How do macro-regional strategies deliver: workflows, processes and approaches
January 2018

Input paper

Introduction

EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) arise from a need to find more targeted solutions to common societal challenges. The MRS become efficient framework to engage relevant stakeholders in defining and implementing strategic actions and macro-regional processes (being called flagships, projects, example projects in the MRS). They are complex initiatives considering different perspectives.

We can observe that actions identified in the Action Plans[1] are well understood by the stakeholders, while the term 'project' may cause a certain misunderstanding if used in a macro-regional context. It might even jeopardize a true understanding of a MRS work.

This **paper is aiming to collect different inputs to the question on what is in a core of macro-regional work and what is a flagship, project and example project in different MRS. The paper does not aim to replace any definition currently used by the different strategies** but only to compile various views and practice observations into a single document.

The initial version of this document (of September 2017) is updated according to the stakeholder inputs gathered during Interact organised events. Macro-regional processes were explicitly discussed during the 2nd Joint meeting of transport coordinators of the EU macro-regional strategies, held on 29-30 November 2017 in Vienna, Austria.

What is in a focus of a macro-regional strategy?

Keeping in mind that the MRS look for targeted solutions to address common societal and territorial challenges that cannot be solved solely on local, regional or national levels but requires transnational cooperation, the **MRS work for developing, implementing and monitoring macro-regional processes.**

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[1] Action Plan accompanying the respective EU macro-regional strategy, respectively the Action Plan for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the Action Plan for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Action Plan for the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, the Action Plan for the Alpine Region.

European Regional Development Fund

> **Macro-regional processes should lead to improved implementation of the existing policies or ideally, the development of new policy recommendations and planning methods**.

Attention to the recommendations mentioned above marks a gradual interest shift in the MRS' implementation – from the output level (e.g. number of labelled projects approved, number of thematic events organised) to the result/impact level where a policy change is expected.

What is a macro-regional process?

A macro-regional process is a number of jointly established development processes that aim to create a broad impact and achieve objectives (targets and indicators, where defined) **of the priority/policy within the MRS.**

This process responds to the actions defined in the Action Plan which are implemented through interlinked <u>activities</u> (e.g. meetings, groups, networks, platforms) **and <u>operations</u>** (called also projects under some of funding programmes/ funding instruments).

The macro-regional process has a larger impact on cohesion, is linked to various policies and pushes stakeholders for a joint action (single or complex, depending on the topic). Through a strong stakeholder involvement, it helps interlink various single projects and activities, take up their results and develop new joint initiatives for a macro-regional benefit. Thus, it ensures continuation and transferability of actions at macro-regional level.

The macro-regional process is built on three core elements:

a) The strategy – dedicated to 'breaking silos' through transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation;
b) The platform – established by the group of committed stakeholders (representing relevant multi-level governance levels) for the purpose of interacting on the macro-regional issues;
c) The work plan (or road map) – in a form of agreed way to cooperate and reach the set objectives, targets and indicators.

The macro-regional process applies principles of **macro-regional relevance, transnationality, complementarity** and **impact** or **change**.

> **Macro-regional process is an organised and inclusive long-term cooperation, with blending activities based on identified gaps and needs of the macro-region aiming for greater policy impact and change of existing approaches.**

What characterises a macro-regional process?

Macro-regional process:

- is a systematic series of actions directed to some end, not a one-time activity;
- aims to address a challenge defined in the Action Plan and work for a change/impact;
- contributes to objectives (targets and indicators) defined in the Action Plan;
- is jointly agreed and developed, implemented and monitored by a group of committed and relevant stakeholders;
- have a clear macro-regional added value;
- applies principles of macro-regional relevance, transnationality, complementarity;
- integrates different perspectives, cooperation instruments and funding;
- requires time for preparations, implementation and monitoring;
- considers cross-cutting aspects of the topic (interlinks policies, themes and priorities);
- has an impact on existing institutional settings.

What instruments could be considered when building up and implementing a macro-regional process?

