### Radboud University | Nijmegen School of Management

# THE URBAN DIMENSION IN EU MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES City networking and its contribution to macro-regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

Master thesis in European Spatial and Environmental Planning

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August 2018

# The urban dimension in macro-regional strategies

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Master thesis in European Spatial and Environmental Planning Final Version

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Cities are increasingly being recognised as both actors in and subjects to European policy making. They use city networks to share their knowledge and to be able to represent their interests with a united voice in the European policy making arena. The European Union macroregional strategies are a relatively new political project aiming at coordinating and strengthen transnational cooperation in specific geographical areas. They require the involvement of existing institutions and forms of cooperation, which include city networks as well, in order to realise their goals. However, the question occurs whether macro-regional strategies are able to activate cities as actors within their processes or if they remain dominated by nation states. This thesis wants to find out about how a city network in the Baltic Sea Region, the Union of the Baltic Cities, is contributing to the processes of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Reflecting on the general concepts of European Territorial Cooperation and macro-regional strategies, the thesis focuses on the specific situation of transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. As a supporting theoretical framework, the concepts of Europeanization and multi-level governance are used. The findings of the thesis are based on qualitative interviews with actors of the Union of the Baltic Cities and an analysis of policy documents.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my interviewees Mr. Grönholm, Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Mohr, Mr. Adamsen, Mr. Vārpiņš and the representatives of the UBC General Secretariat, who took their time to answer my questions despite their full schedules and made a major contribution to this research. I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Theo Soukos, who supported me in developing my own research approach and whose knowledge and commitment was most helpful whenever I needed advice. I can look back on writing this thesis as an overall positive experience and our pleasant cooperation certainly contributed to this.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

В7	Baltic Sea Islands Network					
BaltMet	Baltic Metropoles Network					
BSSSC	Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation					
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States					
CECICN	Conference of European Cross-border and Interregional City Networks					
CoR	Committee of the Regions					
DG REGIO	Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy					
ERDF	RDF European Regional Development Fund					
ESDP	European Spatial Development Perspective					
EU	European Union					
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region					
HA	Horizontal Action					
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission					
MLG	Multi-level Governance					
MRS	Macro-regional strategy					
PA	Policy Area					
SSC	Sustainable Cities Commission					
UBC	Union of the Baltic Cities					
VASAB	Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea					
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#### 1 Introduction

Transboundary cooperation in the field of spatial development in the European Union (EU) has many faces. Such cooperation across national borders may occur between national governments, regions, cities or non-governmental initiatives or organisations in various fields like transportation, economic and cultural development, environmental issues, migration and other issues. Even though some cooperation activities are of intergovernmental nature, the European Union is a key player when it comes to policy and programmes that aim to tackle problems of transnational scale.

The expansion of the European Union's competences and engagement over the last decades has also led to a growing role of cities, which often play a key role in implementing EU policy (European Parliament, 2017). Subsequently, the EU has made progress in articulating an *urban dimension* in its policies, which was followed in new instruments and programmes such as the Urban Agenda. (ibid.) Likewise, cities have formed transnational networks in order to exchange their knowledge but also to have a united voice within the EU policy making arena.

In the Baltic Sea region, cooperation across borders has a long tradition. On a municipal level, cities cooperate in the Baltic Sea Region through the city network *Union of the Baltic Cities* (UBC) which connects 78 Member Cities from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The UBC was founded in 1991 and operates through different commissions on several urban topics.

On a regional level, the Baltic Sea Region is connected via various intergovernmental organisations as well as the EU's transnational programme Interreg. With the introduction of the first *macro-regional* strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009, the EU has introduced a governance arrangement which has gained attention as a new tool for territorial cooperation. A macro-region is generally referred to as "an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges" (European Commission, 2009, p. 1). With macro-regional strategies the EU tries to give territorial cooperation an integrated framework within "a certain geographical area" to "address common challenges and to benefit from strengthened cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion" (European Commission, 2017c, p 83). Macro-regional strategies aim to coordinate existing forms of cooperation and funding in a more efficient way.

They do not introduce new funding, new legislation or new institutions. Hence, they rely on existing means for implementation. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016a)

City networks could possibly play an active role as an existing institution for the implementation of macro-regional strategies. In fact, scholars as well as policy makers have pointed out the importance of subnational actors in the context of macro-regional strategies (Gänzle, 2017b). However, it is questionable how much cities are aware of macro-regional processes and to what extent they are able to contribute to those. In the Baltic Sea Region, the UBC has stated its willingness to contribute to the EU macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (Union of the Baltic Cities [UBC], n.d.). But does the EUSBSR have an *urban dimension* which gives cities the possibility to participate in a regional EU strategy? And if so, what are the concrete effects of this macro-regional participation?

#### 1.1 Research aim and research questions

The aim of the research is to find out about the functioning of the city network Union of the Baltic Cities in providing an assessment of the experiences of city networking in the Baltic Sea Region within the context of macro-regional processes. More specifically, it wants to find out whether the Union of the Baltic cities is able to contribute to the processes of the EU macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. In doing so, the research aims to contribute to the academic discussion on macro-regional strategies by filling a research gap with its specific focus on the role of cities and city networking. The research also aims to reflect on the applicability of the theoretical concepts of multi-level governance and Europeanization on macro-regional strategies. The research is consequently guided by the following research question:

How is the *Union of the Baltic Cities* as a city network operating in the Baltic Sea Region contributing to the processes of the EUSBSR?

The research question can be divided in the following sub-questions:

How does the city network Union of the Baltic Cities work?

In answering this question, a general idea of the functioning of the UBC will be provided. This includes the organisational structure of the network, its general goals and means to achieve those.

# What are the interdependencies between the UBC and the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region?

Answering this research question should provide information about the interrelations in governance structures and policies between the UBC and the EUSBSR. By answering the question, the thesis wants to provide information on how, or if at all, the work in the network has changed through the introduction of the macro-regional strategy.

# To what extent does the UBC contribute to the implementation of policies and actions of the EUSBSR and what are potentials and restrictions?

This sub-question wants to critically reflect on the UBC's statement on contributing to the EUSBSR and indicate specific policies and actions that do so.

#### 1.2 Scientific and societal relevance

In order to justify the previous given research questions, it is necessary to make clear the scientific and societal relevance of the research. The scientific relevance of the master thesis results in its contribution to the existing theoretical and practical knowledge on forms of transnational cooperation in the European Union. It contributes to two currently emerging topics in scientific literature: the functioning of city networks as well as macro-regional strategies. A combination of those two spheres as a frame for research is rather novel, yet it builds already upon first attempts to look at the municipal level in macro-regions, as already done to a little extent, e.g. in the work of Gänzle and Kern (2016b), Gänzle (2017b) or Serguin and Jonenniemi (2017). As those authors do not cover the specific issue of city networking and its macro-regional implications in detail, the thesis can fill a gap in research, while still being embedded in a strong scientific context.

The societal relevance constitutes out of the fact that both city networks as well as macroregional strategies want to implement policies for more sustainable cities and regions which are likely to have implications on the citizens' living conditions in the Baltic Sea Area. The research aims to contribute to a better understanding of certain governance dynamics within \_\_\_\_\_

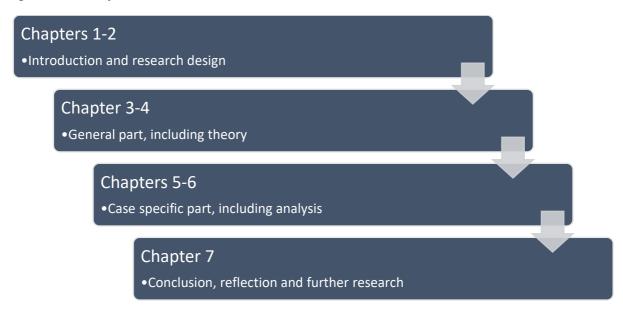
the cities and region. Its findings can be a useful source of information for policy makers engaged in the city network (e.g. participating cities or staff of the network) as well as policy makers involved in the MRS and may be considered in order to establish a more productive form of cooperation.

Ultimately, only a better understanding of the processes, relationships and beliefs of actors can result in a more effective policy making, which then has a societal impact. As the research reflects in a broad sense on the urban dimension in EU policy making in general, its relevance is not only limited to actors in the Baltic Sea Region. In addition to that, cities and city networks are involved or want to be involved in other macro-regional strategies as well. Although it is questionable if the findings are generalisable, as actor constellations and institutional settings differ in other macro-regions, the thesis may at least provide a hypothesis that could be tested or reflected on in other macro-regions.

#### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in seven chapters and divided in the introduction and research design, a more general part and a case specific part (see Figure 1). Finally, a conclusion will be made reflecting all the preceded parts of the thesis. First, the research design of the thesis will be presented, referring to the research strategy and the research methods as well as questions of validity and reliability. After that, a general examination of territorial cooperation in the European Union will be given in order to set the frame for the following chapters. In this chapter macro-regional strategies will be introduced and the urban dimension in European policy making will be presented. After that, the phenomenon of transnational city networks will be explained, including common themes and structures of city networks in Europe. In chapter four, the theoretical framework for the thesis will be presented, starting with multilevel governance and followed by the concept of Europeanization. The chapter also includes a conceptual framework which indicates the main concepts of the research and their relationship. The following chapter five introduces the specific case in the Baltic Sea Region. First, the history of cooperation in the area will be examined, followed by an explanation of the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The sixth chapter will present the Union of the Baltic Cities, including the analysis of the data that was generated during the thesis process. In the last chapter, a conclusion will be made out of this analysis, including reflections of theory and the research process as well as recommendations for further research.

Figure 1: Structure of the thesis



Source: Own illustration

#### 2 Research Design

In the following, the research design as the general plan for answering the research questions will be explained including the research strategy as well as the research methods of data collection and data analysis. Additionally, questions of validity and reliability of the research will be addressed.

#### 2.1 Research Strategy

The research can be defined as exploratory study since wants to discover "what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest" (Saunders, Lewis, & Tornhill, 2016, p. 174) and to clarify the understanding of an issue. The research strategy follows a qualitative approach because it is most appropriate to answer the exploratory research questions. As previously mentioned, the aim of the research is to understand the functioning of the UBC and its contribution to the EUSBSR. Although this happens within a very institutionalised framework it is ultimately depended on the actors engaging in the network. Thus, an understanding of the social reality of actors in the network is needed to identify how the network works itself. Qualitative research opens up the possibility to contribute to a better understanding of social reality and to reflect on constellation of actors and interpretative patterns (Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2007).

Quantitative research is dependent on high level of standardisation during the generation of data. This leads to e.g. pre-defined response options in questionnaires which cannot be flexibly adapted to individual cases. Therefore, quantitative research would be less feasible for capturing the individual social realities of participants in the city network and therefore could not capture the complexity of the network in general.

The research will be carried out as a case study. A case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident." (Yin, 2014, p. 2) A single case study is most feasible for drawing a holistic and realistic picture of the social reality and, according to Yin (2014, p. 14) it is most suitable in situations when "how" questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control. It tries to include dimensions that are relevant for the research object in the analysis and it often serves drawing

attention to an empirical phenomenon and explaining its internal logic (Lamnek & Krell, 2016). Due to limitations of time and length of the master thesis, a single case study is preferred over a multiple case study to be able to go more in depth in one case. As mentioned before, the EUSBSR is the oldest and best researched macro-regional strategy and literature suggests that territorial cooperation is more advanced in the Baltic Sea Region in comparison to other European regions (Gänzle & Kern 2016, p. 123). As the research question asks about a very specific aspect of macro-regional cooperation, the research can profit from the great foundation that exists already in the case of the EUSBSR. This is why the Baltic Sea Region was chosen as a case over the remaining three macro-regions in the EU.

To analyse the connection of city networking and the MRS, it is reasonable to research a city network that operates within a similar geographical area. Out of the two networks which operate in the Baltic Sea area, UBC and the Baltic Metropoles Network (BaltMet), the UBC was chosen because it is the bigger network and actively communicates that it wants to contribute to the EUSBSR, whereas the strategy is not mentioned in the communication of BalMet.

#### 2.2 Research methods, data collection and data analysis

The two main research methods used in the thesis are desk research and interviews. Desk research is the collection and analysis of mostly written material such as literature and documents. Literature and documents can 'set the scene' and identify the state of knowledge in a certain field as well as define the nature of the research question, but they can also generate data about the social world (Farthing, 2016, p. 136). Academic literature was able to give a general understanding of European Territorial Cooperation as well as the specific case in the Baltic Sea Region. Documents by the European Institutions such as reports and evaluations were an additional source of information. Academic literature also provided the theoretical basis of the thesis. Altogether, they build the foundation further research.

Documents such as the UBC Strategy 2016-2021 or the EUSBSR Action Plan were able to give in-depth information on the goals and instruments of both UBC and EUSBSR. Hence, they were of particular importance in order to look for common themes. The UBC position papers on the EUSBSR were an additional source of information and an indicator for the UBC taking influence on the design of the strategy. The documents were especially important in order to answer

the second sub-research question concerning the interdependencies between UBC and EUSBSR (see chapter 1.1).

The interview is the second and most important method for generating data. For understanding the functioning of a city network and its interference with the MRS the know-how of experts in the field is needed. Interviews were a valuable source of information and provided data that contributed to the answering of all three sub-research questions, especially the first question asking how the UBC works and the third question asking about the implementation of policies and actions. (see chapter 1.1). The interviews revealed in-depth information on specific processes in the UBC that was not accessible through other sources.

Interviews were held as expert interviews with individuals that participate in the UBC. In order to get the best overview over the whole network, only individuals in leading positions within the network were interviewed. This mostly includes the chairmen of the different commissions and members of the General Secretariat of the UBC network, as it can be assumed that they have a good overview over the activities in the different commissions, which is where the main work of the network is taking place. However, it should be kept in mind that the interviewees were not necessarily representative for all cities in the network, because as chairmen, their cities may be more involved than an average city in the UBC. Additionally, possible bias of individuals were always reflected in a comparison of the different answers as well as other sources such as documents.

All commissions of the network were contacted and the interviews cover 5 of the 7 commissions (see Table 1), as the remaining were not available for an interview. The interviews were anonymised wherever possible. As some of the results are based on specific activities of certain commissions, the mentioning of those commissions was necessary to ensure the clarity of the findings.

Table 1: Interview partners

Interview Partner	Position	Date
Björn Grönholm	Chairman Sustainable Cities Commission, Turku (Finland)	21.05.2018
Wolfgang Schmidt	Chairman Smart and Prosperous Cities Commission, Kiel (Germany)	24.05.2018
UBC General Secretariat		24.05.2018
Niels-Peter Mohr	Chairman Planning Cities Commission, Aarhus (Denmark)	30.05.2018
Carsten Adamsen	Chairman Youthful Cities Commission, Kolding (Denmark)	19.06.2018
Kaspars Vārpiņš	Chairman Safe Cities Commission, Liepāja (Latvia)	20.06.2018

The research questions ask about motivations as well as relations of participating cities which particularly be answered by the in-depth knowledge of experts working in participating cities.

The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews, as this method provides the right balance between having control about the conduct, but also enough freedom for asking follow-up questions or being open to unexpected changes in the interview process. The interview guideline (see appendix) was able to give the thematic framework of the study and listed all the relevant topics. Also, it ensured a better comparability of the data (Misoch, 2015). The interview guideline divided the interviews in two main parts, embedded by an introduction and epilogue. The first main part concerns the structure of the UBC and its way of working, while the second part tackles the policy that is addressed in the network and the interrelation with the EUSBSR.

Due to the wide geographic distribution of the interview partners, interviews were conducted via skype or telephone between the 21 May 2018 and the 20 June 2018. In the case of the General Secretariat of the UBC in Gdańsk, a written response to the interview question was sent. All interviews were conducted in English with the exception of one interview in German as the native language of both conversation partners. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The data generated through the interviews was analysed by a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis systematically analyses fixed communication (here, in form of interview transcripts) on the basis of theory and predefined rules. In the thesis this was done

in form of a systematic classification process of coding that identifies themes and patterns among different sources in order to insure the reliability of the analysis. The category system, although kept open and flexible for the different responses from interviewees is reflecting the theoretical considerations that have been made in this thesis. (Mayring, 2010)

#### 2.3 Validity and reliability of the research

Validity and reliability are factors for assessing and establishing the quality of research. Reliability describes the degree to which a study can be replicated. A replication of research as in quantitative research designs is certainly not possible in a qualitative research approach, as it follows an interpretivist paradigm and settings and circumstances of the initial study can change. However, Yin (2014) suggests that a certain degree of reliability can be ensured in qualitative research as well. Therefore, reliability of the research will be provided with detailed documentation of research procedures and revealing for instance the coding system of the interview analysis. An example of two codes is given in the appendix.<sup>1</sup>

Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions which are drawn from the research. While internal validity relates to the question whether the findings are watertight from a causal perspective, external validity is concerned with the generalisation of results. (Bryman, 2016) Internal validity is given by relying on the theoretical propositions that can be found in Europeanization and multi-level governance. Those offer already a theoretical orientation which guides the case study and helps to organise the analysis (Yin, 2014). Concerning external validity, opinions in research differ highly if case studies can provide generalisability or not, and whether this is a necessary criterion for research (Yin, 2014; Farthing, 2016). Indeed, it is not possible to empirically generalise findings of the UBC – EUSBSR relationship for all macroregional strategies. However, that does not mean that the findings of this case are useless for other cases as other criteria as transferability or comparability are given (Yin, 2014). As Schramm (1971) argues, case studies are able to "systematize evidence so as to suggest hypotheses for testing and, pending that, to provide a basis of fact and insight for possible application to decision making". Applying that to the thesis, it means that the outcomes of the research can provide a hypothesis, that could be tested in other macro-regional constellations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Further examples of the data analysis are only available on request in order to keep the anonymity of the interviewees.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

and then lead to external validity on the one hand and provide a ground for decision making in the concrete case of the EUSBSR/UBC on the other hand.

