Multilevel governance issues in EU macroregions

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Abstract
Developed at the end of the 20th century the core of the Multilevel Governance (MLG) concept assumes that public governance may be conducted by horizontal and flexible, not necessarily formalised, networks of cooperation between various public and private actors. Hierarchical pyramids with real power on their tops evolve into systems with less control, more decentralised power, and a number of decisive centres. Flattening organisational structures makes that the significance of public consultations increases in collegiate power systems. Issues to be solved require involvement of various leaders participating in decision-making. This approach was used in EU macroregions, in which a need emerged to turn the joint vision of development into a macro-regional strategy. The Baltic Sea Region was a macroregion suitable for taking pioneering actions in terms of multilevel governance. An efficiently operating network of cooperation between actors from many areas and levels, which is unusual in other transnational regions, was its asset. In 2016 another three macroregions had a joint macro-regional strategy, and another five were considering to develop it. The efficiency of multilevel governance required to include entities outside the European Union in cooperation. The sense of regional identity influencing social, economic and cultural development was a bond of cooperation. Unleashing the potential of individual regions covered by strategies became an important objective of cooperation. At the beginning of the cooperation the European Union had to fulfil initiating, motivating and coordinating functions. The aim of this article is to analyse critically MLG in establishing EU macroregions and to suggest an optimal model of their cooperation. A literature study on the origin of multilevel governance and the concept of transnational regions was conducted. Four macroregions with an implemented macro-regional strategy were analysed. Macroregions were described in terms of territory, subject matter, and organisation based on applicable documents. Differences between macroregions and Euroregions as well as relations between macroregions and selected transnational cooperation programmes were discussed. The barriers of macro-regional cooperation were determined. It was shown that although the concept of multilevel governance needs to be improved and simplified, it is still an optimal tool for macro-regional cooperation and development.

Key words: European Union; territorial co-operation; macroregion; multilevel governance.

JEL Classification: F15, R58, 019

1 Introduction
Territorial cooperation is becoming an increasingly important aim of the EU cohesion policy. Due to that reason such tools and cooperation governance models are being sought which would secure the development of EU priorities more efficiently, taking into account the areas that transcend national borders. The coordination of actions at European, national, regional and local levels is challenging (Kizielewicz, 2015; Grobelna and Tokarz-Kocik, 2016). Democratic models, which take into account the contribution of stakeholders should not be perceived as the goal also as a method of development coordination (Niezgoda and Czermek, 2008; Kizielewicz and Skrzeszewska, 2016).
On the initiative of the European Union a process developing transnational strategies was initiated within the vision of European Union development contained in the Europe 2020 strategy. It required to develop a system of multilevel governance allowing to unlock the potential which despite a significant financial support given by territorial programmes has been used so far to a limited extent. An opportunity appeared to generate social and political benefits related to the development of democracy and promotion of European values outside the European Union. In such circumstances the concept of a macroregion emerged as a new area of territorial cooperation.

2. Origin of EU macroregions

Academic literature suggests many definitions of the macroregion, which indicates its ambiguity and multidimensionality differently perceived in various scientific disciplines. The multitude of possible approaches results from an increasing interest in the analysis of economic phenomenon at regional level (Nazarczuk, 2013). Regions can be interstate or intra-state (Korneevets, 2010). International regions can be divided into global regions, megaregions, international macroregions, and cross-border mesoregions. An international region can be defined as a geographical entity in which geographical states form a group (Beyer 2010). The term macroregion in turn applies to larger area of size between the nation and the continent (Roth, 2007).

The process of European integration and power fragmentation resulted in establishing political units operating on a scale that exceeds the national level (Fritsch, 2012). Over time they were called macroregions. The term macroregion has its roots in political science. At first this term concerned only countries, over time it also covered the sub-nation units of the country (Dubois, 2009). Entities creating macroregions are bound together by joint challenges and objectives. The borders of macroregions are determined functionally, not arbitrarily (Słomczyńska, 2014). Both the country and part of its territory may belong to several macroregions.

Fig. 1. Macroregions and eligible areas of Transnational Cooperation Programmes.

The issue of macroregions had not been present in official EU documents for a long time (Słomczyńska 2013). A turning point was a working document (Ministerial Meeting, 2005) in which common characteristics for transnational European regions were determined, including
for the Northern, the Central, the Eastern, the Alpine, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic one. In 2009 it was pointed out in turn (CoR, 2009) that the strategy of the European Union is focused, among other things, on developing macroregions. It was agreed that this inventive approach needed to be highly coherent during its development and implementation to the European process. It must be based on a multilevel governance system, which would result in a new type of partnership that involves connecting together strategic initiatives of internal and external policy.