Based on the discussions with the MRS key implementing stakeholders participating in the events mentioned above, it was concluded that several instruments for cooperation are available and could be considered (being activities or operations (projects)) when building up, implementing and monitoring a macro-regional process. As such were mentioned:

- labelled EU-funded projects;
- single projects (not labelled) – addressing a smaller geographical area than macro-region but with replication potential high enough to be promoted for the use elsewhere in and beyond the macro-region;
- project clusters/platforms arranged by the funding programmes;
- existing thematic networks, working groups, task forces, etc.;
- exchange seminars, workshops, MRS' forums (and sessions during these forums);
- thematic calls organised by the funding programmes[2];
- programme arranged and provided tools, like workshops, partner search forums and events delivered by the programmes in an effort to reach an adequate portfolio of projects;
- programme support structures with open access to MRS coordinators (e.g. Interact Capitalisation networks, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platforms, capacity support structures under the MRS, project platforms under the programmes).

What steps to be considered when developing a macro-regional process?

Step 1: **Choose societal/territorial challenge** (usually defined in the Action Plan) and **identify the macro-regional added value** in addition to local, regional, national value. Consider **what change a macro-regional process will address**. The Action Plans of the MRS are listing broad scope of macro-regional challenges.

Step 2: **Make a stakeholder analysis, identify stakeholders that can bring about change**.

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[2] In accordance with Annex 1 paragraph 7.3. of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 laying down the common provisions for the ESIF.

A greater involvement of all countries of the respective macro-region gives a greater chance for a real policy impact.

Step 3: **Start building a macro-regional process and confirm relevance**. In case a macro-regional process is built by other stakeholder and not thematic (priority, policy, pillar, action) coordinator, the respective (macro-regional) thematic coordinator and priority, policy, pillar, action steering group/coordination group should be addressed to confirm a need and relevance of the process. Then, relevant stakeholders should be addressed to involve them in defining a macro-regional process. Involvement of relevant actors in the process from the very early stage raises awareness and strengthens ownership of the MRS. It will also benefit further transferability and implementation of achieved results.

Step 4: **Plan your macro-regional process** – set up stakeholder groups and keep them involved in identifying, defining and planning activities (meetings, groups, networks, platforms) and operations (projects, where necessary). Share ownership! See around existing cooperation instruments that could be utilised.

Step 5: **Implement, monitor and evaluate impact** of a macro-regional process. Set targets and indicators, find information for setting baselines, monitor and evaluate it towards impact and change the development process makes. Steer the macro-regional process in cooperation with stakeholders!
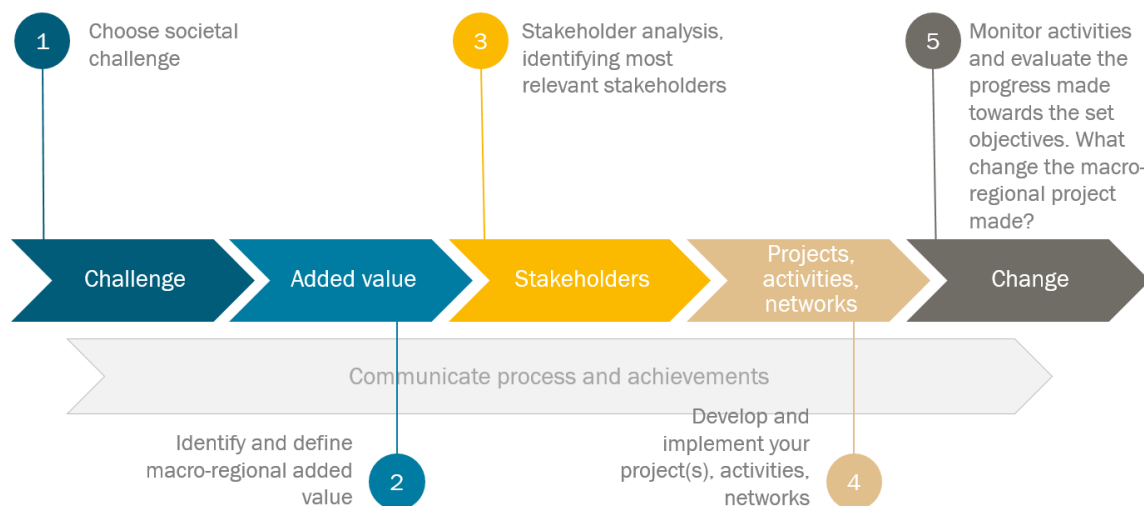
Thought interlinking broad scope of activities and operations (projects) macro-regional processes and MRS thematic coordinators play an important role in the coordination of different funding sources (local, regional, national, EU). However, coordination between thematic coordinators and funds as well as openness of funding sources towards responding to the needs of the macro-regions should be further worked on.