#### 3 TERRITORIAL COOPERATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In order to set the frame for the research, the following chapter will introduce concepts of territorial cooperation, including macro-regional strategies and city networks. Transnational cooperation, may it be of intergovernmental nature or supported by the European Union, exists to solve policy problems that nations could not tackle efficiently on their own. In fact, transnationality becomes an inevitable effect of globalisation that is reinforced by the European integration process as the EU today has a considerable influence over a majority of policy areas in its member states. (Dühr, Colomb, & Nadin, 2010) The reconfiguration and rescaling of social and economic relations – some of them created by the EU itself – require a joint response by all nation states, respectively their regions. The cooperation between nation states and their subnational entities in Europe apart from bilateral relations is mostly connected with EU cohesion policy. Since the early 1980s, the EU has witnessed a process of cross-national convergence, meaning that former periphery countries were catching up to the 'core-Europe', but a divergence within the countries on the other side which was characterised by the rising incomes of already well-situated regions. In order to react to these inter-regional disparities, the EU has made the principle of cohesion one of its key policies with the reform of the structural funds in 1989 and the formulation of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in 1999, an intergovernmental document by the ministers responsible for spatial planning with participation and financial support from the European Commission. (Dühr, et. al., 2010)

Cohesion policy aims to reduce the disparities between the regions in terms of economic competitiveness and growth, sustainable development and quality of life for its citizens. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 adds the objective of territorial cohesion to European Policy making, which puts emphasis on the territorial consequences of the interaction of EU policies in particular places. Territorial cohesion always has to cope with the field of tension between the spatial concentration of economic activity, which is economically favourable, on the one side and social cohesion on the other side. (Dühr et al., 2010)

The main financial basis for cohesion policy is the cohesion fund, the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The latter also co-finances cross-border and transnational cooperation projects, most importantly the Interreg programme, which is particularly tailored to the objective of territorial cohesion. The Interreg initiative was

originally introduced in the 1990 and as a reaction to the ESDP that was complemented by the strand Interreg IIC halfway through the programming period of 1994-1999. Up until today, Interreg (now officially embedded in the goal of European Territorial Cooperation) is the most important building block when it comes to transnational or cross-border cooperation in the EU. Inspired by previous bottom-up initiatives for such cooperation, Interreg intends to tackle issues of spatial development which cannot be solved by member states alone but require a joint action of other member states or regions as well. (Dühr et. al., 2010)

Interreg projects are partially funded by the ERDF, while the participating organisations are responsible for finding the national contribution. The recent programme Interreg V, which lasts from 2014 until 2020, has a commitment budget of 10.1 Billion Euro. (Interreg Europe, 2018) The programme consists of three different strands, cross-border (A), transnational (B) and interregional (C) cooperation. The cross-border cooperation is the biggest strand covering a contribution of 6.6 Billion Euro. It

"aims to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purpose of the overall harmonious development of the Union." (European Commission, 2018, "Interreg A – Cross-border cooperation")

The transnational cooperation, known as Interreg B, has a budget of 2.1 Billion Euro in the current programme period. It covers themes around innovation, environmental issues, accessibility and sustainable urban development and involves different regions from several countries. Interreg VB covers 15 cooperation programmes. (European Commission, 2018b) Notably, some of the Interreg B programme spaces have the same geographical coverage as macro-regional strategies. Lastly, Interreg C as the funding-wise smallest strand (with 500 Million Euro) works at the pan-European level and aims to build networks and develop good practices. Its programmes EUROPE, INTERACT, URBACT and ESPON concentrate on producing and exchanging knowledge throughout public authorities in the EU. (European Commission, 2018c)

The Lisbon strategy, the ESDP and the Interreg programme can all be seen as the attempts of the EU to shape the territorial development of its member states and can be viewed as precursors of macro-regional strategies. \_\_\_\_

#### 3.1 Macro-regional strategies

With the start of the first macro-regional strategy in the Baltic Sea Region in 2009, a new "tool of European integration and increased territorial cohesion" (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, & Sterling, 2009, p. 10) has been introduced in the European Union. It was followed so far by three other macro-regional strategies (MRS) in the Danube (2011), Adriatic-Ionian (2014) and Alpine (2015) regions. Hence, already a considerable part of the EU member states territory (and beyond) is covered by one or more MRS. By now, 19 EU member states and 8 non-EU countries are concerned with at least one MRS, representing a territory with over 340 million inhabitants (European Commission, 2017d). In other regions, like the North Sea region, the intergovernmental North Sea Commission has sought to draw inspiration from the MRS approach (Gänzle, 2017a).

As already citied in the introduction of this thesis, the European Commission defines a macroregion as "an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges" (European Commission, 2009, p. 1). All EU macro-regions have a common natural landscape or ecosystem such as the Baltic Sea, the Danube River or the Alps. However, macro-regions do not exist as such, they are, essentially like all regions, social constructions (Piattoni, 2016). The European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) considers the boundaries of macro-regions as flexible and the natural ecosystem is apparently not the only criterion for the definition of a macro-region. In fact, the boundaries more rely on the subject at hand and the geographical reach changes with the thematical focus. (Dühr, 2011) Furthermore, a common historical or cultural heritage often serves as a narrative or element of region building (Gänzle & Kern, 2016a). As Gänzle and Kern (2016a, p. 5) describe: "[A] macro-region refers to a meso-level bringing together a group of units that are at the same time part of (or related to) a more comprehensive entity." Although MRS are political concepts of the EU, EUmembership is not a necessary criterion for involvement. The external dimensions of the strategies differ among each other. For example, half of the eight participating countries in the Adriatic-Ionian Region are non-EU members and five of the fourteen countries of the Danube region are either accession or neighbourhood countries. The Baltic Sea Region in contrast has not officially included non-EU countries in the strategy, although cooperation is generally welcomed as well. Thus, macro-regional strategies can also become a political

instrument for accession countries to show their commitment for an EU-membership, although this may not necessarily be intended by the EU (Stocchiero, 2015, p. 171).

Macro-regions can be described as *soft spaces* that have *fuzzy boundaries*, meaning that they are political projects of the EU that challenge national and subnational territorial spaces. This does not mean that national or subnational territorial spaces are necessarily replaced. Soft spaces may also just occur throughout a limited time to "provide quick solutions by challenging existing scientific understandings or bureaucratic inertias" (Allmendinger, Haughton, Knieling, & Othengrafen, 2015, p. 12).

Besides all fuzziness, the process of region building also includes the producing of boundaries and forging of a successful 'brand' which will be used to project the strategy outside (Piattoni, 2016, p. 83). As soft spaces, MRS relate to a more pragmatic view on planning that claims to be more efficient because they overcome formal working patterns that are held to be slow and bureaucratic. They are not subject to a formal system of democratic elections and consequently claim their legitimacy out of the fact that democratically legitimated actors engage in them. (Allmendinger et al., 2015, p. 12) This legitimation can be questioned as there is no clear chain of delegation and accountability by legitimate representatives of national constituencies in a complex governance arrangement like a MRS. This is especially the case because the success of the strategy is linked to many non-democratically delegated actors and it is therefore impossible to hold the delegated actors accountable. (Piattoni, 2016) Therefore, a horizontal accountability among the different actors contributing to the success of the strategy is needed. Hence, macro-regional strategies are challenging the "legal reasoning grounded on a vision of the legal order as founded on the sovereign state." (ibid, p. 92)

With MRS, the EU aims to promote an integrated framework for cooperation within such regions in order to address common challenges in the field of social, economic and territorial cohesion. They build on elements of the EU cohesion policy and existing forms of territorial cooperation such as Interreg but they are also intertwined with intergovernmental integration activities which are dissociated from the European Union as such. Hence, they can be perceived as a "hybrid construction drawing on features of both intergovernmental and transnational cooperation" (Chilla, Gänzle, Sielker, & Stead, 2017, p. 128).

MRS aim to coordinate existing forms of cooperation and funding that have been established by EU programmes or on an intergovernmental basis in a more efficient way. Instead of being

single-focused they try to frame a 'big picture' resulting in a broad variety of objectives that reach from cultural cooperation over transportation to economic and environmental goals. The integration of different policy sectors in one single strategy is mainly the new element in MRS in comparison to previous cooperation programmes. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016a) As Chilla et al. (2017, pp. 127-128) mention:

"Macro-regional cooperation can be seen as an intermediary form of territorial cooperation combining strategic elements in drawing on pan-European strategies as well as aiming to implement EU-funded projects through a transnational approach."

MRS claim to be *bottom-up* as a key element of their approach is to include subnational authorities, civil society organisations or municipalities that act at the local level. Those were also consulted in stakeholder processes in the initial phases of the strategies, although Stochhiero (2015, p. 163) mentions that the European Commission still exerts its *soft power* in the role of an overall coordinator and that the central governments were the main actors in the creation of the macro-regions.

The governance structures of the existing four strategies differ, but they are built on the same principles which have been formulated by the European Commission. The participating countries should be able to create the capacity to effectively respond to specific issues without establishing new institutions, new legislation or new funding – the so-called *three-No's*. The three No's put emphasis on the endogenous force of macro-regional strategies: the aligning projects that are funded through EU structural funds to concrete macro-regional objectives. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016; Turşie, 2015) Despite the call for no new institutions Piattoni (2016, p. 88) mentions, macro-regional strategies "inevitably tend to institutionalise consultation patterns, decision-making procedures, administrative roles and behavioural expectations". The *three-No's* rule has been widely discussed and remains an obstacle to some stakeholders and governments, as some have expected that the strategies would soon be supplemented by financial, if not even legislative and institutional capacities (Gänzle, 2017a). It also leads to the interpretation of the declaration by some stakeholders as *three yes's*: Better alignment of funding, better coordination, new project ideas (European Economic and Social Committee, 2014; Turşie, 2015).

If macro-regional strategies manage to actually foster cooperation and are able to bring an added value is a matter of on-going discussions among academia and policy makers.

Unsurprisingly, the European Commission comes to a positive result in reflecting on the success of the MRS. It is argued that they can be a cost-efficient mechanism for improving the territorial cooperation (European Commission, 2017c). However, it is also mentioned, that the performance depends on the operating environment and developing phase. The European Commission report critically notices that while the MRS deliver results, those results are not sufficiently monitored. (ibid.) Böhme (2013) examines that MRS are able to bring together various sector policies to approach common challenges or potentials and that stakeholders developed new activities inspired by the MRS. However, he also mentions the complexity of MRS as a challenge, that could turn in just an additional layer of bureaucracy as well as the danger of losing focus for specific issues due to too general policy priorities. Other authors such as Chilla et al. (2017) state that MRS could have the potential to make a difference in more efficient and coherent territorial development across Europe, though this still remains to be verified. Several authors conclude that this potential is so far not exploited to its fullest (e.g. Interact Programme, 2017) and that a number of challenges for MRS persist, e.g. an unequal involvement of different national actors (Stead, 2014). The actual added value also may vary substantially from one macro-region to another considering that constellations of actors and institutional preconditions vary widely among the different strategies and newer strategies had so far less time to 'prove themselves'.

A critical argument by some authors is the similarity between macro-regional strategies and the transnational strand of European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg B) which often geographically overlaps with MRS and pursuits the same objectives. This might not only result in inefficiency but also in tensions between the European Commission and the central and sub-national governments in terms of prioritizing between the MRS and other existing structures such as Interreg, Euroregions or the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. (Stocchiero, 2015, p. 167)

While MRS are by definition a regional construction, the EU has also a direct and indirect impact on cities. This *urban dimension* in EU policy will be examined in the next chapter.

#### 3.2 The *urban dimension* in European policy

When European policy-makers started to debate on topics like urban poverty, social exclusion and deindustrialisation in the early 1990s, cities began to attract attention for the first time. Since then, one can observe a gradually increase in the presence of the urban dimension in European policies, mostly under the umbrella of cohesion policy. (Antalovsky, Dangschat, & Parkinson, 2005; Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016) From a legal perspective, the European Union does not have a formal competence in urban affairs. However, there are a number of EU sectoral policies which have an impact on cities, either because they are spatially defined to have a territorial impact such as transport policy, or because they are non-spatially defined but still have a strong territorial impact (e.g. Single Market; having an impact on urban economy, mobility, et cetera which has a spatial relevance for cities). Some policies may also specifically address urban planning practices, for example through Interreg programmes. (Dühr et al., 2010 on EU Spatial Planning, pp. 364-365) However, it has been argued that EU urban policy remains a patchwork of programmes, initiatives and funding opportunities whose impact on cities is not clearly transparent or understood completely (Antalovsky et al., 2005). A growing number of researchers, policymakers and observers have argued over the past years for an increased EU role in urban matters. In 2014, around three-quarters of the EU-28 population lived in urban areas (Eurostat, 2017). A common argument is that cities are drivers for the regional economies and that the administrative boundaries of city governments no longer match the economic realities. In fact, cities and regions become more and more intertwined, and it is argued that European policy should deal with both, cities and regions as well. (Antalovsky et al., 2005) A second, relating argument is that cities are the economic drivers of European competitiveness. Not only that more and more people live in cities in Europe, the key features of modern economies such as innovation, creativity and skills are primarily found in urban areas. Therefore, it is argued that the European Commission should support the development of cities in order to keep up the EU's competitiveness in a globalised world. However, these developments can lead to negative consequences such as social exclusion and decline in social cohesion, especially when benefits are not more widely distributed and only few cities turn out as 'winners'. Thus, cohesion policy becomes an important instrument for urban areas in order to tackle threats like political and social

instability. (Antalovsky et al., 2005; Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016)

Since 2000, a considerable share of EU structural funds has been invested in urban areas in order to cope with challenges of cities such as demographic development, social exclusion, migration, sustainability, et cetera. During the same time an implicit urban policy of the EU has evolved, which was first under the name Acquis Urban in 2003. (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016) More recently, the EU Urban Agenda was adopted during the informal meeting of EU ministers responsible for territorial cohesion and urban matters in June 2015 in Riga. It aims to integrate the urban dimension in policy design at all levels, from EU to local and to foster collaboration and coordination between the different Directorates-General of the European Commission. The Urban Agenda for the EU also strives to involve urban authorities in the design and implementation of policies. It will not create any new funding nor change any current legal structures or competences. (EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters, 2016) In that sense, the EU Urban Agenda follows a similar approach as the MRS. Nonetheless, the EU still has no formal competence when it comes to urban policy and both Acquis Urban and EU Urban Agenda reflect more a "common European methodology of intervention, a body of knowledge and examples of action" (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016, p. 2).

Especially in recent developments, one can see an increased urban dimension in the EU cohesion policy as some significant steps were taken to implement urban matters in the recent programming period (2014-2020). For example, each member state has to spend at least five per cent of its ERDF allocation on integrated urban development, whereas there was no legal obligation to do so in previous programming periods. That implies that a greater percentage of funds is administrated by local authorities. Additionally, 330 Million Euro will be invested in innovative actions in the field of sustainable urban development. Also, the EU introduced new instruments such as *Community-Led Local Development* which aims to supply a greater involvement of local stakeholders as well as *Integrated Territorial Investments* which are targeted place-based strategies that combine different streams of funding. (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016)

Nonetheless, Atkinson and Zimmermann still state that an *urban dimension* in EU policy "remains a rather fuzzy and ill-defined field of thinking and action" (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016, p. 12) and that the roles of cities and recognition of urban areas as a field of implementation of cohesion policy still remains limited. This is certainly also due to the fact

that the member states are the only actors in the funding distribution (European Parliament, 2014, p. 53).

This emerged recognition of cities and urban topics within the EU raises the question whether this goes along with more influence or visibility of cities as actors in the EU multi-level framework, or in the words of Schultze (2003) if cities are only "policy takers" or also "policy makers". Cities are able to gain access to the policy-making processes in the EU to a certain extent, either directly or through one of their associations or networks. Naturally, an association of cities provides more legitimacy as it represents a greater number of stakeholders. Cities are also represented in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) which is an official advisory body to European Parliament, the Commission and the Council of the EU. It can provide opinions on legislative and policy proposals.

While the European Commission is formally responsible for initiating legislation, cities offer their expertise and try to influence legislative proposals. In doing so, they act just like other interest groups in the European policy making process. (European Parliament, 2017) Despite those efforts, the actual impact on European policy remains fairly limited as influencing policy relies largely on informal strategies of persuasion and is usually limited to the initial phases of the policy cycle (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016; Schultze, 2003). Also, it is evident that not all cities in Europe are represented through the CoR or City Associations and that cities in Europe in general are extremely diverse, meaning that they have different tasks and degrees of autonomy in their member states (European Parliament, 2017). Additionally, there are remarkable differences to what extent cities engage with the European Union. Le Galès (2002, p. 129) states that

"there is no such thing as a Europe of regions and cities in the making; instead we have a 'variable geometry' Europe within which cities and regions sometimes become actors or systems of action. The EU is also being built from below, by social and political actors in regions and cities: constructing, resisting, fighting, and adapting to new rules, opportunities, and constraints."

In the same time of the growing influence of the EU on cities in the 1990s, cities began to cooperate in networks as one answer to these developments. The phenomenon of transnational city networks will be examined in the next sub-chapter.