3. Concept of multilevel governance MLG

Developed at the end of the 20th century (Cleveland, 1972), the core of the MLG concept assumes that public governance may be conducted by horizontal and flexible, not necessarily formalised, networks of cooperation between various public and private actors (Lackowska, 2009; Kizielewicz, 2016; Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2016, Skrzeszewska and Beran 2016, Szelagowska-Rudzka, 2016). Hierarchical pyramids with real power on their tops evolve into systems with less control, more decentralised power, and a number of decisive centres. Flattening organisational structures makes that the significance of public consultations increases in collegiate power systems. Issues to be solved require involvement of various leaders participating in decision-making (Rudolf, 2010). This approach was used in EU macroregions, in which a need emerged to turn the joint vision of development into a macro-regional strategy.

The Baltic Sea Region was a macroregion suitable for taking pioneering actions in terms of multilevel governance. An efficiently operating network of cooperation between actors from many areas and levels, which is unusual in other transnational regions, was its asset. In 2016 another three macroregions had a joint macro-regional strategy (EC, 2016), and another five (EP, 2015) were considering to develop it (fig. 1). The efficiency of multilevel governance required to include entities outside the European Union in cooperation. The sense of regional identity influencing social, economic and cultural development was a bond of cooperation (Słomczynska, 2013; Spodarczyk and Szelagowska-Rudzka, 2015). Unleashing the potential of individual regions covered by strategies became an important objective of cooperation. At the beginning of the cooperation the European Union had to fulfil initiating, motivating and coordinating functions.

4. Macroregions in terms of territory

Macroregions are territorial units established on geographical units (seas or mountains). Macroregions consist both of EU countries and non-EU countries (tab. 1). However, it must be pointed out that the Alpine Region has a special status because it covers EFTA countries cooperating with the EU, i.e. Liechtenstein and Switzerland. The biggest number of countries belongs to the Danube Macroregion and the fewest to the Alpine Region. Germany (and to be more specific, its federal states) and Slovenia belong to three macroregions. The following EU states belong to two macroregions: Croatia, Italy, Slovenia, and countries outside the EU: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia. Macroregions are relatively similar in terms of population (75 – 115 million), but they differ in terms of the size. It is stressed that (Słomczyńska, 2014) macroregion borders are conventional, they are determined functionally since the territory is not a key delimitation factor. It concerns in particular the countries that belong to macroregions partially.
Table 1. Description of macroregions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>EU countries</th>
<th>Countries outside the EU</th>
<th>Number of countries</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltic Sea Region</td>
<td>European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland</td>
<td>Russia, Norway, Belarus</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>85 mln</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danube Region</td>
<td>European Union Strategy for the Danube Region</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>115 mln</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriatic Ionian Region</td>
<td>European Union Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia</td>
<td>Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>70 mln</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpine Region</td>
<td>European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia</td>
<td>Liechtenstein, Switzerland</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>75 mln</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Macroleigions in terms of subject matter
The substantive scope of macro-regional activity was determined in macro-regional strategies (EC, 2009, EC, 2010, EC, 2014b, EC, 2015). The strategies set objectives, directions and ways of operating in a rapidly changing environment. They aim at bringing together initiatives in different sectors as well as promoting cooperation between stakeholders. Strategic objectives were stipulated in terms of subject matter and activities. The “objective trees” of strategies evolved, in particular the EUSBSR. Finally in 2016 all strategies had a similar structure and the substantive scope (tab. 2).

Table 2. Priorities of macroregional strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Objectives/Pillars</th>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objective 2 Connect the regions</td>
<td>Policy areas (PA) 7. Transport, 8. Energy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority actions (PA)</td>
<td>No horizontal actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUSDR</td>
<td>Pillar 1 Connecting the region</td>
<td>Priority actions (PA) 1. Mobility and multimodality, 2. Sustainable energy, 3. Culture and tourism, people to people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pillar 4 Strengthening the region</td>
<td>Priority actions (PA) 10. Institutional capacity and cooperation, 11 Security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUSAIR</td>
<td>Pillar 1 Blue Growth</td>
<td>Topics 1. Blue technologies, 2. Fisheries and aquaculture, 3. Maritime and marine governance and services</td>
<td>No horizontal actions, the specific objectives for each pillar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pillar 3 Environmental quality</td>
<td>Topics 1. The marine environment, 2. Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The strategies covered primary objectives, i.e.: “objectives” or “pillars”, and secondary objectives (fields), i.e.: “policy areas”, “priority areas”, “topics” and “actions”. In three cases the strategy structure needed to be extended to an extra element (such as horizontal actions, specific objectives, thematic policy areas). The priorities of all strategies included issues such as: the environment, transportation, prosperity. EU programmes such as transnational cooperation programmes, whose area of eligibility covers the areas of macroregions to a great extent, were the key sources for financing activities included in the strategies. It is pointed out that the macroregional strategy and the transnational programme are two different instruments developed for similar aims but acting on different levels and principles (Nyikos, 2015).

