure and Environment'	Too early to talk about it, intention to include EUSBSR	MA plans events to discuss contribution to EUSBSR	No joint events planned

Country	Programme	Theme 1: EUSBSR part of the communication strategy (CS)	Theme 2: Any specific events planned	Theme 3: Joint activities with NCP, PACs or HACs
Poland (continued)	OP 'Digital Poland'	No intention to include EUSBSR	No	No joint events planned
	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	Too early to talk about it, intention to include EUSBSR	Not so far	No joint events planned, NCP should spread information about the OP in its events
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	Too early to talk about it, intention is that EUSBSR will play an important role in CS	An awareness rising campaign on the strategy will be organised, but no details available yet	Will be invited to the events and cooperative actions are possible, no details available
	EMFF Programme	Elaboration of CS hasn't started yet	No details available	No details available
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	No specific provisions in relation to the EUSBSR at this stage		
	OP 'Upper Norrland'	Elaboration of CS hasn't started yet	EUSBSR will be mentioned on information meetings and in information material	No details available
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	Elaboration of CS hasn't started yet, but EUSBSR will be included	There were events in the past, will be similar	During the interview the idea came up to invite PACs to the kick-off of the CP and to offer practical workshops on how to support EUSBSR

3.5. Evaluation Plans

In spite of the fact that most programmes were adopted recently and that MAs have one year to submit an evaluation plan, two questions regarding the evaluation were included in the interview guidelines. The objective was to enquire whether the programmes have formulated an evaluation strategy and, when such is the case, identify the methodology that will be applied to evaluate the contribution of the programme to the EUSBSR.

Text Box 7. Questions on evaluation plans

1. Will the contribution of the selected projects to the EUSBSR be an element in your evaluation?
2. What method will be applied to assess contributions to the EUSBSR?

None of the programmes could provide details or agreed proposals with regards to evaluation. This result is not surprising considering the limited time between approval of the programmes and the interviews.

Some programmes state that they do not plan to include the EUSBSR in the evaluation. In the case of the OP ‘Digital Poland’, this is consistent with the Managing Authority’s view that the programme will not neither cooperate with actors from the Baltic Sea Region nor contribute directly to the EUSBSR.

The Finnish OP ‘Sustainable Growth and Work’ will not conduct a separate evaluation of the EUSBSR contribution due to limited budgets for evaluation but think of a joint evaluation with the other Finnish programmes if there will be more emphasis on the EUSBSR in these programmes.

The strongest commitment to a separate evaluation of contributions to the EUSBSR came from the OP ‘Infrastructure and Environment’. The Polish MA made positive experiences with such an evaluation in the past. This is somehow surprising since the MA does not see many potentials for macro-regional cooperation in the programme due to the nature of large infrastructure projects that will necessarily be implemented within Poland. The other Polish programmes have a more reserved position towards a specific evaluation.

Other MAs confirm that they will consider the EUSBSR in one way or the other in their evaluation plan. Since these plans are not finalised and submitted it is too premature to give details. The Danish MA simply states that an evaluation report will be produced if a sufficient number of projects with EUSBSR relevance are funded.

Only the MA of the OP ‘Pomorskie Voivodeship’ has concrete intentions concerning the EUSBSR. Both the on-going evaluation of the programme and the ex-post evaluation will assess its contribution to the EUSBSR.

The Lithuanian Rural Development Programme plans to use indicators compiled for those measures which stated that they contribute to the EUSBSR for the evaluation. If the EUSBSR would provide more specific indicators the Managing Authority intends use these additionally for the evaluation.

Conclusion

The interviews confirmed that it is premature to enquire about this topic at this stage. As evaluation plans do not exist or have not yet been decided upon, none of the interviewees were able to give a detailed answer.

While most interviewees indicate that the programmes intend to evaluate EUSBSR-relevant effects or impacts, only few provide reflections on challenges linked to this task. The fact that the programmes and the EUSBSR operate at different scales and that the wide scope of the EUSBSR makes it possible to link most measures to it makes it difficult isolate measures of EUSBSR relevance should encourage wider debates on how evaluations should be designed and implemented.