#### 3.3 Transnational City Networks in Europe

Since the late 1980s, cities in Europe have increasingly been networking with other cities across national borders. Usually city networks in the EU share the following goals: interest representation, knowledge exchange, access to funding.

First, they represent the interests of their members at the European Union and serve as an information hub between local authorities and the EU level. In doing so, they adapt their organisational structure to the decision-making structures in the EU. For example, larger transnational city networks open up offices in Brussels in order to cooperate with EU institutions and trying to influence decision making. Second, they generate and exchange knowledge and induce a process of learning among their members. (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Atkinson & Rossignolo, 2010) This is usually done by exchange of ideas, experiences with certain common issues and good practices. In this process of exchange, they also create common cultural values through seminars and conferences, a shared internet presence, data bases, exchanges of staff, et cetera (Atkinson & Rossignolo, 2010). Third, city networks are often used to potentially access sources of community financing. As many cities have to deal with very constrained budgets, funding through the EU seems a promising opportunity. This is especially interesting for cities as it displays a way of circumventing the own national state. Although European funding opportunities for cities are fairly limited, they can offer a chance of experimentation and inclusion of European guidelines in ordinary activities. (Atkinson & Rossignolo, 2010) However, for the acquisition of such funding specific knowledge of how and when to apply is needed. Additionally, funding is often not provided to a single city but to a collaborative project group with members from different nation states. City networks provide an infrastructure which makes is considerably easier to apply and get access to funding. (Niederhafner, 2013)

According to Kern and Bulkeley (2009) transnational city networks have three defining characteristics. First, member cities are free to join and leave a network. In that they differ from some national networks which enrole cities with a certain size by default, such as the Italian association of local governments ANCI (Acuto & Rayner, 2016). Second, they are characterised as a form of self-governance as they are usually non-hierarchical, horizontal and polycentric. That means they have their own governance mechanisms to recruit new members, formulate their goals and achieve them through their member cities. And lastly, the decisions taken within the network are directly implemented by its members. The size of a

city usually plays a role in how far cities are affected by EU policies and respectively to what extent they are engaged in city networks. This is why larger cities often seek the necessity to move to international networks in order to influence EU decision-making processes or use funding opportunities. (Schultze 2003, p. 122) Also, it is likely that smaller cities do not have the administrational and organisational capacity to actively engage in networks.

One can distinguish between different types of city networks. Many networks have a certain thematic topic that they either want to promote in EU politics or exchange experiences about. While a large share of networks is climate- or sustainability-focused (e.g. Climate Alliance, Cities for Climate Protection), other networks deal with topics like resilience (100 resilient cities), transportation (CIVITAS) or health (European Healthy Cities Network). However, city networks are also often considered as a medium for connecting different policy sectors and arenas. This is why often bigger networks such as Eurocities have a more general and broader approach towards the policy they want to address.

Lastly, some networks concentrate on a specific geographical area, to tackle common problems and create a platform of exchange in a regional context. The Union of the Baltic Cities, which is subject to this thesis, is one example. Other areas such as the Alps (Alliance in the Alps) or Mediterranean (Medcities) have municipal networks as well.

As Acuto and Rayner (2016, p. 1157) mention city networks are more and more not only a city-to-city cooperation but

"are being constructed in partnership with actors other than municipal governments, such as the UN, the World Bank or the EU, and increasingly intertwined with the cross-sectional action of the private sector that in some cases is initiating such city networking efforts."

In that respect, the EU has also actively promoted the exchange of best practice in city networks under its patronage in small-scale programmes like URBAN and URBACT and other formally EU-independent networks have profited from EU cohesion policy financing (European Parliament 2014).

Cities join transnational networks because they see an advantage in the exchange of experience and better access to funding or in a direct link from the municipal to the European level. In order to do so, they have to overcome certain cultural barriers, such us different technological development levels or differences in institutional competencies, languages or

working methods. Also, they are facing political and administrative barriers such us inadequate specification of interests, inadequate motivation, insufficient stability of objectives or no adequate design of cooperation management. (Schulman & Kanninen, 2002) It depends very much both on the participating city as well as on the network how active a city participates in a network and to what extent it is able to overcome the before mentioned obstacles for cooperation. A membership in a larger network often might be more a symbolic act than actual engagement. (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009)

While it is widely accepted that city network can promote transnational learning and create advantages for participating cities, they also face some difficulties. Concerning their function as lobby organisations, city networks often still remain more in a position of critical observers than active policy makers. In addition to that, city networks often promote best practices as part of their knowledge exchange strategy. Often however, those best practices are developed within the network and it provides little guarantee of the quality, replicability and transferability of projects. Member cities are often keen to design best practices but there is less evidence that projects are actually taken up in a direct sense. Rather, they are used as sources of inspiration. (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009, pp. 320-321) Thus, city networks have the challenge to reconcile their wide-spanning nature to a specific local space with its own culture, details and character. According to Keiner and Kim (2006) networks bear the danger of overseeing the *present place*, meaning that planning is focused at the local level and in present time. (see also Myers, 2005) On the other hand, one can argue that "we should not assume that what is taken from the European Urban Networks is simply and directly translated into actions/practices" (Atkinson & Rossignolo, 2010, p. 207) but that general mantras as economic development or competitiveness and concepts like integrated urban planning are universal in the sense that every city focuses on those. In spite of a common vocabulary or common cultural values the relevant approaches always have to be translated into the different national and regional contexts. (Atkinson & Rossignolo, 2010)

To summarise the main points of chapter 3, one can say that Territorial Cooperation in the European Union has undergone a variety of changes on different levels. First, the introduction of the macro-regional strategies results from previous developments of steering the territorial development in the EU. In essence, MRS try to organise and streamline existing intergovernmental and EU cooperation activities in certain geographical regions. Second, cities are increasingly considered as subjects to European policy making and as actors in the

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EU policy making process. However, besides all efforts, it is argued that their role still remains limited. Transnational city networks can be seen as one attempt to cope with this increasing urban dimension in EU policy making. They act as platforms of interest representation, knowledge exchange and access to (EU) funding.

#### 4 THEORETICAL APPROACHES: CONCEPTUALISING EU GOVERNANCE

The theoretical approaches that will be introduced in this chapter will be explained in order to lay a foundation for the research process. Both theories, multi-level governance and Europeanization, which certainly have some overlap, can be useful to explain European policy making and its domestic impact in general and the engagement of cities in macro-regional strategies in specific.

#### 4.1 Multi-level Governance

Since the foundation of the European Community and with every step of its geographical widening and deepening in competence, e.g. the introduction of the common market or a common environmental policy, political scientists and international relations theorists have tried to theorise and explain how European integration and European policy making works. The question how nation states give up certain parts of their sovereignty to a supranational community forms the centre of the debate.

The so-called *grand theories* of integration have sought to explain the drivers and direction of European integration in terms of vertical (deepening of EU competences in certain fields), horizontal (integration of new policy areas) and geographical (territorial enlargement of the EU) dimensions. Essentially, theories of European integration can be broadly divided in the *neo-functionalist* and the *intergovernmentalist* approaches, which both dominated the discussion since the mid-1960s. (Dühr et al. 2010, pp. 94-97) The intergovernmentalist, or also *state-centric* approach, poses states as the ultimate decision makers, which transfer some limited authority to supranational organisations in order to achieve certain goals. The main direction of policy making remains in state control and every decision among the European Community reflects the lowest common denominator among the diverse national positions. (Hooghe & Marks, 2001)

In contrast, the *neo-functionalist* perspective argues that European integration has its own dynamic and that integration in one economic sector creates incentives for integration in other sectors as well. The close connection of different policy sectors leads to process of *functional spillover* and an increased economic integration will also lead to an increased political integration. (Dühr et al., 2010)

Both *grand theories* focus on the general European integration without explaining what happens 'day-to-day' in the political system of the EU and how institutions interact with different levels of governmental authorities in Europe. In order to grasp how the European Union works in practice, the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) can help to understand the pluralistic and dispersed policy making activities in the European Union. Thus, it is often referred to as a *post-ontological* concept, moving away from the broad ontological question of what drives European integration (Piattoni, 2010b). First developed in relation to the EU cohesion policy and Structural Funds, which are based on the partnership of different levels of authority, the concept has been extended to other policy fields as well. (Dühr et al., 2010) The debate in the field of cohesion policy circled especially around the question whether subnational authorities were willing and capable to contribute to policy making without the supervision of their central governments (Piattoni, 2010a).

In the understanding of MLG, the EU is a political system that has different layers or levels: a European (consisting of the EU institutions), a national, regional and local level. The interaction and intertwinement between actors across both different levels and governmental and non-governmental actors on the same level are influencing policy outcomes. The term *governance* although having an almost uncountable number of different definitions can be understood in a broad sense as a term that captures "the increasing fragmentation of public decision making and an increasing degree of interdependence between state and nonstate actors" (Bache, 2008, p. 21), which has replaced *government* dominated by sovereign states.

Thus, Marks (1993, p. 392) describes MLG in his pioneering article as

"a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional and local – as the result of a broad process / processes of institutional creation and decision reallocation that has pulled some previously centralised functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local/regional level".

That means decision making competences are no longer only exercised by national authorities but also by other actors on different levels of government. Also, the national level is no longer the only one that gives input to a supranational or EU decision making arena. Although nation states certainly still play an important role, the EU has also direct links and channels with other levels of government.

According to Piattoni (2010a), the phenomena of MLG are taking place at three different analytical spaces: the political mobilisation (politics), the policy-making (policy) and the institutional set-up of state structures (polity) within the European Union. The first dimension, MLG as politics, describes the mobilisation of other institutional and non-institutional actors, including subnational authorities and societies, apart from the member states to which the member states have to react. (Piattoni, 2009) Piattoni (2010b, p. 159) describes MLG therefore as the "simultaneous activation of governmental and non-governmental actors at various jurisdictional levels".

MLG can also be applied to policy-making arrangements within the European Union. This includes different governance approaches that try to explain how the EU is able to produce regulation or achieve their ends without the production of regulation and the "co-ordination and partnership at various stages of the policy-making process, including (re-)formulation and implementation" (Stephenson, 2013, p. 822). The two before mentioned analytical spaces, political mobilisation and policy-making are inherently connected to how the state is defined and organised. This polity dimension of MLG was famously theorised by Hooghe and Marks which have defined two ideal-types of MLG aim to theorise the new patterns and relations of government, previously organised in classic hierarchy. Their two types raise questions how MLG should be organised, whether jurisdictions should be designed around a specific community or level of government or around a certain policy problem. Type I MLG resembles a hierarchical and stable division of tasks and responsibilities between a limited number of levels of government. In analogy to a federal system, each level is clearly defined and has general-purpose jurisdictions over a given territory and exclusive membership. Type II MLG in contrast is composed of specialised jurisdictions around certain policy problems. That means type II MLG is organised across a large number of levels and has a very flexible design in contrast to the static governance architecture of MLG I. Usually Type II MLG is embedded in Type I MLG to varying degrees. (Hooghe & Marks, 2003)

Piattoni (2010a, p. 26) has summarised different conceptions of MLG to the following definition:

"the term 'multi-level governance' denotes a diverse set of arrangements, a panoply of systems of coordination and negotiation among formally independent but functionally interdependent entities that stand in complex relations to one another and that, through coordination and negotiation, keep redefining these relations."

To conclude, MLG has different dimensions of polity, policy and politics, which are all interdependent. It is not only a certain arrangement of decision-making structures, but also a more general process of transforming societal mobilisation. (Piattoni, 2009)

#### 4.2 Europeanization

#### **General concepts of Europeanization**

Similar to multi-level governance, the theoretical approach of Europeanization goes beyond the ontological stage of research that is reflected in the integration theory. Neither MLG nor Europeanization would exist without the European integration. While MLG puts emphasis on the division of power among different levels, the theory of Europeanization draws attention to interorganisational linkages and patterns of mutual adjustments or adaptation among nation states or institutions in general (Stephenson, 2013). It also aims to provide an explanation of the mobilisation of sub-national authorities within the multi-level system of the EU (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010). Broadly speaking, Europeanization describes the domestic impacts of the European integration process on EU member states but also on EU neighbour states (e.g. through the European Neighbourhood Policy). In doing so, it distinguishes itself from the grand theories of European integration as well, since it focuses primarily on the domestic institutions and policy making but not the political system of the EU as such. (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010)

Radaelli (2003) argues that it is important to define what Europeanization is not, in order to inhibit the conceptual stretching of the term. First, it should not be confused with political integration which tries to understand why countries pool their sovereignty, while Europeanization is concerned with what happens when EU institutions are in place and operate. Europeanization should also not be confused with convergence or harmonisation. Processes of Europeanization may encourage domestic policy change, but that does not mean "that all member states will opt for the same types of change" (Radaelli, 2003, p. 9). Both convergence and harmonisation can be the consequence of Europeanization processes, but they do not necessarily have to.

Since the 1990s, there have been several attempts and different foci to define and conceptualise Europeanization. Featherstone (2003) defines four broad categories for the use of the concept:

• a historical process, meaning the *export* of European authority and social norms through imperialistic endeavours by European countries

- a matter increasing transnationalism, meaning the diffusion of cultural norms, values, et cetera.
- a process of institutional adaption, meaning a domestic adaption of governmental and non-governmental institutions to the pressures that derive directly or indirectly from EU membership
- the adaption of policy and policy processes in the member states

In the context of this thesis, it is mostly the adaption of institutions and policy processes which is of importance, as these are important factors when it comes to the analysis of the macroregional strategy. A historical approach (e.g. in the sense of the Europeanization of the Ottoman Empire) is hardly feasible in the context of macro-regional strategies, while the concept of an increasing transnationalism is not limited to Europe and can also be explained through globalisation.

While there is no single definition or agreement on what Europeanization is, one can find common themes around different definitions. Two lines of thought that usually appear in Europeanization literature are so-called *top-down* and *bottom-up* approaches. (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010)

Top-down perspectives on Europeanization seek to explain the domestic reactions to pressures from the European Union. The terms of *downloading* or *taking* policy are often used as synonyms. A common narrative in top-down approaches assumes that there is a misfit between domestic procedures, policies or politics and their European-level counterparts. This misfit creates an adaptational pressure and the greater the misfit, the higher the pressure to adapt. But as Börzel and Risse (2003, p. 2) argue, the adaptational pressure itself does not create domestic change, rather it requires a second condition; necessary actors or institutions need to respond to this adaptational pressure and then induce change. Furthermore, they distinguish between policy misfits, meaning that European policies challenge national policy goals, regulatory standards and the instruments to achieve policy goals and institutional misfits, which challenge the domestic rules or procedures, e.g. challenging highly decentralised Member states with European rules that emphasise the power of the national level. (Börzel & Risse, 2003; see also Cowles, Risse, & Caporaso, 2001) There can be a variation

in the impact of Europeanization according to the degree in which the EU has developed competences and institutions in certain policy areas and consequently, adaptive pressures are more likely to have an impact and be complied with when they have a precise legal foundation, rather than being based on *soft law*. Approaches that only highlight the top-down aspects of Europeanization can be criticised as prejudging the EU as the only influence of domestic change while ignoring other domestic causes.

Bottom-up approaches to Europeanization involve pre-existing national structures, as well as sub-national levels of government into consideration, arguing that they take influence in *uploading* their preferences in policy making to the EU-level. Notably, the theoretical vocabulary to describe bottom-up Europeanization is far less strongly developed than in the top-down discussion.

As mentioned, the definitions of Europeanization vary across authors. Ladrech (1994, p. 70) for example, sees Europeanization as an incremental process of "reorientation of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making". Through that process, political and economic dynamics of the European Community become a part of the domestic politics of a nation state. As one of the first authors, Ladrech (1994) who analysed France as a case study, mentioned the importance of the pre-existing domestic structures and internal developments that have an impact on *external pressures* from the EU.

Cowles, Risse and Caporaso (2001, p. 3) define Europeanization as

"the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social institutions associated with political problem solving that formalizes interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules."

Although acknowledging that Europeanization persists of a two-way process, the authors clearly focus on the *downward causation* from the EU level to the domestic level. Their study focuses on two categories of the domestic level: policy structures, which include the political, legal and administrative structures that interpret and carry out policies and system-wide domestic structures, which is referred to the society, nation state or economy as a whole. (Cowles et al., 2001, p. 5)

Knill and Lehmkuhl's (1999) definition also uses a top-down approach by differentiating between three different mechanisms of Europeanization. These are *positive integration* which

is associated with changing the institutional models, *negative integration*, which implies a change of power structures and actor's positions following in an alteration of domestic opportunity structures and lastly *framing integration* which is associated with the change of beliefs and expectations of domestic actors.

Bomberg and Peterson (2000) critically observe the extended application of the Europeanization concept based on relatively narrow case studies of single nation states. In their definition they also strengthen the bottom-up perspective of the concept:

"Europeanization is a shorthand term for a complex process whereby national and subnational institutions, political actors, and citizens and [sic] adapt to, and seek to shape [emphasis added], the trajectory of European integration in general, and EU policies in particular." (Bomberg & Peterson, 2000, p. 7)

Börzel and Risse (2003) argue that there are two different mechanisms of institutional change, which work along the before mentioned mechanisms of top-down and bottom-up Europeanization. They argue that the process, which leads to changes in actors' preferences, can be conceptualised either from a rationalist institutionalist perspective or from a sociological institutionalist perspective. In the rationalist institutionalist perspective, actors are rational and goal-oriented. The misfit between European and domestic processes, policies and institutions leads to new opportunity structures and constraints. However, actors must be equipped with the capacities to make use of these new opportunity structures and to avoid the constraints in order to redistribute the power in their own domestic territory. Thus, according to the rationalist institutionalist perspective, Europeanization leads to domestic change through the empowerment of actors, which leads to a redistribution of resources in the domestic context.

