



**10th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy of Baltic Sea Region
12-13th of June, 2019
Gdańsk, Poland**

SUMMARY REPORT

**Seminar: 'Reduce, reuse, rethink: connecting EU macro-regions'
Time: 13 June 2019, 10:45-12:15**

Session '**Reduce, reuse, rethink: connecting EU macro-regions**' was looking at the EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) as frameworks for territorial development that are influenced by processes, developments and trends happening outside these frameworks. The session was 'playing' around the keywords of the 10th Annual Forum of the EUSBSR but not directly addressing a circular economy.

The session was looking into three key points:

- most important territorial developments and especially those trends to consider in MRS frameworks ('REDUCE');
- past experiences that can be built upon and reused to better address territorial trends ('REUSE');
- future of the MRS frameworks - thinking if there is a need for a change, a need to empower collaboration ('RETHINK').

Moreover, the session was aiming to have a more distant look on MRS as strategic frameworks for territories without focussing on the MRS thematic or governance questions.

Knowledgeable and experienced speakers provided their views on the three key points of the session. The audience was active replying the question '**What is the most important future challenge?**'. 'Climate change', 'biodiversity', 'pollution', 'health and social care' (see word cloud picture below) were most frequently mentioned challenges for MRS collaboration by the audience. Importance of social dimension in the MRS, the value of cooperation and responsible policymaking were also highlighted as important for the MRS framework. The need to focus on challenge-driven innovation was emphasised both with regards to blue growth, regional value chains and smart specialisation.

Meanwhile, speakers referred to conclusions of the recent research on the European territorial reference frameworks and MRS experience, underlining the importance of:

- stressing a need to avoid (societal & territorial) fragmentation and emphasising the need to deal with common goods;
- addressing negative overlaps and striving for complementarities; as well as
- encouraging more efficient use of existing resources.

Throughout the session, speakers stressed that there are quite some good practices that can be further built on in MRS delivery. Bottom-up initiatives, exchange of experiences and mutual learning across macro-regions make regions more competitive. There is a lot of potential and obvious benefit for connecting practices, experiences and networks across Europe and going beyond one macro-region. Cohesion Policy proposal by the European Commission is strengthening a principle of 'functional territories', synergies across funds and value of cooperation.



Taking into account the MRS is everybody's responsibility, speakers and audience shared their views on **'What can I do to respond to territorial needs?'**.

Among the responses discussed to this question, the topic of the annual forum 'circular economy' as well as the delivery system of the EUSAIR featured strongly. The responses made clear that there are activities where each of us individually has to 'rethink' our doings, and some others require 'rethinking' at an institutional level. Below are a few examples of the points discussed on the stage or via online participation.

Individual rethinking:

- Support the circular economy through reduced personal **consumption**.
- Support circular economy through more sustainable **travelling**.
- Support the EUSBSR through more **communication** about it at a personal level.
- Get more personally engaged and participate actively.

Institutional rethinking:

- Emphasis the role of **the EUSBSR as a platform** bringing together people (rather than a project implementation mechanism) and supporting change by connecting players also beyond the geography of the Strategy. For the Baltic Sea region to meet future trends and move towards blue growth and circular economy cooperation is essential. The EUSBSR can be the platform for it.
- Education and capacity building in all its forms is the key to moving towards a circular economy and a successful EUSBSR. Education and capacity building can **bring about understanding and changes in attitude**. In turn it leads to more responsible policy-making and impactful decisions.
- Do good and **talk about it**. Increasing communication activities about the work and achievements of the EUSBSR (not just in terms of projects but primarily related to policy processes and actions) is needed to increase commitment to cooperation at all levels. This cooperation cannot be left to a single communication body or a strategy. It is a task for every organisation and every person involved.
- Both for a circular economy and the EUSBSR strategy development and implementation processes need to become more inclusive, **involve more stakeholder groups**. We need to get better in asking and involving local players and 'the next generation'¹ when preparing strategies and actions. This implies acknowledging interdependencies across various stakeholders and territories; learn from each other and co-create.
- To allow for a broader participation, we need to support players lacking capacity and make sure that **no player is left alone or left behind**. This includes both involvement and especially capacity building.

Experience from outside the Baltic Sea Region reminded of the fact that the longstanding and good cooperation in the region cannot be taken for given. Indeed, it is something to value, cherish and nourish, so it grows and does not fade away. **Invest in cooperation!**

Summing up the current and future challenges of the Baltic Sea Region as well as other macro-regions are tightly linked to a liveable future with a strong emphasis on climate change and the transition to a circular economy. This requires cooperation and rethinking at the individual and institutional level. 'Thinking global and acting local' was one of the invitations by the audience well presenting the aim of the session.

¹ There was also one remark on stopping differentiating between young and old and become more inclusive simply considering all groups of society and age.

