



5/2/2019

## **Transnational Interreg programmes with German participation: the future programme geographies**

This document was drawn up by the chairs of the German committees of the six Interreg B programme areas with German participation (German federal states) under the chairmanship of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community. This group already elaborated a working paper on the evolution of Interreg B post 2020<sup>1</sup> and another working paper with practical proposals how to improve Interreg B post 2020<sup>2</sup>.

During the present programming period (2014-2020), Germany is involved in six Interreg B programmes with various federal states and regions. The cooperation within the Interreg B programme areas of the **North Sea Region, the Baltic Sea Region, North-West Europe and Central Europe, the Alpine Space and the Danube Region** has proven itself.

According to this Interreg working group,

**these six programme areas should be continued based on the present geographies.**

Note: This paper does not represent Germany's final position but serves as a qualified basis and contribution to the further discussion. In the following, observations concerning adaptations of the future participation of some sub-regions or federal states in the programme areas might be drawn.

The working group's opinion corresponds to the decision of the German "Bundesrat" (Upper House of Parliament)<sup>3</sup> which firmly opposes the abolition of proven programme areas. In case of changes of the programme areas, they should be justified, , and the German federal states should be involved in good time.

### **What speaks well for the programme areas?**

#### **Strengthening common grounds**

The geographies of the North Sea Region and the Baltic Sea Region, of North-West Europe and Central Europe, of the Alpine Space and the Danube Region are based on various political, functional and sociocultural relations such as economic and transport flows, settlement structures or supraregional labour markets. Joint seas, river catchment areas or mountains shape these areas, their economic structures and their populations in the same sustainable way as a joint historic development.

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<sup>1</sup> Working Paper on the Evolution of Interreg B 2020+

[https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/DE/interreg/interregnach2020/positionenartikel/positionenartikel\\_teaser.html;jsessionid=2A84952224145D12BC03A4220702A089.live21301?nn=1966152#target1e](https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/DE/interreg/interregnach2020/positionenartikel/positionenartikel_teaser.html;jsessionid=2A84952224145D12BC03A4220702A089.live21301?nn=1966152#target1e)

<sup>2</sup> Working Paper "Potentials for further improvement of transnational Interreg Programmes post 2020 - some practical suggestions"

[https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/DE/interreg/interregnach2020/positionenartikel/positionenartikel\\_teaser.html;jsessionid=2A84952224145D12BC03A4220702A089.live21301?nn=1966152#target1e](https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/DE/interreg/interregnach2020/positionenartikel/positionenartikel_teaser.html;jsessionid=2A84952224145D12BC03A4220702A089.live21301?nn=1966152#target1e)

<sup>3</sup> Decision of the Bundesrat of 21 September 2018 on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments (Official Document 229/18)

The transnational programme areas enable a regional identification beyond national borders, in large functional sub-regions of Europe. More than thousand projects have already caused organisations and individuals to grow together. Further continuous efforts are nevertheless needed, because concretely tangible cross-border and transnational cooperation between people and institutions is an important and stabilising factor in times of EU-critical tendencies. It is also necessary to grasp at the chances provided by the various networks and partnerships created over the years.

### **Reducing disparities**

In spite of the common grounds, there are considerable socio-economic disparities between the regions and sub-regions of the programme areas. According to the European Commission's ETC regulation proposal, "The transnational cooperation [...] component should aim to strengthen cooperation by means of actions conducive to integrated territorial development linked to the Union's cohesion policy priorities [...]."<sup>4</sup>

In order to achieve a smarter, greener, low-carbon, more interconnected, more social and citizen-oriented Europe, it is necessary to start from the transnational programme areas as Europe's subareas. The programme areas deal ostensibly with similar thematic areas (i.a. innovation, transport, environment). However, due to their specific programme area-related challenges, they pursue different objectives.

Here, regionally specific solutions can be developed and implemented in cooperation and thus, existing economic, social and territorial disparities be reduced.

### **Resuming spatial strategies**

Territorial strategies emphasise the need and the political will of the countries and regions in these areas to advance the efforts for a coordinated spatial development. In doing so, macro-regional EU strategies (Baltic Sea Region, Danube Region, Alpine Region) and other multilateral cooperation (e.g. North Sea Commission or North Seas Energy Cooperation) are of equal importance. A more strategic orientation of the Interreg programmes by linking them with existing territorial or macro-regional strategies in terms of content is explicitly welcomed. The Interreg programmes are an important pillar supporting the implementation of the macro-regional strategies. Nevertheless, solutions are needed how to promote their cross-national governance better. Programme areas with macro-regional strategies should not be curtailed but be maintained as before. Where appropriate, the programme areas should be enlarged to the related macro-regions in order to facilitate an improved interlinkage.