In cooperation with thematic (priority, policy, pillar, action) coordinator evaluate if a macro-regional process led to sufficient response to a challenge defined in the Action Plan. Should it be so, the Action Plan would need amendment, should you have more aspects to consider to respond to the challenge, continue with designing additional processes.

Do not underestimate role of stakeholders involved in the process! They will help to make results of a macro-regional process sustainable and will ensure spill-over effect of those.

Communicating progress made by a macro-regional process could be considered as another crucial activity (step) in the macro-regional process. However, it would be suggested to integrate communication activities in every of the earlier steps of a process.

With an aim to explain the MRS work and increase commitment to macro-regional cooperation, it is crucial to tell about the achievements and benefits brought by the MRS. Therefore thematic coordinators of the MRS need to streamline indicator usage for showing the success; collect evidence about the changes in the macro-region; identify concrete achievements; and communicate added value of the MRS in relation to other policy frameworks. Though it is certain that development and change often happen not only thanks to the MRS but due to developments in these frameworks, co-existence and coordination across the frameworks.

1 Choose societal challenge

3 Stakeholder analysis, identifying most relevant stakeholders

5 Monitor activities and evaluate the progress made towards the set objectives. What change the macro-regional project made?

| Challenge | Added value | Stakeholders | Projects, activities, networks | Change |

Communicate process and achievements

Identify and define macro-regional added value **2**

Develop and implement your project(s), activities, networks **4**

How to measure implementation of a macro-regional process?

A macro-regional process is initiated due to a recognised gap or challenge in a macro-region. Impact and change made through implementation of a macro-regional project is desired outcome of it. It can be social, economic, environmental, policy or any other impact/change.

Due to broad thematic of the MRS, impact made by macro-regional process can be – better coordinated and implemented policy, change in approaches/ ways of addressing certain challenge, development of new ways of cooperation, developing policy recommendations, etc.

Assuming that a macro-regional process is aiming at changing or developing new ways of addressing relevant policy, it is often expected to bring policy impact or policy change.

> **Macro-regional process should focus on measuring a change made towards achieving objectives to combat societal challenge.**
> **Macro-regional process is evaluating impact (even its components) to the macro-region instead of measuring outputs of single operations (projects).**

The envisaged policy impact defines:

- which problem areas are to be addressed (the macro-regional process scope);
- which stakeholders are to be involved;
- what cooperation instruments are relevant (operations (projects), initiatives, meetings, networks, etc.), and
- consequently, what funding needs to be attracted and aligned for achieving envisaged change.

Thus, desire for making a change and impact is a red thread throughout the macro-regional process.

Despite almost ten years in implementation, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is only now starting to formalize the macro-regional process (in case of the EUSBSR called a 'flagship') as a vehicle for a change/an impact.
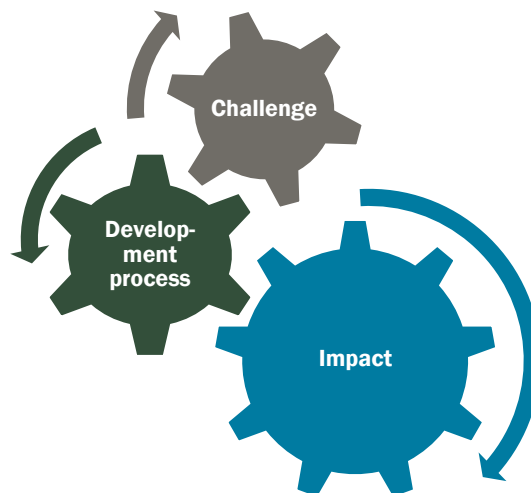

What is a 'project chain' and 'project – to policy loop'?

'Project chain' is an interesting concept that could be utilised to strengthen the MRS' implementation. 'Project chain' could be seen as another way of developing and implementing 'macro-regional projects/processes'.

When developing 'project chains' and 'project –to policy loops' in the MRS' implementation, those allow to set up and manage flexible and responsive process to the macro-regional challenges. The MRS thematic coordinators have several options of designing and nourishing such 'project chains' in their thematic areas to help projects achieve more durable results.

'Project chain' can be built interlinking projects implemented in parallel under priority, policy, pillar, action (shown below as 'horizontal project') or in successional order one after another (shown as 'vertical project'). Picture below is used for illustration only.