In the sociological institutionalist perspective actors possess collective understandings which guide their behaviour. If there is a *deep misfit* of European norms, ideas, or practices and the domestic ones, actors might change their understandings through the processes of socialisation and learning. In this understanding of Europeanization certain *change agents* try to persuade actors to redefine their interests and identities. Another factor might be a political culture or other informal institutions, which lead to a consensus-building. Europeanization in the sociological institutionalist approach leads to domestic change through a process of socialisation and collective learning. (Börzel & Risse, 2003)

The Europeanization approach by Radaelli (2003) seems in particular interesting in the context of this thesis. He describes Europeanization as:

"Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies." (Radaelli, 2003, p. 5)

In contrast to other definitions Radaelli's approach to Europeanization is not specifically limited to EU laws or regulation but to EU public policy which can also include soft forms of governance which are not targeted towards the making of law. Radaelli also avoids the terms of downloading legislation and uploading domestic preferences. Contrary to many other scholars, he conceptualises Europeanization as a circular, rather than unidirectional process in which the EU is more an arena instead of an actor and in which actors can seize their opportunities (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010).

In his paper, Radaelli offers a useful framework that can guide empirical research. According to him, the study of Europeanization should be guided by the following questions: What is Europeanized? and to what extent?. The first question concerns the domains for Europeanization, which are summarised in Table 2. This could be domestic structures, which include the political and legal structures of a country, namely institutions, public administration, intergovernmental relations and the legal structure. It also covers structures of representation and cleavages, namely political parties, pressure groups and societal-cleavage structures. A second domain of Europeanization can be public policy. It can affect actors, policy problems, instruments and resources of public policy as well as a certain policy style, e.g. by making it less conflictual or more or less regulative. The last block of domains of Europeanization is the cognitive and normative dimension. Radaelli (2003) argues that the European Union can not only affect political structures but also values, norms and discourses as well as political legitimacy, identities and state traditions.

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#### Table 2: Domains of Europeanization

#### **Domains of Europeanization**

#### **Domestic Structures**

- 1. Political Structures
  - a. Institutions
  - b. Public Administration
  - c. Intergovernmental relations
  - d. Legal structure
- 2. Structures of representation and cleavages
  - a. Political parties
  - b. Pressure groups
  - c. Societal-cleavage structures

### **Public Policy**

- a. Actors
- b. Policy problems
- c. Style
- d. Instruments
- e. Resources

#### **Cognitive and normative structures**

- a. Discourse
- b. Norms and values
- c. Political legitimacy
- d. Identities
- e. State traditions
- f. Policy paradigms, frames and narratives

Source: Own illustration based on Radaelli 2003, p. 11

The second question to what extent the domains are Europeanized should be answered by an analysis of the direction of policy change. It can reach from retrenchment over inertia and absorption up to transformation of policy. In addition to the domains and direction of change of Europeanization, another step includes the identification of mechanisms of Europeanization. According to Radaelli (2003), there are two types of mechanisms, vertical and horizontal Europeanization. Vertical Europeanization is a process in which the EU defines a certain policy which the domestic level adapts to. Horizontal mechanisms of Europeanization by contrast function without legal pressure of compliance. Instead, they rely on change, which

is triggered by the market or by the diffusion of ideas and discourses. When speaking about markets, vertical mechanisms of Europeanization that frame the market can have horizontal implications. Horizontal Europeanization mechanisms can occur through minimalist directives or non-compulsory regulations, which do not create any pressure in terms of adaption but create an additional legitimacy to domestic reformers. But even without the appearance of minimal regulations, the EU is able to Europeanize through the open method of coordination. The open method of coordination is a *soft* or political policy instrument which is a

"decentralised but carefully coordinated process, involving the exchange of best practices, the use of benchmarking national and regional-level target-setting, periodic reporting, and multi-lateral surveillance – to achieve progress in politically sensitive areas." (Porte, 2002, p. 38)

Thus, the open method of coordination should assist member states to develop their own policies and aims to encourage convergence.

### **Urban Europeanization**

As already described in chapter 3.2 in detail, cities have been increasingly affected by the European Union and a lot of those dynamics can be conceptualised as processes of urban Europeanization. First, they are directly affected by European norms and European programming and funding opportunities, which require an adaption of their own policy or lead to imitation of cities which do so by changing their organisation in normative terms (Le Galès, 2002). Second, they participate in transnational networks and organisations for representing their interests on a European level and exchanging their knowledge. Schultze (2003) argues for example that the increasingly used *soft* modes of governance, e.g. through open method of coordination, opens up opportunity structures on the one side but also responds to an increasing demand for involvement in policy making on the other. Therefore, urban Europeanization features both top-down as well as bottom-up dynamics.

Although most of the Europeanization literature focuses on the national and regional level as spheres of Europeanization, some scholars have analysed the impact of the EU on sub-regional authorities as well. Marshall (2005) has argued, that it is critical to isolate the Europeanization of cities from other, more general forms of Europeanization processes and that previous models of Europeanization have to be modified in order to match the "specific opportunities"

and constraints which shape urban institutions" (Marshall, 2005, p. 670). Marshall (2005) argues that one can analyse four different varieties of Europeanization of cities that have a significant involvement with EU structural funds and institutions:

- Europeanization of local government (download)
- Europeanization of non-statutory actors which are involved in processes of urban governance (download)
- Europeanization of local regeneration partnerships and networks (download)
- Europeanization that engenders dissemination of local practices to the supranational level, and thus to other cities via transnational networks (upload and 'crossload')

John (2001, p. 72) sees Europeanization of cities as different, increasing levels of activity in their interaction with the EU. The different steps are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Steps of urban Europeanization

- A) Responding to EU directives and regulations
- B) Managing European information
- C) Communicating to the private sector through public
- D) Maximizing EU grants
- E) Facilitating economic regeneration
- F) Linking with other local organisations participating in the EU
- G) Participating in EU international networks and cooperation in joint projects
- H) Advising the EU on implementation issues
- I) Making the council's policies more EUropean

Own illustration based on John 2001, p. 72

While steps A-C indicate only minimal Europeanization, steps D-E include a financial oriented approach towards the EU-city relation. Steps F-G are going further with an approach to network on a European level, while cities become fully Europeanized through steps H and I. He also argues municipalities react differently to EU influence according to their national framework. While e.g. Germany, France and Spain would use the EU to bypass their central or

federal governments, municipalities in other countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands tend to have rather bureaucratic responses to European policy.

In order to analyse how cities are subject to Europeanization through macro-regional strategies, the attempts on urban Europeanization contribute to frame the issue but give only little guidance on how to use the concept for empirical research. Thus, the more general Europeanization approach of Radaelli (2003) will be used and modified for the application on the thesis subject.

To summarise the chapters 4.1 and 4.2, the theoretical concepts of MLG and Europeanization both go beyond the discussion of the grand theories and focus on how EU decision making works in practice. MLG highlights the distribution of decision making competences and interaction between different levels of government as well as non-governmental actors. It affects the political mobilisation, policy-making and the institutional set-up of state structures. Concepts of Europeanization aim to explain the domestic impact of the EU integration process. One can distinguish between top-down and bottom-up processes of Europeanization in which actors either adapt to EU formal or informal rules or try to shape these. It can also be conceptualised as a circular process in which top-down and bottom-up developments are affecting each other. Specific concepts on urban Europeanization focus on how cities become subject to Europeanization. They can be used to conceptualise developments which have been described as the urban dimension in EU policy in chapter 3.2.

### 4.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 3 in form of a concept map, indicating the main concepts of the research and the relationships among these. Following the research question, the central relationship of the research is the contribution of the UBC network to the processes of the EUSBSR. The EUSBSR itself is a joint endeavour of sub-national, national and supranational government authorities and therefore inherently multi-level. Thus, it fits in the framework of multi-level governance as an EU strategy which enable multiple actors on the EU, national, regional and local level to develop a relationship to each other.

The thesis will critically reflect on how actors in the EUSBSR are connected throughout different levels and whether they enable cities to engage and bring forward their interests. These theoretical considerations are especially connected to the second research question:

What are the interdependencies between the UBC and the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region?

In order to analyse the impact of the EUSBSR, which is essentially an EU strategy with great influence of the European Commission, the concept of Europeanization will be used as an analytical tool, following the suggestions for an empirical application of Europeanization by Radaelli (2003), because it incorporates a wholistic understanding of Europeanization which also reflects on *soft* policy instruments.

The basic assumption behind the application of the before mentioned theory is that cities participate in the UBC network which then affects EU policy through the representation of interests and is affected by the European Union through a change of policy problems, instruments and resources. The EUSBSR as an EU strategy may be an instrument to induce this change but also a channel for the city network to represent their interests.

Through involvement in processes of the macro-regional strategy, the city network as well as the cities themselves thus become Europeanized, which can be seen in an interdependencies of actors and the in the implementation of EUSBSR policies and actions through the UBC. However, the concept needs adaptations in order to match the case of the thesis, since it was originally designed for nation states and will be applied to a city network. The main focus on the work will be to identify *what* is Europeanized.

What Radaelli defines as the domestic structures, originally refers to the structure of a nation state. Translated into the context of the thesis, it is the political and organisational structure of the city network UBC with its own institutions and administration that will be examined. Therefore, the question analysis of domestic structures can be referred to the first research question *How does the city network Union of the Baltic Cities work?* 

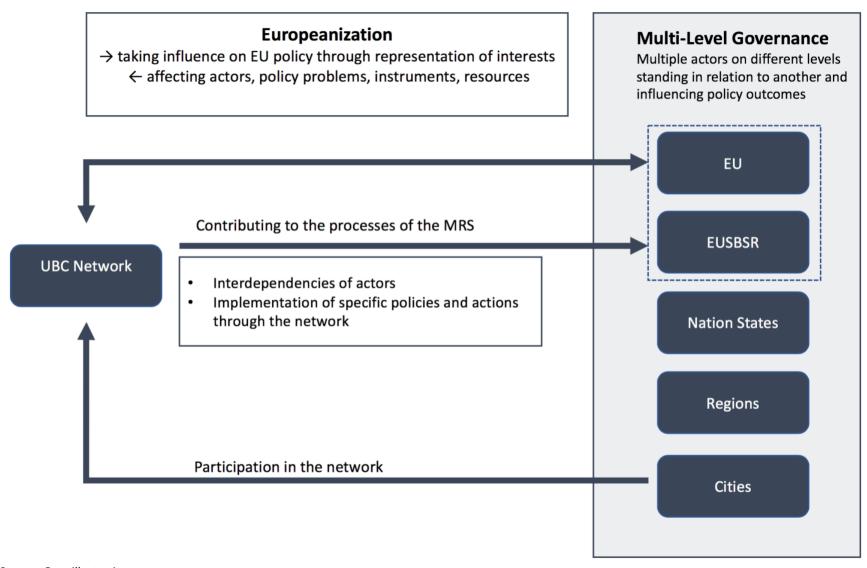
Secondly, the master thesis will research the Europeanization of policy of the UBC, especially policy problems, instruments and resources. This links to the third research question *To what extent does the UBC contribute to the implementation of policies and actions of the EUSBSR and what are potentials and restrictions?* 

The proposed directions of Europeanization by Radaelli are only helpful in the context of topdown Europeanization where one can measure an exact development towards or against European rules. In horizontal Europeanization processes, the directions of Europeanization

are not clearly measurable and will be therefore left out in the analysis. Lastly, the mechanisms of Europeanization will be put into consideration.

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Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



Source: Own illustration

# 5 COOPERATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The following chapter will introduce the specific case of the thesis, namely the transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. In this chapter it is elaborated how the in chapter 3 mentioned concepts of macro-regional strategies and city networking are applied in the Baltic Sea Area. It will first give a general outline of the history of cooperation in the area, since it has a considerable impact on current developments in the region.

### 5.1 The Baltic Sea Region as an area of cooperation since the 1990s

Today's cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region is deeply embedded in a long history of regional collaboration that dates back to the medieval Hanseatic era. The regional identity of the region is strongly linked to the Baltic Sea itself, as it forms a common catchment basin and on functional sea traffic connections (Schulman & Kanninen, 2002). Nowadays, the Baltic Sea Region is perceived as one of the most dynamic regions in Europe, even referred to as the "poster child for regional cooperation" (Chilla et al., 2017, p. 128), that has undergone a variety of changes since the end of the Cold War and which is covered by a large number of intergovernmental organisations and agreements. The fall of the Berlin Wall triggered extreme institutional changes in the region and led to a massive strengthening of a regional governing system, which was reduced to a minimum in the years of the East-West divide.

The development of the region's geopolitical landscape in the past 30 years is also inherently connected with the European Union. By the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain, only Germany and Denmark were EU members in the region. That changed with the accession of Finland and Sweden in 1995 and of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 2004. Consequently, the Baltic Sea virtually became an EU internal water, as Russia remains the only non-EU countries that borders the sea. Nonetheless, considerable differences between the countries still persists along the East-West line concerning economic development and unemployment. However, these differences have been continuously reduced, especially after the financial crisis in 2008 and with the new member states having a higher growth rate than the other group and as a result convergence is slowly increasing. (European Commission, 2017b)

The main subject of international governance in the Region was and still is the environmental protection of the Baltic Sea. One of the most import intergovernmental regimes in the region is the Helsinki Convention on the protection of the Baltic Sea which was first established in 1974 with the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) as its governing body. Due to the political situation during that time, there were still major limitations in cooperation and the nation states were the main actors in that area. After the end of the Cold War, a new convention with the same name was signed in 1992 and ratified in 2000 by all nine coastal countries in the Baltic Sea Area as well as the European Commission. (Lehti, 2009) As an intergovernmental commission, HELCOM works as a forum for environmental protection which develops common environmental objectives, coordinates and supervises the common efforts (Tynkkynen, 2013). During this era of upturn for intergovernmental associations, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was founded in 1992 by the German and Danish foreign ministers' initiative. As a political forum with yearly changing presidencies of the participating states it aims to build trust and security in the region and acts as a coordinator of regional actors in the area. (Gänzle, 2017b) The CBSS was a major actor in establishing the Baltic 21, a regional adoption of the Agenda 21 which was submitted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and is involved in politically and practically translating international agreements such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals or the Paris Climate Agreement into regional actions (CBSS, 2018). It has experiences in policy areas such as civil security, maritime economy and sustainable development and focuses on these issues in a rather pragmatic way, leaving out security-related 'high politics' as much as possible (Gänzle & Kern, 2016b). Besides CBSS and HELCOM being the most important intergovernmental actors in the region, a variety of other regional political forums or networks have appeared since the 1990s such as the Baltic Development Forum, Baltic Sea NGO Forum, Coalition Clean Baltic, Nordic Council of Ministers, Baltic Council of Ministers, just to name a few.

In addition to the efforts on a regional level, the Baltic Sea Region has also a comparatively strong sub-regional cooperation history. Cooperation between the before mentioned Hanseatic cities which were often based on city twinning relationships, were even able to survive the Cold War period (Gänzle, 2017b). As Serguin and Joenniemi (2017) state, the term of city twinning has increasingly shifted from a symbolic action of togetherness towards concrete functional cooperation. This general trend can be observed in the Baltic Sea Region

as well. Here again, cooperation was heavily pushed in the beginning of the 1990s. According to Serguin and Joenniemi (2017), twinning activities remained rather symbolic and did not go beyond the meeting of local leaders, public diplomatic appearances or the organisation of cultural events. Bussmann and Nickel (2018) argue however, that the city twinning activities were used to strengthen the power of local governments and to increase their capacities. Instances of twinning have been probed especially in border regions within the Baltic Sea Region including cities or town that share similar social, economic or political pattern and/or common historical links. Notably, they have become more and more Europe-oriented, due to the EU financial possibilities for cross-border cooperation. (Sergunin & Joenniemi, 2017) Up to date, the countries in the Baltic Sea Area are still among those with the largest numbers of city twinning cooperations worldwide (Bussmann & Nickel, 2018).

Besides the twinning activities cities also have been engaged in regional city networks. There exist two mayor city networks in the region. The Baltic Metropoles Network (BaltMet) was founded in 2002 and represents eleven capitals and metropolitan areas around the Baltic Sea Region. The network operates through initiating and coordinating projects between the member cities, particularly in the field of science, business and city administration. The Union of the Baltic Cities, which will be described more comprehensively in the course of this work was founded in 1992 and consists of roughly 80 members with a great variety in in size and population.

The European Union has also appeared as an additional actor to improve cooperation in the area, first, in supporting twinning activities and regional city networks and second, in developing strategies. For example, the European Commission published a *Union's approach towards the Baltic Sea Region* in 1994 and set up the Northern Dimension in 1999 as a regional strategy which established a partnership between the EU, Norway, Iceland and Russia, especially in questions of environmental protection, nuclear safety, energy and transport infrastructure and health care. The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership was perceived as one of the main achievements of the strategy, as it was able to attract attention and funds for environmental issues. However, the Environmental Partnership remains an exception and the Norther Dimension does not offer other individual financing, but only a platform for exchange between actors of the different countries. (Bolotnikova & Mezhevich, 2010) After the launch of the EUSBSR, the Northern Dimension strategy remained the preferred channel to cooperate with third countries (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016, p. 65).