Table 7. Answers on evaluation plans

Country	Programme	Theme 1: contribution to EUSBSR as part of the evaluation	Theme 2: method to assess contribution to EUSBSR
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	Envisaged to produce an evaluation report on EUSBSR effects, depending on the number of projects with EUSBSR relevance	No decision yet
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'	Interviewee could not answer question	Interviewee could not answer question
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	Evaluation plan is not finalised, no separate evaluation on EUSBSR, but joint evaluation with EMFF and EAFRD possible, if there is more emphasis on macro-regional strategies	
	Rural Development Programme	It is possible that the EUSBSR will be included at some level, no decisions made	
	EMFF Programme	If EUSBSR will be brought up in discussion about the evaluation plan it will be included	
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	It will be, but no details available yet	No decision yet
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	No specific measures in the drafted evaluation plan on EUSBSR, but can be included in a yearly evaluation plan and in the ex-ante evaluation	
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	Will in the opinion of the MA become more important	Attempts in the past to count projects contributing to EUSBSR, but it was difficult since there are no standard procedures
	Rural Development Programme	Will be included in the measures which contribute to EUSBSR, but no separate evaluation	Questions asking to determine whether and to what extent the measures lived up to this commitment, how many projects were implemented and what effects they have create
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure and Environment'	EUSBSR will play a prominent role in the evaluation, probably with a separate evaluation (made positive experience in the past)	

Country	Programme	Theme 1: contribution to EUSBSR as part of the evaluation	Theme 2: method to assess contribution to EUSBSR
Poland (continued)	OP 'Digital Poland'	EUSBSR will not play a big role in the evaluation, but could be considered	
	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	EUSBSR will play some role in the evaluation, but no separate evaluation planned	
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	EUSBSR will play a role in the evaluation	Two evaluations on EUSBSR are planned, one on-going and one ex-post, probably by external experts, but no decisions are made
	EMFF Programme	Work on evaluation plan hasn't started, too early to talk about it	
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	No specific provisions in relation to the EUSBSR at this stage	
	OP 'Upper Norrland'	No specific provisions in relation to the EUSBSR at this stage	
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	EUSBSR will play a prominent role in the evaluation, but no details available	No decision made yet

3.6. Monitoring

As mentioned in the first interim report it does not appear meaningful to discuss correspondences between programme indicators and EUSBSR indicators. Observed indicator correspondences do not provide additional information compared to the correspondences of priority axes and EUSBSR objectives, sub-objectives, PAs and HAs. Establishing a correspondence between similar indicators, or indicators measuring identical or proximate phenomena, raises series of technical issues which are beyond the scope of the present study. This aspect was therefore only addressed in the case of Denmark, which includes lists of indicator correspondences in the partnership agreement and in the OP.

The number of output indicators is also very limited and most programmes concentrate on the compulsory monitoring requirements. Output indicators were also predefined in the regulations and the indicators do not measure a macro-regional dimension. That is the reason why during the interviews the question on how the contribution of projects is measured with indicators was not discussed.

The questions focused on the one hand on how the EUSBSR is anchored in the Monitoring Committees of the programmes and on the other hand on what measures or instruments are foreseen that projects that were selected as projects contributing to the EUSBSR fulfil their commitment during the implementation (see Text Box 8).

Text Box 8. Questions on monitoring

1. Is it planned to invite a representative of the EUSBSR, e.g. NCP, PAC/HAC to become a member of the MC?
2. How do you monitor whether projects that committed to contribute to the EUSBSR in the application phase actually live up to this commitment?

Representation of EUSBSR actors in ESI Funds programmes Monitoring Committees is variable. Only the Danish OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Businesses', the Finnish Rural Development Programme and the Lithuanian OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments' gave a clear confirmation, that one or more PACs (DK and FI) or the national EUSBSR coordinator (LT) will become members of the Monitoring Committee. The Latvian MA and the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme expect that they will have a member representing the EUSBSR. On the other hand the Finnish OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work' and the EMFF Programme as well as the OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern' clearly said that they do not intend to invite a representative. In the case of the South Baltic Cooperation Programme the members of the Monitoring Committee will be nominated from the Member States, so the Managing Authority of the programme has no influence on its constitution. The other programmes answered that the question was premature, as no decision had yet been made and they did not want to anticipate the decisions.