> **'Project chain' is a process where several operations (projects) are interlinked within one priority, policy, pillar, action of the MRS.**
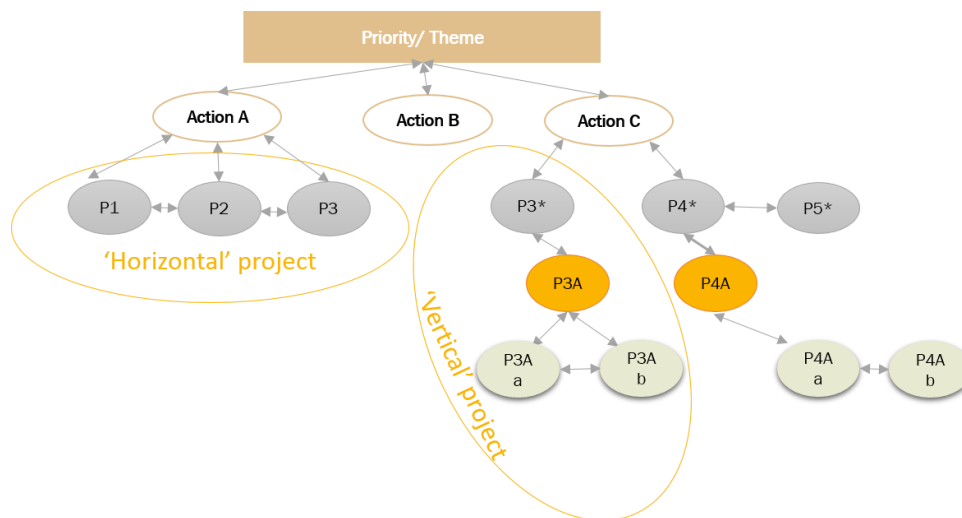
Linking ongoing projects, helping the new generation of projects build on the outcomes of the completed ones, is allowing any programme and project, despite its scope (in terms of territory, partnership, funding amount, etc.), to contribute to a MRS. However, it would require that thematic coordinators would be building, implementing, monitoring - developing these 'project chains' (being 'architects' of the macro-regional processes).

However, invigorating the 'project chains' and labelling the projects presents the two different approaches. According to the top-down approach, the steering / coordination group initiates and steers the 'project chain' development process based on shared priorities. As example could be mentioned PA 'Education' in the EUSBSR, which engages in building so-called flagships as packaged 'macro-regional processes' to achieve the change, with individual projects forming parts of flagships. In the bottom-up approach the steering/ coordination group collects existing projects and recommends/expresses support to them for implementation. This option is being practiced e.g. under EU Strategy for the Danube Region where a label is given to those projects that are assessed to have a transnational value.

Whichever approach would be taken by thematic coordinators, it need to support their work in addressing macro-regional challenges. Certainly, it would require appropriate time for embedding new ways of working and approaches.

'Project – to policy loop' showcase impact operations (projects) make to policy.
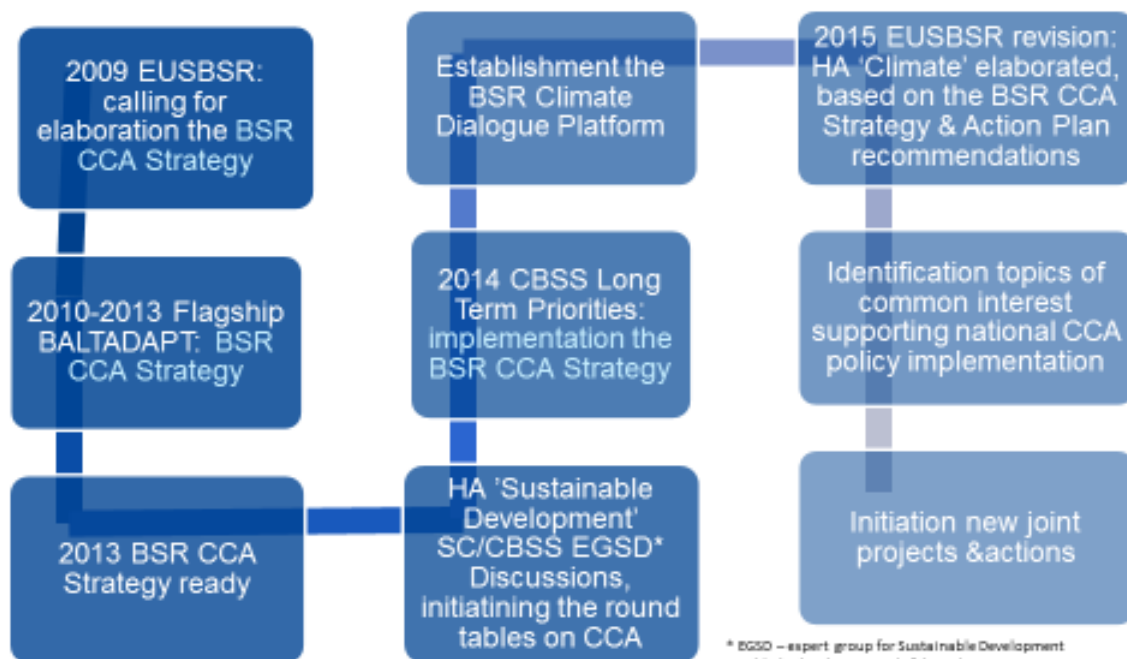
> **'Project– to policy loop' is a process where a link between a macro-regional process and a policy change is ensured.**
> **In this context macro-regional process can initiate policy discussion/change as well as be an outcome of it.**