In summary, one can state that several intergovernmental as well as sub-national cooperation activities have been established in the Baltic Sea Region since the 1990s. While the EU certainly had great impact on the region through the accessions of 1995 and 2004, its role was mainly limited as one actor between the nation states in intergovernmental partnerships such as HELCOM, more than a guiding coordinator of cooperation in the region. However, its influence has constantly grown over time, for example with the formulation of own strategic approaches for the region.

# 5.2 The macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Although transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region was relatively strong, or maybe for this very reason, the EU saw the need to become involved with its macro-regional strategy, which aims to coordinate those activities and tries to prohibit overlaps in responsibilities and a lack of coherence. In fact, the establishment of an EU strategy may lead to the conclusion that the Baltic Sea Region was not able to address the problems of the region in a sufficient way.

### History

The idea of a macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was first developed in the European Parliament in a Euro-Baltic Intergroup that consisted of Members of the European Parliament from member states of the Baltic Sea Region. In 2005, it was presented to the European Commission President, José Manuel Barroso. Initially, the concept was to chiefly improve the economic potential of the Baltic Sea Region and lobby for a consolidated EU pillar of Baltic Sea states in the Northern Dimension strategy. After a mandate by the European Council, the European Commission adopted the initiative, although as a more internal EU strategy. (Gänzle, 2017b) The intention from the Baltic Intergroup behind the strategy was to offset the consequences of years of division in the area, which EU accession only was not capable of solving. While neither Finland nor Germany were willing actively push forward the initiative for the strategy during their EU presidencies in 2006 and 2007, it was Sweden, which encouraged the European Council in 2007 to present the strategy in 2009 during its presidency. (Rostoks, 2010)

According to the Commission it was designed to serve as a new model of inspiration and to inspire other regions, which worked out to some extent, as three other macro-regional strategies with a similar organisational pattern followed. So far it can be said that the EUSBSR is certainly the most advanced strategy of all the existing four, when it comes to its implementation. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016b) Before the strategy was presented by the European Commission in July 2009 and adopted by the European Council in October of the same year, a large public consultation process took place in 2008 and 2009. During the consultation process the Commission tried to involve the largest possible number of stakeholders to foster democratic legitimacy of the strategy. Besides informing the general public, the consultation process was aimed at involving actors in the region in the drafting process of the strategy. In total, the European Commission received 109 written contributions from national, regional and sub-regional authorities, intergovernmental institutions, representatives from the private sector and individuals. (Rostoks, 2010)

Since then, policymakers and stakeholders that participate in the strategy come together every year in the so-called Annual Forum, held in a different country each time. The Annual Fora have changing themes every year and provide a platform for networking and discussion. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016b) As mentioned before in chapter 3.1 the EUSBSR was designed expected to support multi-actor and multi-level governance within the region, without creating new institutions, funds or laws.

#### **Governance structure**

As can be seen in Figure 4, the EUSBSR includes eight EU member states: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden Denmark and Germany (the Länder of Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Hamburg). In addition, the strategy is "welcoming cooperation with EU neighbouring countries (Russia, Iceland, Norway and Belarus)" (EUSBSR, 2018), nevertheless the EUSBSR remains a mostly EU internal strategy.

Figure 4: Participating states in the EUSBSR



Source: Interreg Baltic Sea Region (interreg-baltic.eu)

The EUSBSR came with an Action Plan that was designed to be regularly updated and to react to the experiences that have been made with the strategy. It sets the main objectives as well as concrete proposals for a set of measurable indicators and targets for each objective. It is the main document that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in the EUSBSR and sets the governance structure of the strategy. As mentioned in the Action Plan itself, "the Strategy cannot impose action to third parties. Instead, it rather indicates areas where cooperation is desirable and proposes platforms for discussion and cooperation." (European Commission, 2017a, p. 8) The initial Action Plan featured 4 Pillars and 15 so-called Policy Areas (PAs). After revisions of the initial Action Plan in 2015 the EUSBSR focuses now on three objectives of the strategy in order to narrow the strategy's focus. The objectives are Save the Sea, Connect the Region and Increase Prosperity. To achieve those objectives, 13 different Policy Areas have been identified as well as four Horizontal Actions (HAs) which are crosscutting different policy areas. As displayed in Table 3, each PA is organised by Policy Area Coordinators (respectively Horizontal Action Leaders) which are either member states or intergovernmental institutions such as the CBSS or HELCOM. The Policy Area Coordinators have a managerial role in the implementation of the EUSBSR and support the application of the EU structural policy in the macro-region. In addition to that, steering groups have been established within the policy areas which bring together other interested stakeholder from subnational authorities and non-governmental organisations in the region.

Table 3: EUSBSR Policy Areas and Coordinators

Policy Areas (PAs)	Coordinator(s)	
Objective 1: Save the Sea		
PA Bioeconomy – agriculture, forestry and fisheries	Finland, Lithuania, Sweden, Nordic Council of Ministers	
PA Hazards – reducing the use and impact of hazardous substances	Sweden	
PA Nutri – reducing nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels	Finland, Poland	
PA Safe – to become a leading region in maritime safety and security	Denmark, Finland	
PA Secure – protection from land-based emergencies, accidents and cross-border crime	Sweden, Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)	
PA Ship – becoming a model region for cleaning shipping	Denmark	
Objective 2: Connect the region		

BEMIP (Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan), PA Energy – ction plan for competitive, secure and sustainable energy Latvia, Lithuania PA Transport - Improving internal and external Lithuania, Sweden transport links Objective 3: Increase Prosperity Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Poland PA Culture - culture & creative sectors PA Education – education, research and employability Hamburg (Germany), Norden Association PA Health - improving and promoting people's Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and health, including its social aspects Social Well-being PA Innovation – exploiting the full potential of the Poland, Estonia, Nordic Council of Ministers region in research, innovation and SME PA Tourism - reinforcing cohesiveness of the macro-Mecklenburg-Vorpommern region in through tourism **Horizontal Actions (HAs)** Ha Capacity – capacity building and involvement Baltic Sea NGO Network, Union of the Baltic Cities, Swedish Institute **HA Climate CBSS** City of Turku (Finland), CBSS HA Neighbours - working with neighbouring countries and regions VASAB, HELCOM HA Spatial Planning – encourage the use of maritime and land-based spatial planning in all member states, develop a common approach for cross-border cooperation

Source: Gänzle & Kern 2016b, p. 127f., updated on state July 2018

The different Policy Areas have been assigned so-called flagship projects which are supposed to demonstrate the progress of the strategy and serve as pilot-examples for action in a certain policy field, e.g. it may develop new solutions, new methodology or new forms of cooperation. Flagship projects need to have a high macro-regional dimension and must be related to the implementation of the actions of one or more PAs or HAs. For becoming a flagship project, the project must first be presented to the PA Coordinators or HA Leaders that it may concern. If the project is supported, these consult the main stakeholders and then propose the recommendation to DG REGIO. DG REGIO then considers the proposal and makes a proposal to the national coordinators which need to agree for declaring the project as a flagship project. (European Commission, 2017a)

As overall assisting coordinators, the EU member states also have a network of National Coordinators, which assist and coordinate the strategy at the national level. In addition to the

member states' involvement the European Commission still has a strong role in the strategy as well in leading the coordination of the overall coordination of the Action Plan, preparing strategy reviews and monitoring the implementation of the strategy. Also, participating states are linked in a High-Level Group, which consists of all other EU member states, in order to assist the Commission in facilitating the implementation of the strategy. It is supposed to be consulted about amendments of the strategy and Action Plan. The European Commission has a significant role in the governance structure as well. Together with the participating member states, it has become a driving force behind the policy process, e.g. in preparing strategy reviews, monitoring its implementation and leading the overall coordination of the Action Plan. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016b) An overview of the different actors and roles within the EUSBSR is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Actors and responsibilities in the EUSBSR

Actors in the EUSBSR	Role and responsibility
European Commission	<ul> <li>Leading role in strategic coordination</li> <li>Promote and facilitate involvement of stakeholders</li> <li>Facilitate implementation of the EUSBSR in cooperation with member states</li> <li>Evaluate and report on the progress made</li> <li>Review and update Action Plan when necessary</li> </ul>
High Level Group	Give advice to the European Commission on the EUSBSR and its implementation
Member states	<ul> <li>Ensure continuous political commitment</li> <li>Ensure that the EUSBSR is respected in national and regional strategic planning</li> <li>Support National Contact Point and PACs and HA Leaders in implementation of the EUSBSR</li> </ul>
National Contact Point	<ul> <li>Seek political support for and contribute political commitment to the implementation of the EUSBSR in the home country</li> <li>Ensure overall coordination and support in the home country</li> <li>Formulate and communicate national positions on the EUSBSR</li> <li>Monitor on request of the European Commission on the coordination activities taken in the implementation of the EUSBSR</li> </ul>

Policy Area Coordinator and Horizontal Action Leader	Facilitate involvement of and cooperation with relevant stakeholders from the entire
	macro-region

Source: based on European Commission (2017a)

The EUSBSR is financially neutral as it relies on more effective use of existing funding instruments. The European Commission identifies the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Fisheries Fund as the key funding sources of the strategy. However, actions and projects under the strategy framework can also be funded by other financial sources, such as the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme as well as national, regional or private sources. (European Commission, 2017a)

### The impact of the EUSBSR

The overall objective of the EUSBSR is to increase and coordinate cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region through the involvement of different levels of government from sub-national to supranational (Gänzle, 2017b). While the European Commission and the member states still have a major role in the formulation of the strategy (Stocchiero, 2015), sub-national authorities and local stakeholders have a strong influence on the implementation. However, according to Gänzle (2017b, p. 411) they may also formulise political mobilisation which subsequently the member states react to.

The EUSBSR is not only a platform for cooperation of nation states, but manages to mobilise regional non-governmental actors in the strategy. Although there were no new institutions created, it made an impact on the existing institutions in the region and "stimulates new forms of institution interplay" (Gänzle & Kern, 2016b, p. 129). Thus, regional organisations in the region were able to embed their activities in the overall framework of the strategy. In that way, the EU is able to profit from the regional expertise and experience of these organisations, while the organisations are supposed to benefit from synergy effects and better co-ordination with other organisations through the active use of communication channels. (Gänzle & Kern, 2016b)

The CBSS, for example manages together with the Nordic Council of Ministers the PA *Sustainable Development and Bio-energy*. As Gänzle (2017b) reports, the 'twinning' of those two institutions has led to a better interinstitutional coordination and an arranged division of

tasks. Also, the EUSBSR provided the opportunity for the CBSS to apply for project funding. In a similar manner, HELCOM is co-leading the HA *Spatial Planning* together with the intergovernmental cooperation Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB). In addition, it also participates in several Steering Groups of Policy Areas related to environmental issues (e.g. PA Natural Zones and Biodiversity), often providing a scientific and technical framework such as indicators and targets, since HELCOM and the EUSBSR share the same environmental objectives. (European Commission, 2017a)

On the other hand, the EUSBSR is used to improve the existing EU legislation, without creating new one. For example, the EU Marine Strategy Framework has been built on the experience of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by HELCOM. As the latter is solely politically binding, the EU is able to transform the regional regulations into binding law. Moreover, the European Commission has gained influence trough the EUSBSR in intergovernmental organisations such as HELCOM and CBSS, even though it has been a member of both before the appearance of the MRS. (Gänzle, 2017b) In a study carried out on behalf of the European Commission, participating stakeholders agree that the EUSBSR has converged actors across different sectors and countries and types (private and public). Also, almost all participants either strongly agree or somewhat agree, that the EUSBSR is continuing on from previous cooperation and building on existing transnational networks. (European Commission, 2017b) MRS are also supposed to create new opportunities for engagement of civil society and subnational authorities. As Gänzle (2017b, p. 414) states

"If, for example, subnational authorities establish transnational networks, they have the potential to develop into constitutive elements of macro-regions",

and that city networks like the Union of the Baltic Cities

"can be expected to trigger a positive impact on the implementation of the EUSBSR".

Whether this is really the case remains to be verified in the thesis and will be subject to chapter 6.3. Gänzle and Kern (2016b) however also mention, that subnational authorities only rarely act in the function of Policy Area Coordinators and also very rarely act as members of steering groups. They come to the view that there are persisting shortcoming when it comes to the integration of local and regional authorities in order to implement the EUSBSR. A notable exception is the City of Turku, which acts as a Coordinator of the Horizontal Action *Neighbours*. This development can be traced back to the so-called *Turku Process*, which was

collaboratively initiated by the City of Turku and the Regional Council of Southwest Finland in 2010. It primarily aims to increase cooperation activities with Northwest Russian partners in the Baltic Sea Region. Today it is organised by the City of St. Petersburg, the City of Hamburg and the City of Turku, which share a common secretariat at the Centrum Balticum Foundation in Turku.

The cooperation with non-member states, especially the Russian Federation is also an important theme within the EUSBSR. Although Russia launched its own Northwest Strategy and perceives the EUSBSR as an EU internal strategy, one can find several common actions and initiatives for cooperation within similar policy fields. It appears like Russia prefers to participate on a bilateral or multilateral basis through institutions such as the Northern Dimension, the CBSS or HELCOM (Makarychec & Serguin, 2017). The situation has certainly become more difficult after the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 which remained a contradictory relationship between the EU and Russia followed by growing distrust and mutual sanctions, which also effect e.g. environmental cooperation. The effects could also be seen in the Baltic region, e.g. in the cancelling of the summer summit of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in Turku for the first time in 22 years, or the disruption of the Russian participation in the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme. (Kosov & Gribanova, 2016; Gänzle, 2017a) On the other hand, there appears to be an acknowledgement of both parties for a need for cooperation development and a sustainable development in the region. During the annual EUSBSR forum in 2016, the former prime minister and speaker of the parliament of Finland Paavo Lipponen said:

"In these times of tensions between Russia and the West, we need to maintain pragmatic cooperation, on a win-win basis, in matters where common interests transcend conflict" (UBC, 2016, paragraph 4)

### 6 THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE EUSBSR AND UBC

The following chapter will present the case of the UBC and analyse the data that was generated during the research process. It will first present the findings and then contextualise them in respect to the theoretical approaches described in chapter 4. In order to answer the main research question *How is the Union of the Baltic Cities as a city network operating in the Baltic Sea Region contributing to the processes of the EUSBSR?* the analysis of the interviews and documents is necessary. Results from the interviews will be presented through summaries as well as direct quotes whenever appropriate.<sup>2</sup> The sub-chapters are oriented towards the three sub research questions formulated in chapter 1.1 and each sub-chapter will also provide an answer to the respective sub-question. In the last sub-chapter of this section, reflection back to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4 will be made.

# 6.1 The UBC's way of working

The analysis on how the UBC works as a city network operating in the Baltic Sea Region is mostly based on the conducted interviews except for the general organisational structure of the network, which can also be gathered from UBC documents and its online presence. In order to understand how the UBC works, the sub-chapter reveals information about how the UBC is generally organised, what is seen as the main purpose of the network and why cities participate in it. It mainly elaborates on how cities participate in the network. As this differs in the various commissions of the UBC, different perspectives are presented. Lastly, recent developments in the UBC as well as challenges of the network are presented in this sub-chapter.

### **Organisational structure**

The Union of the Baltic Cities with 78 cities involved is the leading network of municipalities in the Baltic Sea Region with member cities from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Denmark and Germany (see Figure 5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The interviews have been anonymised and assigned with IDs whenever it was possible. Further information on interview partners is available upon request.

Member Cities of the UBC 16 15 14 14 12 12 11 10 8 6 4 4 4 3 0 Denmark Estonia Finland Germany Latvia Lithuania Poland Russia Sweden

Figure 5: Member cities of the UBC by states

Source: Own figure based on UBC, 2018

It was founded by 32 cities in 1991 on the initiative of the mayors of Gdańsk (Poland) and Kalmar (Sweden). The city of Gdańsk is also the location for the secretariat of the network. The UBC is a voluntary city network with the aim of mobilising shared potentials of cities in the region and promote knowledge exchange and that aims to "act on behalf of its member cities in common matters towards regional, national European and international bodies." (UBC, 2017b, p. 5)

Its member cities vary from large metropoles like St. Petersburg in Russia with more than 5 million inhabitants to small cities like Hiiumaa in Estonia with less than 10.000 inhabitants. The network often includes the largest or capital cities in their countries. Thus, accession of cities is not motivated by a certain size or characteristic, but by a sense of belonging to the Baltic Sea Region (Kern & Loffelsend, 2004). The network is financed by a membership fee, which gradually increases from 600 Euro (less than 10 000 inhabitants) up to a maximum of 7250 Euro for cities with more than 500.000 inhabitants. The accumulated membership fees for the period 2018-2019 are 247.150 Euro. (UBC, 2017a) Until 2017, the member cities of the ex-Soviet countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia) had a discount of 30% for their membership fees (UBC, n.d. a).

Its core organisation consists of a Presidium, which is elected by the General Conference for a two-year period, an Executive Board, which consists of one member city representative from

each country and a secretariat which coordinates the daily work and activities of the network. The UBC works through seven commission which are circled around different topics that concern the member cities. The commissions are:

- Cultural Cities
- Inclusive and Healthy Cities
- Planning Cities
- Safe Cities
- Smart and Prospering Cities
- Sustainable Cities
- and Youthful Cities.

In addition to that, a working group on gender equality works on strengthen a gender equality in all the different commissions and a communication network which aims to improve the communication between the member cities.