A number of technical and regulatory challenges to the monitoring of contributions to the EUSBSR were mentioned. Different programmes, e.g. in Sweden, Finland and Denmark, argue that projects of EUSBSR relevance will be identified as such during the application phase and/or when the funding decision is made. The Finnish OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work' further specifies that it will identify the relevance of each project for the contribution to EUSBSR sub-objectives. Quantitative monitoring of EUSBSR relevant effects is said to be very complicated because of the complex and evolving

structure of the programme. Therefore, the interviewees advocate a realistic and more qualitative approach to EUSBSR contributions, in which raising awareness of the EUSBSR is the main objective.

In the Danish case, a discussion with the interviewees on the lists of correspondences between programme indicators and a selection of the EUSBSR indicators provided in the partnership agreement and in the OPs confirmed that the discussion on underlying causal connections is complex. For example, it is argued that the programme indicator 'expected yearly reduction in energy consumption' is connected to the EUSBSR indicators 'employment rates' and 'productivity'. While the existence of a causal link between these measures cannot be dismissed a priori⁵, they cannot be presumed to be correlated. These different measures can therefore only be invoked as part of a wider qualitative assessment of different forms of contributions to EUSBSR contributions.

The Polish OPs 'Infrastructure and Environment' and 'Knowledge and Education Development' mention that the contribution to the EUSBSR is difficult to monitor, because monitoring is not about measuring results and impacts. Compliance with the EUSBSR would for example imply that all projects would be defined as contributing to the EUSBSR. That is one reason that they did not make a decision how to monitor the projects in regard to the EUSBSR. The Estonian interviewees also mention this difficulty, and declare that their proposal to narrow the list of flagship projects when the EUSBSR Action Plan was revised would have helped to find a solution. In the absence of such a narrowing of the scope of the EUSBSR, the solution proposed by the Estonian interviewees is to consider only project whose objectives coincide with those of the EUSBSR, and to exclude all those that are "of EUSBSR relevance".

The two considered rural development programmes restrict the monitoring of contributions to the EUSBSR to programme components that are considered relevant. However, these component are identified differently in each programme. E.g. the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme monitors the contribution only in the LEADER axis because the Local Action Groups needed to describe the relation between their local objectives and the EUSBSR. But the Managing Authority has to rely on the monitoring data from the Local Action Groups.

The regional OPs 'Pomorskie Voivodeship', 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern' and 'Upper Norrland' consider it premature to talk about monitoring. However, foreseen solutions vary, as they span from the definition of additional indicators in Germany to a focus on proportions of funding spent on EUSBSR relevant projects in Poland.

Conclusion

The foreseen involvement of PACs or HACs in Monitoring Committee varies from country to country. Only a limited number of programmes consider this option.

When answers on monitoring of EUSBSR contributions could be obtained, these were quite diverse. Some programmes will develop additional indicators, while several programmes do not monitor the projects in relation to the EUSBSR. The answers reflect the great complexity of programme monitoring, which leads to a certain reluctance at creating additional constraints through the monitoring of contributions to the EUSBSR.

⁵ One could for example hypothesise that reduced energy consumption could lead to higher productivity, and could, in some respects, be compensated for through higher employment.

Table 8. Answers on monitoring

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Representative of EUSBSR in MC	Theme 2: Monitoring of projects during the implementation
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	Yes, PACs from Denmark	Is considered difficult, but OP only supports small part of the EUSBSR
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'		
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	No plans to invite representatives to the MC	Direct and indirect contribution is evaluated for the decision, but no special monitoring of projects during the implementation on this aspect
	Rural Development Programme	PAC Agri is member of the MC as well as representatives from PA Nutri	Measure if the objectives of the programme have been fulfilled, if these includes EUSBSR, it is monitored
	EMFF Programme	Will not include representative of EUSBSR in MC	Will not monitor contribution of all projects
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	No plans to invite representatives to the MC	There will be probably additional indicators to monitor the contribution
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	It was in the past, probably also for the new period (according to NCP)	Monitored with progress reports, on the spot checks and monitoring visits
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	National coordinator was invited to MC	Monitoring through indicators and targets agreed in the grant agreement
	Rural Development Programme	No decision made, but was in the past	Will be monitored only in Leader, MA will rely on data delivered from the Local Action Groups Do not use EUSBSR indicators, are too broad
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure & Environment'	No decision	No decisions yet, difficult to assess what projects are contributing to the EUSBSR, if compliance with EUSBSR objectives are taken, than nearly every project can be claimed as contributing to EUSBSR
	OP 'Digital Poland'	No decision	No decisions yet
	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	No decision	No decisions yet, difficult to assess what projects are contributing to the EUSBSR, if compliance with EUSBSR objectives are taken, than nearly every project can be claimed as contributing to EUSBSR
Poland (continued)	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	No decision	No decisions yet, Marshall office is working on descriptions
	EMFF Programme	MC was just established, no decisions	MC was just established, no decisions

