



Master's Thesis  
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The added value of  
Macro Regional Strategies  
to EU-funded projects

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The EUSAIR case study

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ENRICA CORPACE

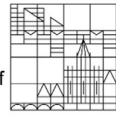


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# MASTER THESIS

**The added value of the Macro Regional Strategies to EU-funded projects:  
*The case of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR)***

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## CHAPTER 1. Abstract

The EU Macro Regional Strategies (MRS) are a relatively new and innovative policy tool to strengthen the macro-regional integration within and above the borders of the European Union. Over the past years, such Strategies gained more importance and by today, 19 EU Member States and 8 non-EU states are involved in these frameworks. Considering the growing importance of MRS, it is surprising that, until today, the real added value of the MRS has not been researched and literature only focusses on explaining the Strategies' functioning in terms of governance structure. Conducting a case study on the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), I want to contribute to better evaluation and monitoring options of MRS. My detailed analysis of the most Southern Macro Region includes an analysis of webpages, the evaluation of a questionnaire which was administered to a wide range of project leaders, and results from the 3rd EUSAIR Annual Forum in May 2018.

The analysis shows that the EUSAIR does not add any value in terms of improved networking and knowledge-sharing practices for the projects' stakeholders. Moreover, it results that the projects link themselves to the Strategy in the hope of having more or better funding opportunities. The overall conclusion is that the EUSAIR does not add value to the projects ongoing in the current programming period

To improve the contribution of the EUSAIR to the EU-funded projects on the Adriatic Ionian macro-region, a more active role of all the involved actors is required. The National Coordinators shall encourage the debate over the topics to be solved on a macro-regional level and advertise best-practice examples of projects addressing relevant issues for the Strategy. The Thematic Coordinators shall increase the number of networking events and give more support to the projects' partners. Finally, the Commission should establish clear and transparent criteria to monitor and evaluate the Strategies.

## CHAPTER 2 Introduction

*“The EU’s macro-regional strategies are gaining ground as an important instrument in the European interregional cooperation. It is our strong belief that these strategies should be evaluated on a regular basis, with regard to both their practical usefulness as a tool for strategic policy-making in a multilevel governance environment and their actual outputs.”*

– Peter Friedrich, Minister for the Bundesrat, Europe and International Affairs, Baden-Württemberg (Germany)

Since 2009, when the first EU Strategy has been implemented, the “macro-regional fever” (Dühr, 2011, p. 2) has spread to other four macro regions on the European territory, and now 19 out of 27 Member States and 8 neighbouring countries are involved in, at least, one Macro Regional Strategy (MRS).

Nevertheless, although most of the EU Member States are implementing this policy instrument on their territory, the added value of Macro Regional Strategies has not been evaluated yet.

A number of reasons contribute to make difficult to estimate the added value of the Strategies.

First of all, the meaning itself of MRS and macro region is not completely clear, for both scholars and EU institutions. The European Commission defined the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the forerunner of this policy tool, as “an integrated framework that allows the European Union to identify needs and allocate available resources” (Samecki, 2009, p. 2). However, following the emergence and the proposals for the other three MRS, namely the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), the definition of the Strategies as “integrated framework” became the most used.

Secondly, the nature of the Macro Regional Strategies is intangible. In fact, the Strategies are an innovative policy instrument based on the ‘three No’s’ rule. Given that their scope is to improve the efficiency in the use of already available resources, they aim to mobilize existing actors (no new institutions) on existing funding schemes (no new funds) and are created by voluntary intergovernmental initiatives (no new laws).

The ‘three-No’s’ rule has its roots in the reasons leading to the creation of the Strategies. The first (EUSBSR) initiative came at a time of financial crisis, mistrust in how the EU was spending the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) budget, and heavy criticism on the inefficiency of the European bureaucracy (Ahner, 2016). The principle of the ‘three No’s’ was perfectly fitting. Moreover, the Strategies, thanks to their intergovernmental approach, allowed the EU to tackle issues where it did not have competence (Ahner, 2016),

or where “the optimal regulatory area was either too large or too small” (Manjone, 2014, p. 319), like in the case of certain environmental issues.

Moreover, the main hope related to the creation of the Strategies was that they would have improved cooperation and coordination among the EU and national actors in the interested areas, together with a more efficient use of the EU funds.