As guiding documents, the UBC has elaborated strategies, which are adopted at the general conferences, lately with a time frame of five years. In its current strategic framework for 2016-2021, the UBC has formulated four main goals:

- Promote cooperation and exchange of experiences between cities in the Baltic Sea
   Region
- Promote cities as drivers for smart, sustainable, green and resource-efficient growth
- Advance cities as inclusive, diverse, creative, democratic and safe hubs, where active citizenship, gender equality and participatory policy making are promoted
- Advocate for common interests of cities and their citizens and act on their behalf and further the interest of the Baltic Sea Region. (UBC, n.d. b, p. 1)

In the following it is described how the UBC works to achieve to those goals. Interviews with chairmen of different commissions revealed that the network is rather diverse in its way of working. This is certainly due to the great variety of topics that are approached in the network and to the different people that are involved. For example, in the Safe City Commission civil servants of fire departments, municipal polices and security experts come together, while the Smart and Prospering Cities Commission consists of experts from the local business development agencies but also members from universities and other stakeholders. Respectively the Planning Cities Commission brings urban planners together while the

Youthful Cities Commission consists of municipal employees, youth workers and teachers but also youth participants from municipal youth parliaments. Hence, every commission has its own structure, challenges and ways of working. Nonetheless, there are some clear commonalities visible.

### Purpose of the network and cities' motivation in joining

goals by the UBC.

All interviewees saw a similar purpose of the network as well as similar benefits for the cities to participate in. As the reason for networking, two main aspects stood out. First, all interviewees clearly named the aspect of knowledge exchange and capacity building. The network is able to facilitate a platform for exchanging experiences in the different thematic areas, so cities can learn from good practices but also from the mistakes of others in order to avoid them in the future. Secondly, it is able to support the integration of the Baltic Sea Region and to strengthen the cities in this work in order to become economically, socially and ecologically more balanced and sustainable. The integration of the Region is still perceived as a large challenge and also goes along with "being interested in what our neighbours [are] doing" and "making a common culture with [them]" (Interview #3), as one interviewee stated. Reflecting on the purposes of city networking in Europe as mentioned in chapter 3.3, one can state that the aspect of knowledge exchange clearly stood out as a reason for networking. One main aspect of city networking in general, namely the interest representation was not as

Cities join the network, because they can find a platform for exchanging and finding information and to be alert of the new developments in the region or the EU, which is more efficient than searching for contacts and information on their own. One interviewee stated, that the network also enables the city to be more visible on an international scale for certain target groups, such as employees, students, companies and investors as well as tourists. (Interview #4) Also, it serves as a platform to find common partners for projects. However, joining or staying in the network might as well happen for political reasons only (e.g. creating a cosmopolitan city image), rather than for a genuine interest in using it as a platform for transnational cooperation. Since member fees are relatively low, inactive cities can afford to officially be in the network without being engaged in it. (Interview #3) This attitude stands of

present as a purpose of the network, even though it is mentioned as one of the four main

course in contrast to the general purpose of the network and transnational cooperation in general. However, the UBC works on a completely voluntary basis and cannot force cities to participate. It also has a certain interest in keeping as many cities as members as possible in order to claim to be a voice of the cities and to ensure a certain relevance in the region. Nevertheless, one can state that if cities only join or stay in the network only for political reasons, they obviously gain no real added value from the networking activities in the UBC.

### Way of working

Cities participate in the different workshops or meetings of the thematic commissions as well as in the General Conference, which not only covers internal matters but also workshops and panels devoted to different issues. Cities can also share their experiences through an email bulletin which informs about the network's activities and external projects or conferences. While the general course of the network is determined by the Presidium and the Executive Board, the day-to-day work is carried out in the commissions, also described as the 'backbone' of the whole network. The commissions are equipped with a relatively high degree of freedom as every commission organises its own activities and projects. While some actors in the network may welcome this freedom, one interviewee criticised that the UBC has not developed temporary thematic foci that ensure a certain degree of stringency throughout the whole organisation. (Interview #4)) The general secretary takes care of the communication with member cities and other organisations, e.g. through the *UBC bulletin* as well as other communication activities, the administration of the institution, the production and distribution of reports and documents, the management of finances and the organisation of UBC events and meetings.

There are obvious thematic differences in the commissions and the way the commissions are organised and operate differs considerably as well. Within the seven commissions the Sustainable Cities Commission (SSC) has certainly a special role, as it is the only commission that is financed from outside sources by the city of Turku. It consequently has a working capacity which exceeds the other commissions by far. While in all the other commissions the work for UBC is carried out by only one or a few individuals besides their everyday work as civil servants, the SSC has a staff of 22 employees that only work for the commission. As a result, the SSC is by far the most active commission in the network and the only one that has

enough work force to be involved in around 15 EU projects in addition to organising events that all cities in the network can take part in. It also has a bigger organisational structure compared to the other commissions, almost as a network within the network, with three cochair persons that stand in regular contact with the head of secretariat and an advisory board with at least one member per country. The SSC is author of the UBC Sustainability Action Programme which acts as a guiding document on sustainability issues for the whole network. Other commissions, such as the Smart and Prospering Commission, the Safe Cities Commission as well as the Planning Cities Commission are only scarcely or not at all involved in EU projects but mainly operate through workshops, which are held about twice a year and which are open to all interested cities within the network. Workshops are usually hosted by a city that participates in the commission and concentrate on one specific issue, for example digitalisation in cities in case of the Smart and Prospering Cities Commission. In the Planning Cities Commission workshops usually concentrate on a particular issue of the host city that might occur in a similar manner in the participating cities as well. While the participating cities can profit from the exchange, the host city is usually left with the results of the workshop that include recommendation on local issues. Often there is a core of specific cities that are interested in the commission activities, although workshops are generally open for everyone. This situation can be seen critically in respect to the general idea of networking, because a limited number of core cities that participate may inhibit the exchange of new ideas and the overcoming of divergences.

For example, the Safe Cities Commission usually has around 30 cities actively participating in its activities, the Planning Cities Commission hosts workshops with about 50 participants, the Youthful Cities Commission with around 40, with around 11 cities that are constantly active in the commission and the remaining depending on the issue that is being discussed in the commission. Thus, being active in the UBC as a city does not mean to be active in all of the different commissions.

The involvement depends on the specific interests of a city and in which activities it sees a benefit in participation, which usually covers only a limited policy field. As a result, one can see differences in the levels of activity. The different involvement is also a result of varying capacities in the cities. First, small cities often do not have the personnel capacity to be involved in activities and second, financial constraints hinder cities to participate as well. (Interviews #4 & #3) Whereas the East European cities were subsidised for several years, those

cities now have difficulties to afford the expenses of field trips to other countries. In that respect one can say that the divergence the network is trying to overcome, is hindering networking activities in the first place.

While the different commissions were relatively isolated in the work in the past years, multiple interviewees stated that there are growing efforts to increase the cooperation between the different commissions. Here, there is certainly room for improvement in order to achieve the goals of the network and to increase contact between different cities that usually only interact within a smaller group in one commission.

"So, in that way, the past [...] five years, the organisation as such has changed very much in the way that we know a lot more about what's going on in the other commissions and we can in that way benefit a lot more from the work that is going on. And this is a development that hasn't stopped yet and I think it will go on for the next five years as well. Because we are also trying to find out, [...] if we can use [the General Secretariat] more on a commission level to include them in our work in one way or another. So, that we will have more cohesion in the UBC as such." (Interview #2)

It appears to be a common goal for the future development of the network to strengthen this cooperation among the different commissions in order to create synergies. This tendency was in particular visible in the Youthful Cities Commission. The Youthful Cities Commission works on youth issues with representatives of municipal youth councils and other young people in the region. In doing so, they have a rather cross-cutting thematic focus, as youth involvement can be part of a variety of different policy fields. Consequentially the Safe Cities Commission stated that they want to work with youth councils and approach youth safety in their work. Cooperation took place for example by the common attendance of workshops of other commissions. The different commissions also try to organise joint meetings that specifically address the cooperation between the commissions. For example, the first joint meeting on Cultures of Sustainability in the Baltic Cities was held by the Sustainable Cities Commission, Safe Cities Commission and Cultural Cities Commission in 2016 and tried to develop common guidelines for cities to organise safe and sustainable public events such as concerts or festivals from a holistic perspective. In that way, the UBC is moving towards a more holistic approach, trying to achieve cooperation not only in specific sectoral policies but also in a more policy cross-cutting sense in order to achieve its goals.

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### Challenges of the network

Another phenomenon in the network is a generation change of politicians as well as civil servants in the network. As this new generation acts and networks in different ways, this change of generation will have a considerable impact of the UBC's work as well. While this has some positive aspects such as better language skills of participants in contrast to the beginning times of the network, one interviewee stated that it is becoming more difficult to find host cities for their seminars. (Interview #3) Apparently, this is also because the initial theme of organisations like the UBC, bridging East and West, is not seen as relevant to politicians anymore and since cities have developed and grown in the past 25 years the need for a UBC membership as a means of developing may not be evident to all. In addition, cooperation has also extended towards a global scale. (Interview #3)

There are other challenges that influence or even harm the cooperation activities in the network. As mentioned before, all commissions except the Sustainable Cities Commission have to face limitations in the time they can spend on network activities as these are only one part of their everyday work. One interviewee also stated that cities do not send civil servants out anymore to participate in network activities as it may have a strong social and cultural component, but it is not effective enough and the added value in participation for cities is often not given. The fact that workshops results often remain unevaluated contributes to this perception.

Another issue that has to be dealt with is the differences of cities in terms of autonomy and regulative frameworks. For example, the Safe Cities Commission that is constituted by different police, fire brigade, emergency and crises management departments, has to face different systems in each country for the tasks and possibilities of the local police. A further example is the field of city planning where municipalities in the Scandinavian countries traditionally have a high degree of autonomy, whereas states like Latvia and Estonia have rather limited possibilities to influence land use planning. These differences in national frameworks have been discussed a lot in the network and generally a high awareness of this challenge is visible. It was for example approached in the ERDF-funded EU project Baltic Urban Lab. In this project, different spatial planning systems and legislation for brownfield development were analysed and recommendations for national actors were developed in order to support brownfield development.

An additional part of UBC's work is the representation of interests of the Baltic Cities in common matters towards regional, national, European and international bodies. This task is usually assigned towards the higher organisational bodies such as Secretariat and Presidium. While some interviewees stated that the UBC is "really an organisation that is capable of playing on the field of European policy" (Interview #2), other interviewees stated that even though the UBC has the potential to actively lobby for the Baltic cities' interest on a European level, this potential is only poorly used especially in comparison to other city networks like Eurocities and that they do not feel well represented on a European scale. (Interviews #4 & #5) These statements contribute to the perception that interest representation in the form of lobbying for Baltic Cities on an EU level is not the core activity of the network and that it is rather focussed on the knowledge exchange component of city networks.

### Concluding on the UBC's way of working

To answer the first sub research question *How does the city network Union of the Baltic Cities work?* one can say in summary that the network has developed a sophisticated and long established organisational structure within its 27 years of existence. The network assigns clear responsibilities towards the different actors. It has also defined a guiding strategy on which its work is based on. The network's way of working is strongly connected to its actors and especially depends on the different commissions, which can be perceived as the heart of the network. All interviewees saw similar reasons to participate in the UBC, namely to exchange knowledge with other cities and to contribute to a process of region building. The representation of interests on a European scale was perceived as a main field of action of the UBC.

The UBC has to deal with certain limitations and challenges that occur throughout the different commissions. This include the general challenge of missing personnel capacity and dealing with different national frameworks. Also, participating only in the limited scope of one commission with the same cities inhibits the general idea of knowledge exchange of the network. Here, developments towards more policy cross-cutting activities can be observed.

Generally, the work in the network is organised through workshops and the biennial General Conference and only scarcely through participation in EU funded projects. The Sustainable

Cities Commission has an exceptional character in this respect as it actively participates in a variety of EU projects relating to urban sustainability and transnational exchange.

## 6.2 Interdependencies between the UBC and the EUSBSR

### The UBC's attempts on influencing the formulation of the EUSBSR

According to the General Secretariat, the UBC has been involved in the process of elaboration of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region from the beginning. The UBC declared in 2008 and again in 2012 together with the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), the Baltic Sea Islands Network (B7), Euroregion Baltic, Euroregion Pomerania and the CoR in a joint declaration to develop and implement a European Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. All parties agreed that "local and regional authorities play an indispensable part in this process and will support each other in all activities of common interests concerning the Baltic Sea Strategy" (CoR et al., 2012). During the public consultation processes of the EUSBSR before its launch in 2008 and 2009, the UBC took influence on the development of the strategy through multiple position papers. One joint position paper with BSSSC, B7, Euroregion Baltic, Baltic Development Forum and the Baltic Sea Commission in December 2008 made specific proposals with concrete areas of actions for the Baltic Sea Strategy, including a model of governance and a summary of proposals for possible flagship projects to facilitate the implementation of the strategy. (BSSSC et al., 2008) One of the key points of the paper is that the strategy should not only point out necessary actions but also name responsible authorities and institutions as well as a method for implementation and a timetable.

In addition to the joint statement with other regional organisations, the UBC submitted two different position papers on its own as well. The first position paper, signed by the President of the UBC at that time, covers the general statement of the UBC as a whole organisation. (UBC, 2008b) In the position paper, the UBC welcomes the idea of a macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region but also mentions that there is already a high general awareness of problems in the Baltic Sea Region and that there is no need to introduce new issues. It postulates that the strategy should focus on providing the region with new governance. Also, the position paper emphasises that there is no need for new institutions as existing ones, like the UBC, could contribute to the coordination of the strategy. In that sense, it was welcoming

the European Commission's call for no new institutions. Interestingly, the UBC calls for a strong guiding role of the European Commission in the formulation of the strategy:

"The European Union has taken the initiative of launching the strategy while shaping it and its implementation depends very much of the region itself. We need leadership in the region and pro-activeness and commitment of the European Institutions in shaping the strategy. We also need a forward-looking action from the region." (UBC, 2008b, p. 3)

The position paper also advocates for strong mechanisms to exercise pressure to those who are responsible for implementation, although it acknowledges that traditional state mechanisms for accountability cannot be applied for in a complex governance arrangement like an MRS, as already mentioned in chapter 3.1 of this thesis. A demand for a sound monitoring system has still been articulated in the 2016 European Commission's report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies (European Commission, 2016, p. 4).

On the other hand, the UBC also puts emphasis on the bottom-up dimension of the strategy and the importance to include cities as the "public authority closest to the citizens and their everyday life." (UBC, 2008b, p. 4). The bottom-up aspect "shall ensure that the interest of the region are adequately injected into the strategy." (ibid.) Thus, in the perspective of the UBC, a bottom-up design with a strong role of the cities as contributors to the strategy and a guiding role of the European Commission do not stand in contrast to each other but are complementing features of the strategy.

In a second contribution to the stakeholder process of the strategy formulation, 4 of the then 15 commissions in the UBC presented their own opinion and input on the EUSBSR. (UBC, 2008a) Those contributions, although supporting the general position paper, are mainly focusing on technical issues such as proposals for flagship projects or concrete recommendations for policy areas such as energy and environment. (ibid.)

The various position papers that were published by the UBC in 2008 can be seen as a clear example of bottom-up Europeanization in which the cities through the UBC as a platform articulated their preferences towards the EU. Given the fact that over 100 submissions were made during the consultation process, the direct influence of the UBC on the strategy design is hard to prove. However, Schymik and Krumrey (2009), who have made a detailed analysis out of 47 contributions to the consultation process, conclude that although it is impossible to

include all ideas and proposals, the European Commission has "been able to draft an action plan that captures the essence of public opinion in the region" (Schymik & Krumrey, 2009, p. 15).

The UBC has operated since the early 1990s and therefore has been actively involved in different policy areas which were later addressed in the EUSBSR as well. For example, it has advocated for a common maritime policy for the European Union as well as common rules among port authorities in a project called New Hansa from 2003 to 2005. The long tradition of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area and the high degree of establishment of the UBC as an organisation in the region has been mentioned in the position paper as well as in the interviews. One interviewee stated that the network has been working for a long time in a similar way as the MRS intends to do and that the UBC might even have been an example for the strategy as such. (interview #6) The fact that the UBC published one of the position papers with five other organisations in the region already suggests that actors in the region were already quite well connected.

#### The UBC's involvement in EUSBSR activities

The UBC has participated at the Annual Fora of the EUSBSR since 2016 with seminars (see Table 5). In 2016 it organised two seminars, in 2017 UBC co-organised four seminars and back-to-back meetings before and during the Forum and in 2018 co-hosted one seminar, a youth conference and a participation day together with HA Capacity and the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities. The participation days were events half-prior to the Annual Forum and served as a 'market place' where stakeholders can present their ideas or find a way to take part in the implementation of the strategy. Given the fact that the EUSBSR was introduced in 2009, one can state that the UBC started to participate relatively late in the Annual Fora, which were part of the strategy right from the beginning. This seems especially surprising given the active participation in the consultation process of the strategy that was presented before.