Country	Programme	Theme 1: Representative of EUSBSR in MC	Theme 2: Monitoring of projects during the implementation
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'		
	OP 'Upper Norrland'	MC does not include representative of EUSBSR	No decisions, predefined indicators from the EC are not appropriate
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	Members of MC are delegated from Member States, Ma has no influence, PAC Tourism was member of MC, but is unclear if he remains	Monitoring will be done through progress reports

4. Challenges and Opportunities, Future Perspectives,

The output of the interviews is disappointing when it comes to cooperation and coordination models, in spite of repeated encouragements to address these issues from a wide perspective. A number of interviewees emphasize the regulatory, practical and organisational challenges that need to be overcome when seeking to implement cooperative actions, and only few develop thoughts on new cooperation models that could be envisaged within the given frameworks for ESI Funds programmes. Many consider macro-regional cooperation and coordination primarily as an issue at project level or for ETC programmes. The majority of interviews show that discussions and reflections on cooperation and coordination models have been limited. The Polish Managing Authorities see a lack of consistency in the approach, considering that the European Commission did not emphasise the cooperation aspect sufficiently in the negotiations of the programmes.

A number of programmes declare that contributions to the EUSBSR will primarily depend on the attitudes and decisions of actors such as regional intermediaries involved in the programme management, potential project applicants (including sectoral ministries) and monitoring committees. Awareness-raising initiatives on the potential added value of macro-regional cooperation and encouragements to incorporate this dimension in project activities carried out in the coming months can therefore have a significant impact. Further interviews with NCPs, PACs, HACs and flagship project leaders could help clarifying the possibilities for such actions. These exchanges can usefully be informed by the findings of the present and previous interim reports, which together provide extensive evidence on the challenges and opportunities for macro-regional cooperation across the Baltic Sea Region.

The regional programmes that have been interviewed appear particularly sceptical with regards to contributions to the EUSBSR. The OP 'Upper Norrland' states that regional and local actors' sense of ownership of the EUSBSR is declining and considers that the bottom-up emergence of cooperation projects ambitioning to contribute to the EUSBSR would require some sort of support and encouragement from the national level. The Managing Authority in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern states that *"if the Commission wants more cooperation projects in the mainstream funds, clearer regulations are needed"*. The regional programme is drafted to fulfil regional needs, which do not necessarily need to be addressed through macro-regional cooperation. Macro-regional cooperation is perceived as an issue for ETC programmes. The OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship' argues that national programme are not interested in cooperation, that the lack of flexibility in the programme elaboration process makes it difficult to develop arrangements for macro-regional cooperation and that Polish EUSBSR actors were not pro-active enough.

All programmes consider regional and national needs as their priority, and contributions to the EUSBSR as a possible side-effect or as a potential lever to improve the efficiency of their actions. EUSBSR actors need to better demonstrate the added value of macro-regional cooperation and implement encouragements to enhance the 'macro-regional side effects' of national and regional measures.

The interviewed coordinator for the Swedish OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs' states that there is a need to define joint mechanisms for cooperation, a well-defined path leading from transnational project idea to application, funding and implementation. For that a much stronger cooperation between the MAs is needed. Cooperation between the managing authorities is, with the exception of the Baltic

Sea Network for the ESF, very limited. This reduces their capacity to formulate joint interests and possibilities to implement different types of coordinated or cooperative measures.

Interviewees that are not personally involved in the EUSBSR generally display a low sense of ownership to the strategy and expect other actors such as national authorities and European organisations to play an active role promoting it. Some national authorities would like more guidance from the European Commission, e.g. with regards to the application of article 70(2). It therefore, from the perspective of the interviewed ESI Funds programme, seems to be an open question who is in the 'driver's seat' of the implementation of the EUSBSR. A reinforced dialogue is therefore needed, clarifying expectations to ESI Funds programmes and the support they may expect to receive from the national and European levels.