There are examples and experiences where macro-regional processes have an impact on the policy.
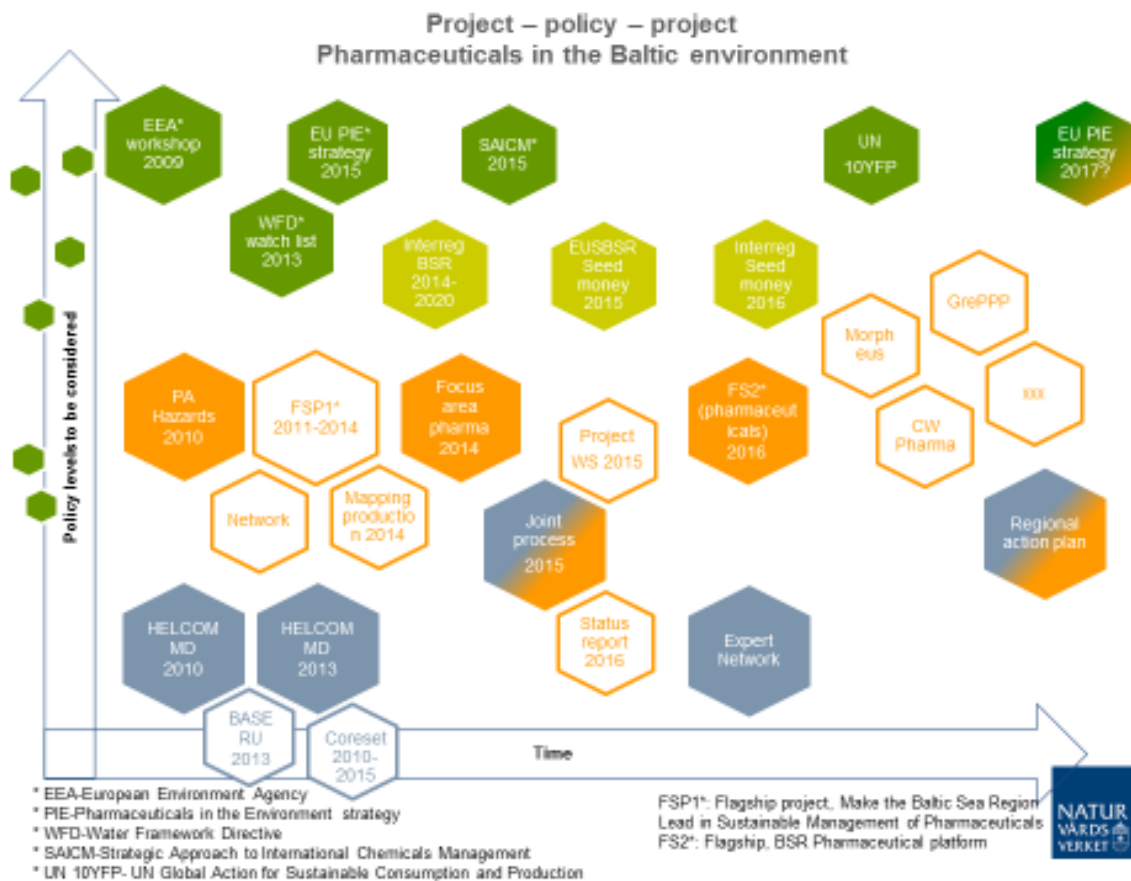
Horizontal Action 'Climate', EUSBSR