Table 5: UBC's participation at the EUSBSR Annual Fora

EUSBSR Annual Forum	UBC Participation
7 <sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Forum in Stockholm (2016)	<ul> <li>Seminar: Cities and regions: Drivers or bystanders in Baltic Sea cooperation?</li> <li>Seminar: Nothing about us without us - Sustainable and green future and prosperity, growth and jobs from a youth perspective (Youthful Cities Commission)</li> </ul>
8 <sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Forum in Berlin (2017)	<ul> <li>Youth Conference 2017</li> <li>Seminar: Nothing about us without us – making it work! (Youthful Cities Commission)</li> <li>First Participation Day of the EUSBSR (HA Capacity)</li> <li>Seminar: Smart Water Sector (Youthful Cities Commission)</li> </ul>
9 <sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Forum in Tallinn (2018)	<ul> <li>Seminar: Nothing about us without us – digital tools for better youth involvement and dialog (Youthful Cities Commission)</li> <li>Youth Conference 2018 (Youthful Cities Commission)</li> <li>Second EUSBSR Participation Day (HA Capacity)</li> </ul>

As shown in Table 5, particularly the Youthful Cities Commission has been active at the Annual EUSBSR Fora. The commission has been working together with other regional actors such as BSSSC and Euregion Baltic, an organisation of Pomeranian municipalities, and the members of the commission have been taking part as organisers or participants of seminars with a representation of youth groups. As the chairman of the Youthful Cities Commission, mentioned in the interview, participating at the EUSBSR Fora was a concrete reaction to the lack of youth issues included in the strategy policy. The annual fora served as a way to draw attention to this deficit and to let youth representatives from the Baltic Sea Area be actively involved in the strategy process. The cooperation with other organisations in the region, which were also involved in youth issues, was a direct consequence of the first seminar *Nothing about us without us*. Looking on the EUSBSR Action Plan in its current version (March 2017), the topic youth is still not represented, thus the efforts of the Youthful Cities Commission have not lead to an amendment of the strategy the design so far. On a positive note, the EUSBSR fora were able to serve as a platform for the Youthful Cities Commission to put a topic relevant to cities on the regional agenda and to come in contact with other institutions in the region.

### Structural overlaps between UBC and EUSBSR

The UBC is also present in the organisational structure of the EUSBSR. As already mentioned, the UBC is Horizontal Action Leader of the HA Capacity, together with the Baltic Sea NGO Network and the Swedish Institute. The HA Capacity was established in 2015 after the second revision of the EUSBSR Action Plan and the reorganisation of the objectives and PAs and HAs. It focuses on Capacity Building support for the implementing stakeholders, e.g. through trainings for stakeholders that are not accustomed to working internationally. The Horizontal Action also tries to ensure a broad participation of local and regional authorities and other stakeholders. HA Capacity is among HA Neighbours the only one of the PAs and HAs that is coordinated by a sub-regional organisation, all the others are coordinated by nation states. The HA Neighbours is co-coordinated by the city of Turku (which is also closely connected to the UBC with funding the Sustainable Cities Commission) together with the CBSS.

This scheme is also inwritten in the EUSBSR Action Plan which says: "*Typically* [emphasis added], one Member State coordinates each policy area and horizontal action" while "other bodies *may* [emphasis added] also be nominated to coordinate an area or action." (European Commission, 2017a, p. 8) Hence, a general focus on the nation states as coordinators of the EUSBSR is inwritten in the Action Plan and weakens the bottom-up dimension of the strategy design.

In addition, the interviews revealed that some of the UBC commissions are also in contact with the EUSBSR PAs. For example, the Youthful Cities Commission stands in contact with PA Culture. The latter has been supporting the commission's application for funding for a youth event that is supposed to take place prior to the next EUSBSR Annual Forum. However, the interviewee also stated, that getting in contact with the PAs only happens in little steps. Similar developments could be seen in the UBC Safe Cities Commission, which became an official member of the PA Safe Steering Group in 2017, after the latter invited the commission. The UBC Cultural Cities Commission, whose chair could not be interviewed, states on its website in a vision for 2017-2018 that it wants to develop contact with the PA Culture.

#### Concluding on the interdependencies between the UBC and EUSBSR

To answer the second sub research question What are the interdependencies between the UBC and the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea Region? the following can be said: In

conclusion, one can determine certain interrelations in the governance structures of the UBC and macro-regional strategies. Through the different interrelations with regional, national and EU actors in the context of the EUSBSR, the UBC acts within a framework of multi-level governance as described in chapter 4.1. Even though the coordination of the different PAs and HAs is dominated by nation states, the UBC takes responsibilities as a leader of the HA Capacity. Nevertheless, one has to argue that the nation states have still a major position, as almost all other PAs are coordinated by them, adding up to their influence in deciding over the flagship status of projects, together with the European Commission.

It is evident, that the UBC as a long-established actor in the region has actively contributed to the formulation of the strategy through its positioning papers. The general position paper of the whole organisation gives relatively extensive positions about how the strategy should be designed, especially in terms of governance. It calls a strong role of the European Institutions in shaping the strategy and instruments for exercising pressure on actors responsible for implementation. On the other hand, it also stresses the importance of cities as actors in the EUSBSR constituting "a basic structure of the Baltic Sea region" (UBC 2008b, p. 3). In addition, four different commissions submitted their own positions that refer to their specific policy area. The joint position paper with the five other Baltic organisations indicates already, that working together with other organisations was no rarity even before the introduction of the EUSBSR.

Two of the five interviewed chairmen of UBC commissions stated that their commission is involved in the steering group of a PA or at least in contact with one, as a resource for help, while one commission according to its website wants to establish a connection to its thematic fitting PA. Here, one can observe a slowly increasing interdependency between the UBC commission and the established structures of the EUSBSR. In addition, the UBC is taking part in the EUSBSR Annual Fora since 2016 with seminars and workshops. These developments show that an organisational interdependence has especially emerged during the past two years, but in relation to the enthusiasm of the position papers it still remains relatively low.

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### 6.3 UBC's contribution to the implementation of the EUSBSR

### General support for the implementation of the EUSBSR

According to its Action Plan, the EUSBSR "is implemented, among others, by means of flagships – projects and processes." (European Commission, 2017a, p. 17) While it is not further defined in the Action Plan what is meant by projects and processes, the EUSBSR HA Capacity has published together with Interact an input paper which defines a macro-regional project as a

"jointly established development process that aims to create a broad impact and achieve objectives and targets of the MRS. Macro-regional project is [sic] implemented through interlinked activities (e.g. thematic working groups, networks) and operations (projects)." (EUSBSR, 2017, p. 1)

The purpose of chapter 6.3 is to examine how the UBC is contributing to the implementation of policies and actions of the EUSBSR. First of all, the question arises, if the UBC is facing similar policy problems to those on a macro-regional level and whether policy problems have been influenced by the introduction of the EUSBSR and thus have been Europeanized, following the theoretical suggestions of Radaelli (see chapter 4.2). Secondly, the chapter will elaborate on how, if at all, the different commissions are implementing the EUSBSR.

While of course the policy problems differ with every UBC commission, it is questionable whether the UBC is dealing generally with the same issues as the EUSBSR. As it was mentioned in one of the interviews, the whole region correlates with the state of the cities and that the overall goal of a safe, smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region can only be achieved through the support of the cities as a key driver of economic and social development. (Interview #1) In its strategic framework, the UBC makes its commitment to the EUSBSR clear. The EUSBSR and its Action Plan are mentioned as "key framework for UBC" (UBC, n.d. b, p.4) in their regional work and implementation of the strategy is among the mentioned priorities for the 2016-2021 strategy. According to the UBC Strategy

"The main challenges of EUSBSR implementation are, from UBC perspective, to apply simple procedures and innovative governance systems to ensure that multi-level governance becomes a reality and that local and regional authorities are given a real role of co-decision when drafting and implementing strategies." (UBC, n.d. b, p. 4)

This quote shows not only that the UBC is committed to the EUSBSR, but also that the UBC is demanding the power to co-decide in drafting and implementation of the strategy. Furthermore, multi-level governance in this case is used as a normative element of policy making that is aimed to be achieved.

In a position paper of the Conference of European cross-border and interregional city networks (CECICN), which the UBC is part of, the demand for a real and *equal* involvement of cities in macro-regional strategies is formulated as well. The paper states:

"Common platforms where all governance levels participate in an equal footing are [...|a fundamental condition of success" (CECICN, 2013, p. 2) and demands a full integration of the urban dimension in the macro-regions to respect a bottom-up logic that is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. (ibid.)

### The commissions' roles in implementation of the EUSBSR

While there is a general acknowledgement to participate in the strategy, the Action Plan of the EUSBSR, which serves as the key document of the strategy, is considered in slightly different ways throughout the commissions. Two interviewees mentioned that it is helpful in serving as a guiding document for those who want to participate in the strategy and especially as a way to see upcoming events, policies and consequently funding opportunities. (Interview #6 and #4) Other interviewees stated, that the Action Plan has only limited to no relevance in their work and that cooperation activities are not specifically referring to the plan, but are just a natural part of their work. (interview #3 and #5)

The representative of the Sustainable Cities Commission noted, that there is a strong overlap between the policy problems the commission deals with and those which are discussed in the respective PAs of the EUSBSR, for example Nitrification or Climate Adaption. Policy problems are identified in a process of reflecting the commission's agenda towards its own member cities as well as towards global, EU and national strategies. Logically, the Smart and Sustainable Cities Commission addresses especially policy problems that matter on a city level as well. An example for this can be seen in the nitrification of the Baltic Sea, which is an overall policy problem that has been highlighted within the strategy from the beginning, even assigned with its own Policy Area *Nutri*. Among the various dimensions of nitrification, there is urban waste-water treatment, which is dealt with by the Sustainable Cities Commission.

Implementation takes then place through projects, such as IWAMA, which focuses on improving wastewater management through improving capacity of the involved operators and implementing pilot investments.<sup>3</sup> The project is funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme and has the EUSBSR flagship status.

For the remaining commissions that have been questioned, the connection in policy problems becomes less clear, also because interviewees usually preferred to speak about general topics which they are addressing instead of specific policy problems. While certain topics are represented in the strategy as well, e.g. safety or climate adaption, others such as digitalisation in cities are not explicitly featured in the Action Plan of the strategy, although they might connect thematically to certain PAs.

The EUSBSR policy is nothing that is specifically addressed in the seminars of the Safe Cities and Smart and Prospering Cities commission, although the topics, which are discussed, are not thematically detached from the strategy. The seminars are in the first place oriented towards the cities' needs and demands for topics, while looking on the policy of the EUSBSR happens more in a second view. As one interviewee mentioned

"It depends on the city where we are hosting our meetings, so they are showing what they are concerned about. It could be influenced by the strategy, it couldn't be. Because sometimes they know more or less about that, sometimes they don't know. So [...] it's more about the exchange." (Interview #5)

The quote reflects a general problem that was revealed in multiple interviews. Interviewees were often not able to say what developments within their network activity can be traced back to the EUSBSR, as it is only one component of their work.

A limited awareness of the EUSBSR can be also explained given the fact that access to funding opportunities, which may be facilitated through involvement in the MRS is not always a top priority in the commissions, even if it might be desired by the Executive Board.

"...[T]he board, they try to professionalise us and push us to make more EU projects, so we put more money in from the BSR funds. But I can't do it because it's not my job. What I do for UBC is beside my real job and my boss would not allow me to build up a big organisation for this. So, as long as I use these six or eight travelling days per year

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> http://www.iwama.eu

and I keep the network going, then it's okay. But if I should make an EU project, then I need much more power... and this I don't have." (Interview #3)

### Another interviewee mentioned:

"Of course, it would be better to have more funding opportunities but everyone has their daily job, so this is like a voluntary thing which we are eager to do." (Interview #5)

On the other hand, one interviewee stated that being involved in EU projects is in addition to a lack of capacities also something that the participating cities in the workshops are not so much interested in after all. (Interview #4)

Consequently, several interviewees expressed their opinion that the introduction of the macro-regional strategy had only little to no influence on the policies of the different commissions. Especially mentioned was the difficulty to trace back changes in policies of the UBC to the MRS or any other specific influence. (Interviews #2, #5, #3) Since the overall strategy framework of the UBC refers back to the EUSBSR, an influence of the EUSBSR in UBC's policy can be seen. However, in the actual work of the commissions, influences are less clear and evident.

The EUSBSR also had some impacts on the way of working in the UBC. Although most interviewees stressed that the network generally still works in the same ways as it has before the introduction of the strategy due to long years of experience, some minor or more implicit changes in the way of working still occur:

"Well, if you are looking for an answer that is saying, well, this specific strategy or this specific part of the strategy has changed the way we work in the UBC or [the] Commission, I would say no, as a specific change. But it's implicit that while we are trying to accomplish something towards the strategy, well of course it has changed the way we work, we are now working with more transnational organisations, which we might not have been doing, if we were not focused on the macro-regional strategy in some way." (Interview #2)

Other interviewees enhanced that the strategy has made it easier to get access to information and responsible partners, e.g. responsible state ministries. (Interviews #5 & #6) These results suggest that the introduction of the EUSBSR has enhanced multi-level governance as one can

see an increasing connection to other non-state and state actors on different levels. It also shows that one of the key features of the MRS approach, a better and more efficient coordination of cooperation activity could be achieved in this case.

In the Planning Cities Commission, the EUSBSR is not relevant at all. As mentioned before, the work in the commission takes place in seminars, which are held about twice a year. The commission works on matters of urban planning and tries to find solutions for specific urban planning problems. The focus here lies on individual, practical solutions and as the chairman of the Planning Cities Commission mentioned, there are no generalisable solutions in urban planning, because each city is different and has different actors involved. He argues that transnational cooperation in the field of urban planning has strong limitations:

"And it doesn't mean anything to have a deep discussion with another city in another country about how to do it. You can put out some ideas but everybody has to find their own way. [...] You can only go on study trips, you can see what they do in other cities but you can't make such a template how to do it."

On the other hand, very general goals for city development such as an attractive, growing and sustainable city constitute a common sense, for which no specific strategy is needed. Thus, an added value in participating in any form in the EUSBSR is not seen in the Planning Cities Commission. This opinion connects with the critical view on city networks mentioned by Keiner and Kim (2006) on the danger of overlooking the complexity of the *present place*, e.g. the "orientation of urban planning to current concerns and the limited and transient perspectives local communities and residents." (Keiner & Kim, 2006, p. 1372; see also chapter 3.3)

In the Youthful Cities Commission, another development can be observed. Since youth involvement is not mentioned in the EUSBSR Action Plan and youth issues in the plan are only limited to youth unemployment, the Youthful Cities took this lack of overlapping policy problems as reason to get involved in the strategy in the first place and to convince stakeholders about the necessity to involve the youth in their decision making. Hence, one can argue that in the case of the Youthful Cities Commission it is more about agenda setting, following a bottom-up logic, than about policy implementation.

### Concluding on the UBC's contribution to the implementation of the EUSBSR

To answer the third sub research question To what extent does the UBC contribute to the implementation of policies and actions of the EUSBSR and what are potentials and restrictions? one can say that there is a general commitment of the UBC as a whole organisation to contribute to the implementation of the EUSBSR as defined in the UBC strategic document. However, implementation through specific operations as defined by the HA Capacity, meaning EU funded projects, happens almost only in the Sustainable Cities Commission. Other commissions may contribute to the implementation on a more abstract level through their participation in meetings and steering groups. However, most of the commissions have stated that the strategy has only little influence on the policy they address or their way of working. A clear restriction to actively work on projects that facilitate the implementation of the strategy is certainly the lack of personnel capacity but also a lack of motivation by the participating cities to do so. A collaboration between the different UBC commissions as mentioned in chapter 6.1 can be a potential to jointly apply for funding or bundle personnel resources in order to create projects that are able to implement the EUSBSR. The example of the Youthful Cities Commission shows also, that the different commissions have the potential to set their own topics which may not be represented in the MRS yet on the agenda through bottom-up processes using channels such as the annual fora or steering groups.

### 6.4 Theoretical reflection of the findings

Reflecting on the theoretical considerations made in chapter 4.2 one can say that the relationship between the UBC and EUSBSR can be conceptualised with both multi-level governance and Europeanization.

As shown in chapter 6.2, the UBC has several points for interaction and intertwinement between actors of the UBC and the EUSBSR, e.g. in participating in the consultation process, through the commissions' engagement in steering groups of PAs or in contributing to the EUSBSR annual fora. These interactions between different levels and between state and non-state actors have an impact on policy outcomes. Through the introduction of the EUSBSR, some functions of the nation state were shifted up to the macro-regional level and down to the local level at the same time. These are clear characteristics for multi-level governance.

However, it is questionable whether this form of multi-level governance already meets the normative perception of the term as it was formulated in the UBC strategy and if the EUSBSR "ensure[s] that multi-level governance becomes a reality and that local and regional authorities are given a real role of co-decision when drafting and implementing strategies". Since for example, the coordination of PAs and HAs are still be default in hands of the nation states and the topic youth has not been incorporated in the EUSBSR Action Plan besides the efforts of the Youthful Cities Commission, there might be a gap between the UBC's demand for power and the reality of the strategy design.

The UBC has been subject to Europeanization, in the sense that it has incorporated (informal) rules and procedures that were defined through the introduction of the EUSBSR in certain ways. Using Radaelli's (2003) analytical framework for analysing Europeanization, this chapter reveals a change of policy problems, policy instruments and policy resources.

Data suggests that the UBC's policy problems have stayed the same due to its long tradition of cooperation and only little to no influence of the EUSBSR is visible. However, the UBC has made attempts to take influence on the EUSBSR in the formulation process as well as during the Annual Fora, e.g. through the Youthful Cities Commission. Thus, in terms of policy problems, one can see a bottom up process of Europeanization, even though the example of the Youthful Cities Commission remains a single case.