It is also emphasised, that those Interreg programmes that are not linked to maritime or macro-regional strategies have an own strategic justification. Cities and regions are characterised by functional relations to major large areas. In doing so, some regions show relations to various geographic and functional areas. Different functional relations are accompanied by overlaps of programme areas which might imply important synergy effects for the development of related regions. Interreg B plays an important role in unfolding these effects.

**On the following pages, each of the six transnational programme areas with German participation is presented** with regard to the fact why it should be continued to strengthen common grounds, to reduce disparities and to take up territorial strategies.

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<sup>4</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments, statement of reasons see p. 15

## Alpine Space: region of diversity



Unspoiled nature and lively large cities, innovative research centres and sparsely populated country-sides, use of natural resources and protection of sensible ecosystems – the Alpine Space is a region full of diversity and contrasts. Even more than other European regions, the Alpine Space is exposed to the impacts of climate change which manifest themselves in extreme weather events or increasing natural hazards. Due to its central situation in Europe, the Alpine Space is also an important transit area for the European freight transport regarding both the north-southern and the west-eastern direction. The region is characterised by cultural diversity and has a long tradition of cooperation. The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) provides a political-strategic framework for transnational cooperation.

Coping with the challenges in the Alpine Space also in future requires an integrated view and the development of innovative approaches across borders. One of the Alpine Space's main challenges is to find an adequate balance between economic development and nature conservation. In future as well, a project-oriented transnational cooperation will be required to develop integrated and innovative solutions to make the region more competitive, to maintain accessibility and services of general interest in remote regions, to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and to promote a low-carbon passenger and freight transport, to valorise the unique cultural and natural heritage or to protect and network ecosystems and habitats including their services. The various interactions between urban and rural areas are of special spatial and functional importance in the Alpine Space. Similar as the migration tendencies from rural areas they require transnational solutions.

Already in the current programming period 2014 – 2020, the Alpine Space programme is providing significant support for the implementation of the EUSALP. The projects funded by the programme address one or more action groups of this macro-regional strategy. The link to EUSALP and its multi-fund approach should be intensified to enforce the ability of transnational projects to prepare investments and to incorporate the projects into the EUSALP's strategic-political context.

Furthermore, instruments like exchange fora, communication and capitalisation activities, that were developed within the programme to produce synergies between programme and strategy, should be advanced and the governance of EUSALP by the Alpine Space programme be supported.

## Danube Region: cooperation from the Black Forest to the Black Sea - the Danube: a connecting river



With 14 participating countries, the Danube Region is the largest programme area with German participation. Spatial interactions are not only revealed by the course of the River Danube but also by the joint cultural and historic relations of the Region, for example those of the Danube Swabians. Economically as well, the Region reveals a high degree of interdependence (e.g. in the automotive industry) and a strong brain drain from east to west.

At the same time, the old external EU border in the Danube Region is overcome and non-EU member states are involved in the cooperation. The Region covers far more than those countries immediately situated on the River Danube. It is characterised by a large spatial heterogeneity with partly far-reaching economic and social disparities. Based on the cooperation between stronger and less strong regions, the Danube Transnational Programme contributes to reducing these disparities by developing and testing joint solutions within different thematic priorities.

In the course of project cooperation, current challenges are addressed and concrete solutions worked out. Apart from using and protecting the Danube for transport purposes and as an ecological corridor, they include a reliable and cost-efficient energy supply and higher energy efficiency as well as the reduction of social and economic disparities. The thematic priorities are largely covered by the currently ongoing projects. In future, especially the improvement of the innovation capacity and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises is likely to be a key factor for the development of the Danube Region and the strengthening of institutional capacities (administrative, research and educational institutions etc.) will come more to the fore.

The spatial, economic and social cohesion in the Danube Region is supported by the macro-regional EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), which is supported by the Programme by promoting theme-related projects and the eleven priority areas of the macro-strategy. An even more strategic future orientation of the Programme towards the targets of the EUSDR should further intensify the synergies between Programme and Strategy. This is why Programme and macro-regional strategy are to be networked in time and for example, the Strategy's Action Plan is to be revised based on the results of the territorial analysis, which the Programme carries out for the entire Danube Region across all topics.

## Central Europe: from the Iron Curtain towards the heart of Europe



The Central Europe programme area is the only one to encompass the regions on both sides of the former Iron Curtain and is characterised by large socio-economic diversity and structural heterogeneity. The long-term goal in Europe's core area is to carry the increased economic power in larger cities and regional centres also into their surrounding areas and peripheral regions in order to reduce the still existing disparities especially between urban and rural regions.