'Project – to policy loop' was initiated by the transnational project BALTADAPT as a direct response to the strategic decision addressed in the macro-regional strategy. As an outcome of the project Baltic Sea Region-Wide Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS) and its Action Plan were developed. The further implementation the CCAS becomes one of the CBSS strategic actions. As the CCAS highlighted the need for setting up a BSR level framework for following-up the CCAS and improving transnational climate cooperation, the CBSS member countries decided to establish the Baltic Sea Region Climate Dialogue Platform - a policy process in order to facilitate knowledge exchange among the Member States, to support the development and implementation of national climate policies and advance joint climate actions in the Baltic Sea Region. The Baltic Sea Region Climate Dialogue Platform becomes a new Flagship of the EUSBSR. For further details and developments please see the process in the slide below.

Multilevel governance in policy process - example from HA 'Climate' on Climate Change Adaptation (CCA)

2009 EUSBSR: calling for elaboration the BSR CCA Strategy

2010-2013 Flagship BALTADAPT: BSR CCA Strategy

2013 BSR CCA Strategy ready

Establishment the BSR Climate Dialogue Platform

2014 CBSS Long Term Priorities: implementation the BSR CCA Strategy

HA 'Sustainable Development' SC/CBSS EGSD* Discussions, initiatining the round tables on CCA

2015 EUSBSR revision: HA 'Climate' elaborated, based on the BSR CCA Strategy & Action Plan recommendations

Identification topics of common interest supporting national CCA policy implementation

Initiation new joint projects &actions

* EGSD – expert group for Sustainable Development established within Council of the Baltic Sea States

Policy Area 'Hazards', EUSBSR

Implementation process (time) and complexity of the 'project – to policy loop' is well illustrated by Swedish Environmental Protection Agency acting as a coordinator for the EUSBSR Policy Area 'Hazards'. It was highlighted that it is important to see 'project – to policy loop' is a context of developments on the ground in regional and national, as well as macro-regional, EU and even international levels. Cross-sectorial links need to be considered. Some of the projects initiated within the 'project – to policy loop' were never implemented although thoroughly planed. The conclusion shows that 'project – to policy loop' has experimental nature and to implement the process relevant time for its implementation should be allocated.

Project – policy – project
Pharmaceuticals in the Baltic environment

* EEA-European Environment Agency
* PIE-Pharmaceuticals in the Environment strategy
* WFD-Water Framework Directive
* SAICM-Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
* UN 10YFP- UN Global Action for Sustainable Consumption and Production

FSP1*: Flagship project, Make the Baltic Sea Region Lead in Sustainable Management of Pharmaceuticals
FS2*: Flagship, BSR Pharmaceutical platform