Thirdly, the EU Macro Regional Strategies are located in an already complex policy field. As previously mentioned, the MRS are contributing to the territorial cooperation, which is a specific objective of the Cohesion Policy. The European Territorial Cooperation programmes (ETC), are co-financed by the ERDF and can cover large areas, identical to the territory involved in a Strategy. This happens for all the four macro regions which endorsed an EU Strategy. Also, this is often the reason of confusion between the Transnational Cooperation programmes and the MRS. Yet, the difference between them is important: the MRS are, in fact, not part of the ETC. Nevertheless, the Transnational Cooperation programmes, having their own budgets, are called to contribute to the achievements of thematic objectives of the Strategies.

In other words, the Macro Regional Strategies do not belong to the Cohesion Policy framework but serve the same objectives, functioning as a further policy framework in a, already intricate, policy area.

As it might seem clear, monitoring and evaluating the Macro Regional Strategies tool is quite difficult, due to the complexity of the policy field, summed to the novelty of this policy instrument, and to the intangible broad goals that the Strategies wants to achieve.

Not much research has been done on the EU Strategies, until now, and the academic debate on MRS has been focussed on explaining the functioning of the Strategies in terms of governance structure. In particular, the Strategies have been looked by scholars through the lenses of the Multilevel, External, and Experimentalist Governance perspectives.

As a matter of fact, the MRS have elements belonging to these three paradigms.

First, they are multilevel governance examples in relation to the mobilization of institutional and non-institutional actors to realize the Strategy’s goals (Piattoni, 2010a, 2010b, 2016, Gänzle & Kern 2016, Gänzle, 2017).

Secondly, the fact that non-Member States are often included in the implementation of the Strategies makes them suitable examples of external governance of the EU, which uses this tool to expand its policies beyond the EU borders (Chilla et al., 2017, Stocchiero, 2010a, 2010b, Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016).

Thirdly, MRS are most of all examples of experimentalist governance (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017, Gänzle, 2017, Chilla et al. 2017) because they promote innovation through temporary goal-setting and cyclical revision of the objectives by the actors in charge of the implementation.

Nevertheless, the actual added value of the Macro Regional Strategies to the projects they are a framework of remains unknown.

On the added value of MRS there is in fact no academic literature and only one EU-financed study has been published on this topic (INTERREG, 2017a).

Therefore, my thesis aims to contribute to cover this research gap by answering the question whether and to what extent the Strategies add value to the EU-financed projects.

To operationalize the Strategy's added value to projects, I borrow the definition from the INTERACT (2017a) paper, which investigated the added value of the EUSBSR and EUSDR on the EU-funded projects in the programming period 2007-2013.

This definition helps me to investigate the added value in the different project's life-cycle phases, namely the project development, the project implementation, and the project closure and future.

My research focusses on the EUSAIR, a Strategy which has been not subject of studies yet, due to its very recent implementation (2014).

Furthermore, the Adriatic Ionian region represent the most different case compared with those investigated by INTERACT. As a matter of fact, the EUSAIR has a powerful external dimension (half of the participating countries are not Member States), and it covers the most affected region by the economic and financial crisis, and the migratory crisis.

I conduct my analysis on the current programming period (2014-2020), scrutinizing project which are still in the implementation phase, to obtain the most recent impression by their projects' lead. The ongoing implementation of the EUSAIR projects allows me to gather recent impressions of the people working on the projects about the actual value that the MRS adds to their daily work and future developments of their projects.

Hence, the relevance of my thesis relies not only in the novelty of the topic, but also because it tests the definition on a recently-created, and not previously studied Strategy.

This work aims to contribute to a better understanding of the MRS policy instrument and constitute an attempt to evaluate the outcomes of the Strategy measuring the benefits received by the EU-funded projects.

To do so, I follow a two-steps procedure. I, first, analyse the websites of the EUSAIR, the Transnational Cooperation programmes involved, and their financed projects. Secondly, I administrate a questionnaire to the projects' leads of the selected project to investigate their perception over the added value of the Strategy to their projects.

In addition to this, I participate to the 3<sup>rd</sup> EUSAIR Annual Forum in Catania, where I have the chance to gather the most up-to-date information about the Strategy's recognised limits and future goals.