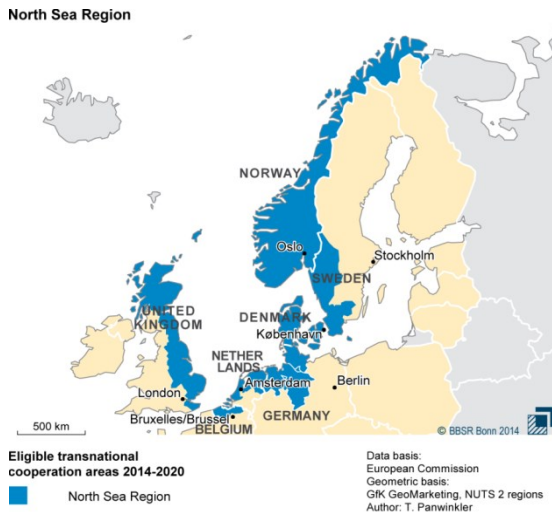
Especially rural regions were and are particularly affected by the structural impacts of the political and economic developments, i.a. the EU enlargement. Their industrial plants could not survive against the global competition and the impacts could by now not be sufficiently compensated. This is why the EU's benefit is hardly perceived by the population and institutions in these regions, which considerably contributes to the Europe-critical tendencies.

Measures are therefore required within the Central Europe programme with regard to cooperation projects that bring concrete benefits both to economic centres and remote regions. The transnational cooperation between people and institutions across various topics will further develop the constructive dialogue between the Eastern and Western European countries, improve the economic cohesion, strengthen the programme area's competitiveness and the connection of surrounding areas to cities and it connects the regions for example along the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor as an important European axis. Trust in the benefits of European cooperation is strengthened and concrete on-site solutions how to cope with the impacts of structural changes are demonstrated in this way.

Compared to the Danube Region and the Alpine Space, the Baltic Sea Region and the Adriatic and Ionian region, Central Europe does not have an own EU macro-regional strategy but considers itself rather as an active and mediating interface between these strategies. The connections and strategic linking opportunities that have been developed over 25 years in this politically, economically and culturally sensible European region would be interrupted, if the programme area was split or some regions were assigned to other programme areas. Furthermore, strengthening the region's identity by promoting transnational projects to find innovative solutions would be complicated. An important instrument to counteract Europe-critical tendencies and socio-economic instabilities concretely would be given away just along the former Iron Curtain.

This is why the Central Europe programme must be developed further and, in future, even more effectively used as an instrument to dismantle territorial, social and especially economic disparities. With an even more strategic orientation, interdisciplinary approaches and practice-oriented projects, the development of this heterogeneous area can be advanced and the trust of citizens and institutions in a united Europe strengthened. The Central Europe programme would thus be attached an important and outstanding importance in strengthening the European integration in the heart of Europe.

## North Sea Region: economic power on the coast



The North Sea Region (NSR) goes from the desert islands and fjords in the far north to the densely populated urban growth regions of Europe. It is characterised by its economic power, good infrastructures, a highly qualified workforce and an efficient environmental risk management.

The North Sea counts among the most intensively used sea basins in the world with many, often rivalling interests (e.g. in the fields of wind power, energy supply, fishery, port industry, shipping and nature protection), which have to be coordinated and balanced. The growth of the North Sea Region and its international competitiveness strongly depend on the strengthening of their knowledge economies and research sceneries. The Interreg North Sea Region programme offers companies and organisations from the whole NSR a forum to take new knowledge and innovative solutions over into the daily work.

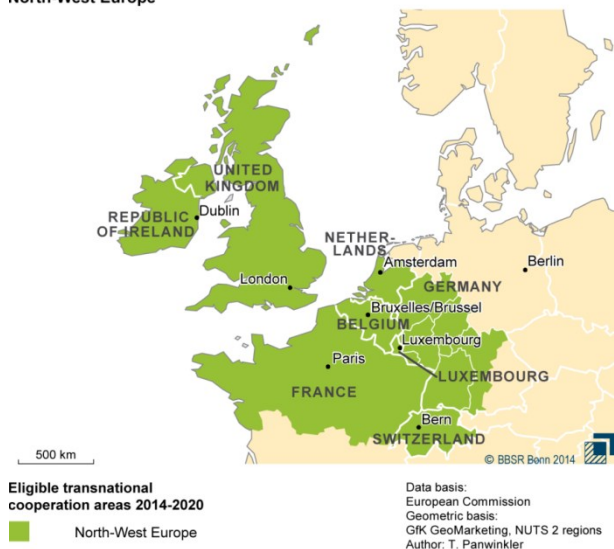
The North Sea Region with its deepwater ports moreover is one of the most important commercial places of transshipment in Europe. The coastal regions bordering on the North Sea with their ports and their hinterland have their joint function as international commercial nodes for the continent in common. The transport sector has an important share in the North Sea Region's economy and offers important links to areas beyond the Region. Another common ground in this context is the challenge to manage increasing transport flows between the regions and from and to ports in a climate-friendly and ecological way.