Table 9. Answers on challenges and opportunities

Country	Programme	Challenges	Opportunities
Denmark	OP 'Innovation and Sustainable Growth in Business' and 'ESF OP'	Competition from ETC programmes, provide a better basis for cooperation	Many regions are quite enthusiastic about EUSBSR; Improving the dialogue between MA and Regional Growth Forums
Estonia	OP 'Cohesion Policy Funding'	List of priorities in the action plan too long Different level of interest and priorities in Member States	Start with two or three countries to get the process going
Finland	OP 'Sustainable Growth and Work'	Diminishing funds	In southern and western Finland more cooperation is foreseen
	Rural Development Programme	Concrete actions have been missing, strong barriers for more cooperation	
	EMFF Programme		Transnational cooperation plays an important part in the EMFF programme Inspiration can be drawn from ERA-NET and Baltfish forum
Germany	OP 'Mecklenburg-Vorpommern'	No challenges for the OP because clear orientation on regional level;	If the EC wants more cooperation projects in the mainstream funds, clearer regulations are needed
Latvia	OP 'Growth and Employment'	Objectives of the EUSBSR are very broad, revision of Action plan leads to some uncertainty among project developers about the eligibility of their project idea in the future	
Lithuania	OP 'EU Structural Funds Investments'	MA: meetings are interesting but not useful NCP: coordination between MS for a parallel submission of OPs to have joint calls Encourage applicants to be initiative and offer ideas Explain the administrative procedures Strict regulations and complex procedures are an obstacle	MA: organise thematic meetings with ministries NCP: most opportunities were there was cooperation before, e.g. science and innovation have a long tradition of cooperation
	Rural Development Programme	Strict regulation of rural development policy, macro-regional dimension should be included in the regulations; Lack of human resources and political will	More active information policy More active promotion of EUSBSR on EU level

Country	Programme	Challenges	Opportunities
Poland	OP 'Infrastructure & Environment'	Lack of consistency in the approach of EC to the inclusion of EUSBSR, EUSBSR has not been prioritised in the negotiations; Passive attitude of EC, tries to shift responsibility to MS CF Regulation is not friendly with such complex initiatives Language and communication barriers	
	OP 'Digital Poland'	Small size of the programme compared to high EUSBSR ambitions	
	OP 'Knowledge Education Development'	Lack of consistency in the approach of EC to the inclusion of EUSBSR, EUSBSR has not been prioritised in the negotiations; Different approach of BSR countries in the implementation of the ESF, different priority axes make it difficult to have joint calls Limited pro-active attitude of the EUSBSR structures: PACs etc. need to improve their capacity with regard to ESI Funds Lack of Polish national priorities with regard to BSR cooperation makes it difficult to define BSR priorities of Poland in the ESI Funds	Use experiences from EQUAL for coordination
	OP 'Pomorskie Voivodeship'	Standardisation: guidelines limit place-based approach Lack of coordination between EC services (different approaches and priorities) Lack of priority under national guidelines on cooperation between OP and entities outside the programme area	
	EMFF Programme	Architecture of the programme, due to regulations, OP Fish can contribute only indirectly and contribution has not been prioritised by EC	Work of the Polish National Working Team on EUSBSR

Country	Programme	Challenges	Opportunities
Sweden	OP 'Investments in Growth and Jobs'	<p>All Swedish projects can easily add a transnational component without the need of cofunding from other countries</p> <p>Programme administrations at the regional level are sceptical to the possibility of funding activities abroad</p>	<p>Regional commitment to EUSBSR, especially in some regions (Skåne)</p> <p>Waiting for guidelines from the EC on how to implement Art. 70(2)</p> <p>Need to define joint mechanisms for cooperation, a well-defined path leading from transnational project idea to application, funding and implementation</p>
	OP 'Upper Norrland'	<p>Habit to turn to INTERREG for transnational ideas</p> <p>Additional administrative costs of transnational cooperation</p> <p>Complexity of EUSBSR makes it difficult to raise awareness</p> <p>North of Sweden is more orientated to Barents Sea, BSR is not the natural region for the North</p> <p>Need to clarify added value of cooperation and to find easy solutions for cooperation</p>	
	South Baltic Cooperation Programme	<p>Ownership of the EUSBSR</p> <p>Same questions from stakeholders as six years before, only a few actors are aware of the EUSBSR</p>	<p>Separation of mainstream programmes and ETC has changed, mainstream programmes discover that they can profit from EUSBSR</p>