Priority Area 1a Navigation, EUSDR

The activities of Priority Area 1a 'Navigation' (see chart below) showcases how the macro-regional body ('Steering Group') triggers the interaction between projects and policy and thereby works as a hub and interface between the different levels, ministries and implementing bodies. It also illustrates how the Interreg project "Newada" developed into a clearly macro-regional one – "Fairway Danube" – with a different funding source, the Connecting Europe Facility. The MRS here establishes a loop that ensures the consistency and coherence between the different levels, but also throughout different projects and programmes.
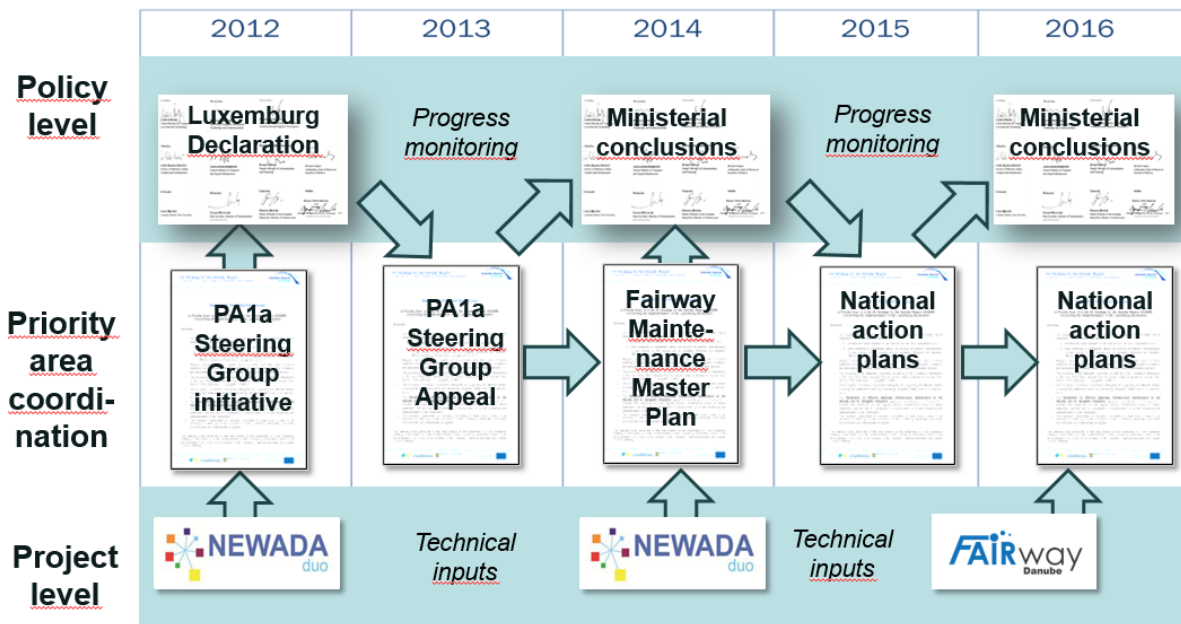
Open issues to be considered and followed up when designing a macro-regional process

- **Resources:** Working on the 'project-to-policy loop' requires time, appropriate human and funding resources. Due to these and transnational nature of the coordinators' work, allocating relevant human resources and finding appropriate funding is a challenge. In general, there is a lack of tailor-made funding that responds to the needs of the MRS.

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Engagement of relevant national representatives in the macro-regional processes is a crucial point for the success of the MRS, yet at the same time it is a challenge that macro-regional coordinators are facing.

- **Policy impact on national level:** Internal (national) coordination mechanisms established in the countries of the MRS differ significantly. There is a question if and what information from the steering/coordination group of the thematic area is further communicated in the home country. Roles and responsibilities of the focal points to the thematic steering/coordination groups are not well assumed. Constantly changing steering/coordination group members is another challenge.

- **Involvement of the Commission services:** There should be closer coordination with and more direct involvement of relevant Directorates-General of the European Commission in the implementation of the thematic priorities/policies/actions of the MRS. Outcomes of the macro-regional processes can be better used as an input to the EU level policy development.

- **Strategic aspect beyond projects:** The MRS are not necessarily perceived as integral part of institutional responsibilities as well as funding programmes, therefore, often outcome of the macro-regional framework is measured by number of implemented transnational projects. Instead the MRS should focus on developing and maintaining policy dialogue, change and impact.

- **Role of the thematic coordinators:** Thematic coordinators were appointed by the Member of the Commission for Regional and Urban Policy or countries of the macro-region (differs per MRS). Like the Strategies, this role does not have any end date. Thematic coordinators are employees of their respective national/regional administrations and represent – as coordinators – all participating states in an MRS. In some countries, their role has been included into government programmes. In its communication on MRS, the Commission has proposed a "periodic rotation of thematic coordinators"[3] in order to increase the commitment of line ministries within the thematic groups. Such a rotation should not jeopardise, but enhance the macro-regional process described in this document (spill-over effect). In the future, there could be a discussion on how to formalise the roles of thematic coordinators and thereby strengthen MRS' effectiveness.

- **Communication:** Throughout planning, implementing and monitoring macro-regional processes both internal and external communication have a significant role. This is

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[3] Report from the Commission on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, COM(2016) 805 final, 16.12.2016, p. 10

an integral part of the stakeholder engagement whereby macro-regional work can contribute towards the institutional memory by establishing consistency across policies and across multi-annual financial frameworks. Communicating progress made and concrete achievements help thematic the coordinator to raise awareness of his/her work and increase commitment to the MRS. Moreover, the communication of the achievement of MRS' processes highlights the results of regional policy (and other policies) and puts an emphasis on the needs, challenges and opportunities of intergovernmental cooperation for the sake of territorial, social and economic cohesion.