The thesis is organised in five chapters. The first one (Chapter 3) gives the informational background to understand the functioning and the vocabulary related to this policy tool, from the struggles in finding a common definition, to its complex relation with the Cohesion Policy. The second chapter (Chapter 4) gives an overview of the existing literature on the MRS, which help us to theorizing it, and it leads to the research question

and its operationalization. The third chapter (Chapter 5) offers a description of the methodology: it describes the case study, explains the specific aims and the detailed structure of the questionnaire, states my expectations, and recognizes the limitations of this study. In the fourth chapter (Chapter 6) a report of my findings limited to the relevant aspects is given. Finally, the conclusions (Chapter 7) sum up the content of this research and give an answer to the research question and its implications.



## **CHAPTER 3. Macro Regions and Macro Regional Strategies: An introduction**

In this chapter I give an overview of the policy sector I am researching about: the EU Macro Regional Strategies (MRS).

I will explain the concept and its main characteristics, and the difference between a macro region and a Strategy, highlighting the difficulties of institutions and scholars to give a standard definition. I will contextualise this policy instrument in the Cohesion Policy, explaining the differences and similarities with Territorial Cooperation Programmes like Interreg B.

The information contained in this chapter will serve as general knowledge over the thesis's topic, helping the reader to collocate it in the EU institutional and policy framework.

### 3.1. Macro-regions and Macro Regional Strategies: a struggle in definition

In the following sections, I explain what a Macro Regional Strategy is, why it is relevant for the EU, which are the main innovative characteristics of this policy instrument, and which were the reasons leading to its creation.

#### 3.1.1. An attempt to define macro regions and Macro Regional Strategies

Because of the novelty of this policy instrument, a common definition of macro region and Macro Regional Strategy has not been given yet, and the two nouns are often used as synonyms in the literature. Nevertheless, it is important for the scope of this thesis to clarify the distinction between the two, and, in the following chapters, to distinguish the MRS from the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes.

The definition of macro region has been used by scholars to describe, on the one hand, global group of nations like the EU itself, and, on the other hand, a group of administrative regions within a country (Samecki, 2009). Complete literature on the topic is in fact rather low and despite the academic attempt to categorize macro regions within the changes and process from 'old' to 'new regionalism' (Hettne, 1999), a clear explanation of the concept is still missing.

Despite the very different contexts in which 'macro region' is used, it is clear that a macro region is the opposite of a micro region, and hence that this noun applies to a group of communities and regions belonging to more than one country.

Not only in the academic literature, but also in the EU institutional documents, an official universal definition of macro region and Macro Regional Strategy has not been established yet, even if the first EU Macro Regional Strategy has been in place since 2009, and since then other three have been implemented.

The European Commission gives a rather vague definition of macro regions, which are classified as “an area spreading including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges [...] of a geographical, cultural, economic or other nature” (Samecki, 2009, p. 1). The definition does not carry any implication of scale, but only the cross-border transnational dimension.

The cross-border transnational dimension is stated also by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) (2011) in reference to the Strategies. They are said to constitute a new type of territorial cooperation involving both the interregional and the transnational level of governance. This is one of the cases in which macro regions and MRS are identified as one thing.

Samecki (2009) argues that the fundamental characteristics of a macro region in the EU-context are *functionality* and *flexibility*. This means that the actual boundaries of the macro region can vary and change according to the policy area in question, as it is also affirmed by DG Regio (European Commission, 2012b).

Hence, it is possible for functional (macro) regions to overlap, and for one site to belong to more than one region and therefore participates to more than one Strategy (Schymik, 2011). This is the case of e.g. Croatia which participates to both the EUSAIR and the EUSDR.

Similarly, a commonly agreed definition of Macro Regional Strategy does not officially exist.

To solve common challenges and take on transnational possibilities, the regions belonging to a macro region can find common tailored-made solutions through a Macro Regional Strategy.

The CoR describe the Strategies as a new form of “territorial cooperation at the interregional and transnational level to meet the European objectives defined in the 2020 strategy, the Cohesion Policy, the Integrated Maritime Policy and the External Cooperation Policies” (CPMR General Secretariat, 2012, p. 2).