Cooperation in the North Sea Region supports blue growth and is still needed in order to maintain and develop the Region's natural resources. This includes especially the protection of sea, coast and estuaries. The consequences of the climate change, last but not least the increasing sea level and floods are a special challenge for the regions on the coast and in the hinterland. They can only be tackled if the various use interests can be coordinated and integrated territorial solutions be developed.

The Brexit is going to influence the situation in the North Sea itself and the conditions for cooperation between the institutions in the North Sea area. Disproportionate territorial impacts on the North Sea Region and on sectors like fishing, renewable maritime energy and offshore wind energy, link possibilities between North Sea ports, research and educational activities in the maritime transport sector are expected. Coastal areas and port cities will have to reposition if a new EU external border is created in the North Sea following the Brexit. The effects are likely to exceed purely economic needs. In close cooperation with the North Sea Commission, the Interreg North Sea Region programme provides an important platform for the cooperation between the EU member states with Norway and the United Kingdom as a future non-EU member.

## North-West Europe: Europe's powerhouse

### North-West Europe



North-West Europe (NWE) is Europe's powerhouse: many of the economically strongest European regions are situated there. With many metropolitan regions, large and medium-sized cities, it is the most urban and densely populated INTERREG programme area characterised by various economic interactions. At the same time, the area comprises large rural areas and regions, which are very differently structured, as well as areas and regions being in a state of structural change.

The area's urbanised structure and its above-EU average growth, are both strength and challenge. High emissions, a high resource consumption, the traffic load or social and demographic conditions, typical for densely populated urban areas, require innovative approaches and solutions.

Economic strength and interactions can presently mainly be found between metropolises. A major task for the North-Western European programme area must be to use its economic power in favour and not at the expense of the urban hinterland. The ability of rural areas, for instance in the fields of energy production and sustainable agriculture, must be locally strengthened in line with a functioning and complementary urban-rural system.

The area's heterogeneity confronts the NWE Programme with the challenge to use economic development and high innovation capacity increasingly for territorial compensation and social cohesion. The cohesion of North-West Europe can be favoured if not only urban areas and centres will be promoted but if also the needs of the urban hinterland and of rural areas are more taken into account. This requires innovative approaches that focus on the needs of people and enterprises in cities, urban hinterland and rural areas.

In functional areas without macro-regional strategies as well, such a holistic and spatial view is important and must play a central role in the upcoming programming phase. The need for cooperation might become stronger following the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. Transnational cooperation in the NWE area is therefore also in the future required and should by all means be continued also with the United Kingdom as a third country in an adequate and desirable way.



## Baltic Sea Region: tradition of cooperation

Baltic Sea Region



Eligible transnational cooperation areas 2014-2020

■ Baltic Sea Region

Data basis:  
European Commission  
Geometric basis:  
GfK GeoMarketing, NUTS 2 regions  
Author: T. Panwinkler

The Baltic Sea Region is characterised by the sea, its large area and a comparably sparse population. The Baltic Sea region has turned into a European integration laboratory bringing together various economic backgrounds and cultures. Joint transnational projects, in which partners from old and new EU member states and from neighbouring countries (Belarus, Norway, Russia) come together, considerably contribute to the territorial convergence and to the creation of permanent networks of cooperating organisations and institutions. Examples are the variety of leading economic and technological clusters. The Baltic Sea itself is the most important joint resource of its riparian states. This is why shipping, blue growth and especially keeping the Baltic Sea clean as well as capacity for innovation, social innovations, energy and transport play an important role.

Due to large spatial distances between the regions, last but not least when crossing the Baltic Sea, the development of an efficient and sustainable transport plays a decisive role. A joint challenge in this context is to develop low-carbon shipping on the Baltic Sea and on inland waterways connecting ports around the Baltic Sea efficiently.

The strategic objective of strengthening the Baltic Sea Region's competitiveness, its territorial cohesion and sustainable development is achieved within Interreg by using potentials beyond administrative borders. The political-strategical networking in the Baltic Sea Region serving to overcome large structural disparities between the western and the eastern part as well as the involvement of non-EU member states like Norway and Russia have a long tradition. For the long-term regional sustainability of the Baltic Sea region, Russia as an influential neighbour and partner in various fields of cooperation is indispensable.

Transnational cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region will still be necessary in future in order to stabilise and advance the region and its natural and cultural heritage sustainably. The programme will still have to deal with adaptation strategies to trends like urban sprawl, low population density, demographic processes like ageing and migration and their impacts.

Since 2009, the Baltic Sea Region has been the first programme area with a macro-regional EU strategy. Already now, the Baltic Sea Region is an essential motor for implementing the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. More than half of all projects are thus flagship projects under the Strategy. Besides, the programme financially supports the work of the Policy Area Coordinators, public relations work and the creation of new project partnerships based on Seed Money funding. Such a successful cooperation should be continued in an appropriate way.