In a similar way policy instruments have mostly stayed the same after the introduction of the EUSBSR. Mostly, the work of the commissions is taking place in the organised seminars. Participation in the EUSBSR Fora, PA Steering Groups and the Coordination of HA Capacity are certainly new instruments for territorial cooperation which were introduced by the MRS. However, these new instrument are not a fundamental change to the UBC, because they do not differ substantially from the instruments the UBC used before for transnational cooperation and only play a limited role in the work of the network.

The main influence of the EUSBSR can be seen on the policy resources of the UBC as interviewees stated that they have better and easier access to information, contacts or potential project partners. For those who are engaged in EU funded projects, it can serve as a more efficient way to have access to funding, e.g. through the help of PAs in applying for funds.

Changes of cognitive and normative structures could not be adequately researched in the limitations of this thesis. However, discussions of what the EUSBSR means for the UBC are visible and thus it has been subject to the discourse in the network. The position papers that were published during the strategy formulation and after can be perceived as the outcome of such discourses.

Reflecting on the different mechanisms of Europeanization, it is evident that a moderate and partial change of instruments, resources and policy problems works through a process of horizontal Europeanization. This is due to the fact that the EUSBSR works only on a voluntary basis and cannot apply adaptational pressure in forms of 'hard' instruments such as EU regulation. Even though the UBC advocated for mechanisms to exercise pressure to those who are responsible for implementation it has not found its way into the strategy, it might only be very softly exercised by reports of the European Commission. As there is no formal pressure to comply with the MRS, Europeanization takes places through horizontal mechanisms that involve adjustments to European, in this case macro-regional, norms and procedures by processes of learning. In this mechanism of Europeanization "the idea is to use the European Union as a policy transfer platform rather than a law-making system" (Radaelli, 2003, p. 19).

All in all, one can state that Europeanization can serve as a helpful concept to conceptualise macro-regional strategies and their impact on cities. The introduction of the EUSBSR made some impact on the UBC as a network of cities and it is fair to say that cities become subject to both top-down and bottom-up Europeanization, as their engagement with other actors and their resources as well as their policy instruments have been shaped in a process of learning according to the general strategic idea of the European Commission. These processes take place in a horizontal mechanism of Europeanization, as the EU ultimately has no means to create any adaptational pressure by compulsory regulations. Since cities engage to different degrees in the network and commissions are not equally committed to the EUSBSR, Europeanization effects on cities vary as well. Noteworthy, all processes of bottom-up Europeanization that have been mentioned require the structure of the strategy in the first place. For example, for the Youthful Cities Commission to take influence on the Action Plan of the EUSBSR, it has to act in the given structures of the strategy: get in touch with PAs or take part at the Annual Forum. Respectively, for stressing an urban dimension in the MRS formulation, it requires a consultation process. Hence, in the context of this thesis bottom-up Europeanization relies on the structures that have been created in a process of top-down

Europeanization, following in a dynamic relationship of both. The UBC's call for a strong guiding role of the European Institutions as well as its emphasising of the role of cities in MRS incorporate this logic as well. Therefore, the circular, dynamic and multidirectional conception of Europeanization that Radaelli (2003) suggests can help to understand the processes of macro-regional strategies as well.

### 7 CONCLUSION.

### Summary of the main findings and answer to the research question

The UBC has been operating in the Baltic Sea Region for more than 25 years. It is a well-established organisation that connects about 80 cities around ten different countries and constitutes a platform for knowledge exchange and region building. Its main work takes place at the seven different commissions that circle around varying policy areas. The commissions' work is taking place in different workshops and meetings as well as in EU-funded projects with other project partners around the region. The commissions are complemented by an organisational structure with an Executive Board, Presidium and Secretariat.

To contribute to the EUSBSR serves as one of the main goals the UBC's strategic framework. Overall a general political support for the macro-regional strategy is clearly visible in the network, especially on a 'higher' level determined by the Executive Board, Presidium and Secretariat.

Consequently, certain interdependencies in governance structures between the UBC and the EUSBSR are visible. First, the UBC has contributed to the strategy design with submitting its position papers during the consultation process in 2008, arguing for the importance of cities as implementors of the macro-regional strategy. Even though it is not possible to trace back certain elements of the strategy design to the contribution of the UBC in specific, one can assume that it had an impact with its input during the consultation process. Second, it has been participating in the last three annual fora with workshops and thus has strengthened an urban dimension in the EUSBSR in bringing up topics related to cities. Third, the UBC is slowly developing a structural overlap between its commissions and respective policy areas, e.g. in the participation in steering groups. This has only been taking place for a few years and in little steps. It is also Leader of the Horizontal Action Capacity, which can be perceived as a major step forward in establishing a multi-level governance, as Horizontal Actions and Policy Areas are still usually dominated by the nation states. Together with the city of Turku, it forms an exceptional involvement of cities in the EUSBSR in this respect.

A contribution to the implementation of the strategy can be seen in the UBC's involvement in projects within the Baltic Sea Region. However, this is mostly limited to the externally funded Sustainable Cities Commission, which additionally is acting within a policy sector that is

traditionally very well established in transnational cooperation in the region. Apart from that implementation of the strategy only takes place in a less direct form through before mentioned participation in steering groups or annual fora. Contribution in form of specific projects does not happen in the remaining commissions for two reasons.

First, the commissions lack the financial and personnel capacity to be involved in the strategy. For the commission's chairmen, who would be in a suitable position to get involved in EU projects, the UBC is only one part of their daily work. Second, transnational cooperation of cities has stronger limitations in certain policy fields than in others and consequently the increase of cooperation, e.g. through the involvement in a macro-regional strategy, may be nothing desirable for cities after all, especially for those which see participation in the network only as a political or symbolic act.

In order to answer the main research question of this thesis: *How is the Union of the Baltic Cities as a city network operating in the Baltic Sea Region contributing to the processes of the EUSBSR?*, the following can be concluded. Through their membership in the UBC, cities are able to mobilise their power and thus contribute to the processes of the EUSBSR in terms of strategy formulation as well as implementation. As the main work of the UBC is taking place in the different commissions, contribution to the strategy takes place on the commission level through interference with EUSBSR structures such as steering groups. Implementation of the strategy through the involvement of EU funded projects is mainly limited to the external funded Sustainable Cities Commission, while other commissions either lack the capacity or willingness to do so.

One of the key characteristics of macro-regional strategies is that they aim to make cooperation activities in the region more effective with use of existing institutions. Cities have a key role in a variety of policy areas which are relevant for macro-regional cooperation such as economic growth and environmental protection. As the governmental level closest to the citizens, they may also build a link between citizens and the European Union, respectively the macro-regional strategy. As the largest city network in the Baltic Sea Region, the UBC is certainly one of the main actors that are able to incorporate city perspectives into the strategy. Nevertheless, potentials for a closer relationship and leading role of cities certainly remain. Looking on the EU as a whole, cities are still confronted with restrictions when trying to take influence in the EU policy making arena. In the way of overcoming formal working patterns, macro-regional strategies may be a channel for cities with lower barriers than the

EU as whole to participate in and to take influence. Therefore, demanding and enhancing an urban dimension in macro-regional strategies is an objective worth following.

### Reflection on theory

Reflecting on the applicability of the theoretical considerations made in this thesis, one can say that although the Europeanization approach by Radaelli (see chapter 4.2) came with a clear empirical 'toolbox', division of certain elements, e.g. policy instruments and policy resources in the public policy process was difficult to achieve. This was because interviewees tended to mix up different elements or elements were so closely interlinked or blurry that a clear division was not possible. A main empirical difficulty lies in the fact that changes in public policy are usually subject to a variety of influences out of which the European Union or respectively a MRS might be only one. This vagueness even increases whenever changes in public policy occur in a more horizontal way, without adaptational pressure and through processes of learning. As this is certainly true for macro-regional strategies, the definition of concrete influences always remains empirically problematic.

Similar to the EU in its entirety, macro-regional strategies serve as a platform or arena in which different actors, non-governmental and governmental, on different levels engage and thus influence policy outcomes. They are able to create a structure for political mobilisation in the sense of multi-level governance according to Piattoni. However, one has to critically state that besides creating this formal structure or arena, sub-regional authorities still lack the resources to take part up to their full potential. Thus, their influence in policy-making on a European or in this case macro-regional level remains below its possibilities. For a better involvement in the implementation of the EUSBSR cities or city networks would not only need the potential structures to get involved but also the actual means to do so in forms of funding. Even though the macro-regional rule of 'no new institutions' may be potentially able to give rise to governance arrangements like the UBC (see Piattoni 2016, p. 88), the macro-regional mantra of 'no new funding' however inhibits funding from the European Union and thus inhibits that sub-regional actors can take this opportunity. To put in in other terms, the rescaling of roles for implementation requires as well the rescaling of funding to be most effective. Hence, it remains open to discussion whether the politics dimension of the multi-level governance approach as formulated by Piattoni can fully be applied to macro-regional strategies.

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#### **Further research**

The fact that the Sustainable Cities Commission is funded by a city itself certainly gives hope as it shows that political mobilisation and including an urban dimension in macro-regional issues without external help is possible. However, Turku certainly remains an individual case and worth looking at in further research as attempts of contacting political actors in Turku during the writing of this thesis remained without success. Also, the thesis does not address how cities are able to contribute to other macro-regional strategies. As mentioned in chapter 2.3 the findings of this case research can hardly be generalised to the extremely diverse governance configurations of other macro-regional strategies, it can only serve as a basis for following research. Thus, two main strands for further research remain.

First, going more into detail in city cooperation and engagement in the EUSBSR, as the main limitation of this work was finding actors that were eager to do an interview and a greater amount of data may produce further insights. This may happen through going more in-depth into the existing case with shifting the exploratory research approach into a more explanatory nature of research. The 'how' questions asked in this thesis are focussed on processes of change within the UBC. An exploratory 'why' research question could be able to comprehensively explain the causal relation of Europeanization processes taking place or not taking place in the UBC.

Another option would be to research another case in the Baltic Sea Region, namely the Baltic Metropoles Network as the remaining city network in the region and their interdependency with the EUSBSR. As BaltMet has similar general goals to the UBC, but a very different member structure, only including 10 major or capital cities in the region. Therefore, a comparison between the two networks and their interference with the EUSBSR may be able to reveal further insides.

Second, comparing the results of this case with the remaining three macro-regional strategies would be able to give a general statement about the urban dimension in macro-regions with respecting the differences of historical backgrounds and strategy designs in other regions. As an example, Policy Areas in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region are all coordinated by nation states while on the other hand, steering groups have been established right from the beginning in difference to the EUSBSR and might ensure a greater participation of cities from the start. General circumstances of cooperation however are completely different from the

Baltic Sea Region. Finding common patterns of sub-regional engagement and activation of cities or restrictions for those could contribute to a discourse of how macro-regional strategies should be designed.

### **Final remarks**

Given the fact that the ideal of city networks is to mobilise cities and to improve local processes through a transnational exchange, one has also to ask where the limitations for transnational cooperation for cities lie. The case of the Planning Cities Commission has made clear that networking experiences may often not go beyond a cultural get-together or providing a source of inspiration. While there is nothing wrong with both, expectations of what city networks can accomplish in very *place-based* policy areas like urban planning need to be clear and should be part of a discourse by cities and city networks. Exploring the possibilities and limitations of the transferability of best practices between cities in different national frameworks can be a rewarding research topic for a better understanding of city networks. Besides all limitations and difficulties, the chair of the Planning Cities Commission also stressed the importance of keeping up transnational cooperation for the future of cities in the Baltic Sea Region: "[T]here is no alternative other than working together. So we all have to push this. If we resign from working together with our neighbours, then we have a big problem."

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### **APPENDIX**

Stefan Baars
Radboud University Nijmegen
Master Thesis in Spatial Planning:
City networking and the urban dimension in macro-regions The role of the Union of the Baltic Cities for the EU Macro-Regional Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

### **Interview Framework**

### Introduction

Could you please introduce yourself and describe your position and your tasks in the Union of the Baltic Cities?

### Structure of the network

How would you describe the main purpose of the UBC?

Is every city equally involved in the network?

If not: What are the reasons for different levels of involvement?

Who is actively involved in your Commission?

How would you describe the role/position of your Commission in the UBC?

How does the UBC fit into the different levels in the EU multi-level framework? Is UBC representing cities or is it a separate level on its own?

Does the UBC act as an interest representation towards authorities on other levels?

How is UBC and your Commission related to the EUSBSR?

### Policy and interrelation with EUSBSR

What are current policy problems that you address in your Commission?

Do you think those are the same challenges that are seen in the macro-regional context?

What is the motivation to cooperate in the framework of the EUSBSR?

Does the Action Plan of the EUSBSR offer concrete options which the UBC can use and implement in their work?

Do you think the EUSBSR has changed the ways of working within the network?

If so: How exactly?

If not: Why do you think it had no impact on the way of working?

Do you think the EUSBSR has changed the policies of the UBC?

What are upcoming issues in the future?

### **Epilogue**

Is there anything that I have not mentioned or asked that you would like to address?

### Data analysis

Codebook:

Actors in the UBC

Actors outside the UBC

Cities' participation in the UBC

Effects of EUSBSR on UBC

Introduction interviewee and city

Organisational structure UBC

Policy implementation

Policy problems

Political issues

Problems and limitations

Purpose of the network

Resources

**UBC's** way of working

Example for two codes, export from ATLAS.ti:

### **Quotations Report**

(3) Quotations in any of the groups: Actors in the UBC



### 3:23 Well that are two totally different [probably: approaches 22:07] but I... (13834:14479)

### Content

Well that are two totally different [probably: approaches 22:07] but I want to talk about the network, UBC, so one thing, and a quite big thing is the shift in generation of people. We have in many of our cities, and I don't know whether this is a typical aspect or question for the Baltic Sea Region but we have a lot young people coming in offices. We have young mayors and we have very young politicians in the cities. Meaning that there is a new generation. I think they act and are networked in different ways and so on. That is something that of course will affect and have some influence how cities will operate. And this is in general.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors in the UBC

# 4:15 Yeah, but even we also had young participants taking part in the confe... (9898:10456)

### Content

Yeah, but even we also had young participants taking part in the conference on migration which was held in Rostock last year on migration issues and stuff like that. So, there are many different...But we normally say that youth is not just youth because youth is diverse as everybody else. You find youth who are interested in elderly care because they know that they will grow older and know that there has to be elderly care in the future as well. So you can find youth who are active in almost every area. It's about finding and getting in touch with those.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors in the UBC

## 6:16 At the same time we are trying to organize joint meetings, too. For ex... (8313:8717)

### Content

At the same time we are trying to organize joint meetings, too. For example the first joint meeting was with Safe Cities Commission, Cultural Cities Commission and Sustainable Cities Commission. An idea to have a handbook for public events organisers, how to make safe and sustainable events. So, we should collaborate as well, not only in a small form but even with other commissions and organisations.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors in the UBC

### **Quotations Report**

(8) Quotations in any of the groups: Actors outside the UBC

# 3:9 Then, of course also we have different campaigns, we have a strategic... (4373:4819)

### Content

Then, of course also we have different campaigns, we have a strategic cooperation with a London-based CDP organization in Carbon disclosure programme. And then we try to engage cities in reporting about water and climate related risks and possibilities. And it is a global, well, survey or reporting tool and with this we hope that the cities will do the reporting and their own profile and at the same time being benchmarked on the global level.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

# 4:18 For the last three strategy forums we had been working together with o... (11756:11992)

### Content

For the last three strategy forums we had been working together with other organizations from the region: BSSSC, Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation and also Euroregion Baltic which is an organization of Pomeranian municipalities.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

## 4:21 So we try to establish a collaboration between those organisations, so... (12797:13149)

### Content

So we try to establish a collaboration between those organisations, so as I told we have BSSSC and [inaudible 20:59] and now we have also working together with CBSS, the Council of the Baltic Sea States which is also having some kind of Youth Dialogue going on each year but with a totally different group of youngsters and a totally different strategy.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

# 4:22 So why not try to bring all of our strategies towards a more united st... (13151:13740)

### Content

So why not try to bring all of our strategies towards a more united strategy towards involving young people in the Baltic Sea Region strategy. So it's a work going on and in that sense we have increased our cooperation and our work in the UBC, especially in the Youthful Cities Commission towards this cooperating with other organisations as well. So now we are not just only the cities working. And in fact, tomorrow I'm going to Flensburg to talk to the Ministry of Justice, European Affairs from Schleswig-Holstein towards creating another Youth Dialogue meeting or something like that.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

# 4:32 And then of course we will have some thoughts about our continued work... (21353:21553)

#### Content

And then of course we will have some thoughts about our continued work with BSSSC and maybe start to include the national youth councils in some way in our work towards the next strategy forum as well.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

# 5:12 Yes, Eurocities, working with China, we do a lot of international work... (7088:7265)

### Content

Yes, Eurocities, working with China, we do a lot of international work but the Baltic Sea Region is not our favorite. Now I talk what I can see because we are not the favorite.

#### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

5:22 we go on study trips to Utrecht, to other citie... (13573:14024)

### Content

we go on study trips to Utrecht, to other cities in Holland, in France, in UK, Scotland, Bologna, everywhere. But when the politicians go on study trips, they don't go East. They go to China, but they don't go to the Baltic Sea Region. Sometimes we go to Stockholm, Malmö, Götheborg and Oslo. Copenhagen. But we don't go to Polish cities, we don't go to East German Cities, we go to Düsseldorf, Duisburg, Karlsruhe. Such cities.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC

# 6:21 They are steering the policy area secure and they invited us and we to... (11907:12049)

### Content

They are steering the policy area secure and they invited us and we took part so we are now member of the consortium, so we can have our voice.

### 1 Codes:

O Actors outside the UBC