### 6. Macroregions in terms of organization

The organisation of macroregions refers to cross-border structures i.e. Euroregions operating in Europe for more than 50 years (Perin, 2014). However, there are significant differences. In Euroregions the key role is played by local and regional cooperation levels. Local and regional authorities sign agreements to establish Euroregions. On the other hand, in macroregions the key role is played by the EU and national level (fig. 2).

#### Fig. 2. Structure of Euroregions and Macroregions

Euroregions are much more institutionalised, they have their own statutes which must comply with the law of countries in which they operate. They are located mainly at borderlands and cover (with a few exceptions) areas much smaller than macroregions. Multilevel governance covers three areas in macroregions: political, coordinating and operational. In the political area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Objectives/Pillars</th>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piller 4</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism</td>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>1. Diversified tourism offer (products and services), 2. Sustainable and responsible tourism management (innovation and quality).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EUSALP Objective 1</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>1. To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem, 2. To increase the economic potential of strategic sectors, 3. To improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective 2, Sustainable internal and external accessibility to all</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>4. To promote inter-modality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport, 5. To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 3, A more inclusive environmental framework for all and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>6. To preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources, 7. To develop ecological connectivity in the whole EUSALP territory, 8. To improve risk management and to better manage climate change, including major natural risks prevention, 9. To make the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No horizontal actions, Thematic policy areas: | 1. economic growth and innovation, 2. Mobility and connectivity, 3. Environment and energy |

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the European Commission and the High Level Group of macro-regional strategies have the main political role. It is advisable to take actions for developing stronger political leadership of countries and regions (EC, 2015). The General Strategy Leadership Body must operate in every macroregion. It should hold annual meetings on a regular basis. It is necessary that institutions coordinating actions at the national and regional level take more responsibility and coordinated actions in the field in a more clear way. Experts and local leaders must be used to a greater extent. The key coordinating role should be played by national contact points. They would participate in “debate forms” to which representatives of key European institutions would be invited (Parliament, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, and the Economic and Social Committee). It is advisable to connect macroregional strategies and territorial cooperation programmes through a cooperation platform. Based on a critical analysis of multilevel governance in macroregions and the suggestions of the European Commission, an organisational model can be suggested that provides more efficient governance and fuller implementation of objectives (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Optimised model of MLG in EU macro-regions

7. Conclusions
The concept of multilevel governance used in the BSR for implementing a macroregional strategy has been adapted in another macroregions of the European Union. Four macroregional strategies were established which are similar in terms of organisation and subject matter. Environmental, transport, and prosperity issues were considered to be the main developmental priorities. The objectives and specific actions were also determined, their implementation was entrusted to macro-regional actors. The governance model involves cooperation between entities at EU, national, and regional levels. This cooperation has already generated economic, social, and political benefits. Therefore, another macroregions interested in developing their own strategies are being established. However, barriers appeared, most of all organisational ones. The weight of coordination was successfully moved from the EU level to national and regional levels to a moderate extent. Therefore, based on the monitoring results, the European Union authorities suggested modifying the governance system to provide more efficient cooperation between
stakeholders. "It is hoped the result will be better management of the strategies to deliver more results more efficiently" (EC, 2014a).

The biggest weakness of macroregional strategies is still the EU "three noes rule": no new regulations, no new EU institutions and no new additional funds. In this situation an efficient use of funds for territorial cooperation programmes, including transnational programmes funds, is an opportunity for the activation of macro-regional development. The macro-regional area covers the eligible area of those programmes to a great extent. So far, a new tool of cooperation, i.e. the European grouping of territorial cooperation, has not been used. After the last reform this tool (EU, 2013) allows to include entities outside the European Union to organisational structures. This is important to the extent that such entities are present in all macroregions.

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