The Commission, instead, referring to the EUSBSR, states that a Strategy is “an integrated framework that allows the European Union and the Member States to identify needs and allocate available resources” (Samecki, 2009, p. 2).

The above definition containing the key words *integrated framework*, has recently been used in EU produced documents (INTERACT, 2017a; INTERACT 2017b) and official events (ADRION Annual Forum, 22.05.2018; EUSAIR Forum, 24-25.05.2018) to offer a description of what generally a MRS is. These key terms give in fact special emphasis to the role of facilitator that the Strategy has to play in connecting actions within and across policy fields in a wide geographical area. According to Chilla et al., Macro Regional Strategies are “an ‘emerging-in-between’ at the interface of regional integration and its constituent parts (e.g. Member States)” (Chilla et al., 2017, p. 133).

Other important element of the MRS expressed by the CPMR General Secretariat (2012) is the necessity of a strong political commitment by the States endorsing the Strategy, which allows them to work on reaching the objectives and avoiding a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

To sum up, the term ‘macro-region’ refers to the geographical area including different administrative regions belonging to more than one country. This cross-border area brings together territories sharing the same natural resources (a sea, a river, or a mountain chain) and facing similar challenges. Nevertheless, we should not imagine it as a larger administrative region, so with fix borders and a defined extension.

As a matter of fact, for the large geographical extension, each of the challenges is not shared by the full number of the administrative regions included in the macro-region, but the single units decide to cooperate with others on specific common issues. For this reason, the borders of the macro-region are ‘flexible’ and this means that they change according to the single challenges to be faced. To give an example, if the administrative region A does not consider the situation S1 as a challenge anymore, it can drop from the cooperation with regions B and C on this issue by stopping pooling resources to face it, but it keeps staying in the macro-region by supporting the solutions to issues S2 and S3. The macro-regions are in fact ‘functional’ regarding the solutions and their existence depends not only from the presence of common challenges, but also on the fact that the single administrative regions (and the countries they belong to) are willing to pool their resources to solve them.

To face the common challenges, the EU gives to each macro-region, which wants to be recognised as such, the opportunity to arrange a Strategy, namely an “integrated framework, which shall contribute to better governance of large territories, rationalise existing resources and use them more efficiently” (INTERACT, 2017a, p. 11). The final scope of the Strategy is to “empower macro-regional actors in the pursuit of specific objectives” (Chilla et al., 2017, p. 133).

The key actors involved in the creation of the Strategy are the Member States. The MRS are initiated and demanded by the countries concerned (until now the initiators have always been EU Member States, but it is not excluded that in some cases non-EU countries can participate to the request of a Strategy). The request is done via the European Council. Following it, the Strategies are drafted and approved by the Commission (European Commission, 2017). In addition to the leading role in the strategic coordination played by the Commission at the initial stages, a high-level group of EU Macro Regional Strategies, including representatives from the 28 Member States and the non-EU countries involved in the Strategies, meets to deliberate over the overall line that must be followed by all the MRS (European Commission, 2017).

Hence, the Strategies’ implementation strongly relies on the commitment of the participating countries.

To conclude, the MRS are intergovernmental initiatives which serve as integrated frameworks for the macro-regional actors to find shared solutions to common challenges.

### 3.1.2. Macro Regional Strategies: the origins

The legal framework that allowed the arise of the “macro regional fever” (Dühr, 2011, p. 2) is the Treaty of Lisbon, entered into force in 2009, which gave new emphasis to the regional and territorial cohesion, by increasing the cooperation within the EU especially through territorial cooperation (Faludi, 2010). The responsibility of the Union to “promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States” (art. 3 TEU<sup>1</sup>) gained strength in combination with the new art. 174 TFEU<sup>2</sup>, which stipulates that “the Union shall develop and pursue actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion, [...] and aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions”. It was clear, then, that the territorial dimension was becoming an important part of the future EU policies.

The obligation to strengthening the internal cohesion of the Union in all its aspects was clashing with the budget constrains coming from the ongoing economic and financial crisis.

According to Gänzle and Kern (2016) the reasons driving the creation of the MRS include *exogenous factors* regarding both “the EU level and the macro-regions themselves” (Gänzle & Kern, 2016, p. 8 - 9), and *endogenous factors* generated by the nature of the macro-regions.

The economic and financial crisis is, in fact, one of the exogenous factors contributing to the creation of the MRS (Gänzle & Kern, 2016). The budget restrictions, which affected all the Member States, but particularly some of those who participated to the two pilot Strategies (EUSBSR and EUSDR) like Hungary and Latvia, were asking for greater efficiency in the use of economic resources and in the implementation of policies. The Strategy allowed better cross-policy coordination and shared solutions for common problems among neighbouring countries.

The second exogenous factor identified by the authors is the growing heterogeneity of the Union due to the big enlargement towards East. The inclusion in the EU of the new eastern-European Member States did not mean only cultural enrichment but implied also more economic integration and the need of “increasing economic (inter)dependencies among territories” (Gänzle & Kern, 2016, p. 9) belonging to the same macro-region. The creation of common Strategies was a straightforward way to facilitate economic collaboration between old, new, and candidate Member States. After all, cooperation among blocks of regions such as the Euro-Mediterranean Union or Baltic Sea Union started to emerge already after the Cold War with the same scope of facilitating the accession to the EU of bordering countries (Leggewie, 2012; Frey, 2012; Dangerfield, 2016).

The third exogenous factor is the necessity of a new strategic narrative of the EU to balance the mistrust in the European institutions generated by the crisis with the sense of belonging to a smaller, but still European, unit.

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<sup>1</sup> Treaty on the European Union

<sup>2</sup> Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

The first endogenous factor identified by Gänzle and Kern (2016) as contributor to the creation of the Strategies is a shared past: a common culture and historical tradition is a useful narrative to build on a collaboration. Examples of this are the Hanseatic League for the Baltic Sea region or the very recent Italian ‘Peace movement’ which coordinated important operations and solidarity action in the Western Balkans, during the war in the former Yugoslavia (Chilla et al., 2017; Dangerfield, 2016).

The second endogenous reason that contributed to the initiation of a MRS is the desire of the lower-governance levels to be represented better in Brussels. Pushed by the common past and by the chance to increase their lobby capacity at the EU, provinces and municipalities saw the Macro Regional Strategies as a way to promote actions for the local development, with a bottom-up approach (Blatter et al., 2008). Moreover, the MRS are functional to promote citizens participation at the EU (Leggewie, 2012).

Finally, the third endogenous factor catalysing the creation of the Strategies is the similar geographical characteristics of the territories constituting each region: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR) are built around a water basin, and the countries constituting the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) on the same mountain chain. This means that each of these groups of countries needs to share and pool resources from a common natural source, which calls for common action of preservation (Ostrom, 1990).

### 3.1.3. The three no’s rule

The reasons and objectives that led to the creation and implementation of the MRS give the idea that the Strategies are “measures to combat the EU financial and economic crisis by proposing better mechanism for the comprehensive coordination of scarce budgetary resources” (Kern & Gänzle, 2013a, p. 3). The peculiar ‘three-No rule’ related to the MRS is the main indicator of the fact that the Strategies want to contribute to better governance of large territories, belonging to different states, and rationalise existing resources for a more efficient use of them.

The first ‘No’ regards the institutions for the MRS implementation. No new organization must be created to realize the Strategies. The policy advisor at the Directorate General for Regional Policy, David Sweet affirmed that “the European Commission cannot and does not want to manage the strategy directly, as we do not have sufficient resources and local knowledge. We need to rely on a governance model involving institutions and organizations from the participating regions, who know how things can be done best” (Malvani, 2011, p. 4).

This, of course, does not mean the no governance structures exist at all: The Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)<sup>3</sup> have the functions of facilitating the cooperation in the region, assisting projects within the macro region, and monitoring the implementation processes, reporting them back to the Commission.

The second ‘No’ is referred to funding opportunities. Following up on their task of using the existing resources in a more efficient way, no new budget is established by the Commission to finance the projects under the macro regional cooperation. This should lead to a better alignment of funding from various existing sources, namely coming from the EU, regional, national or local ones. The concept itself of ‘alignment of funding’ was born together with the Macro Regional Strategies in the EU. It asks for a stronger cooperation between the involved actors, in addition to the coordination and prioritization of all EU, national and regional funding programmes (Dühr, 2011).

Lastly, the third ‘No’ refers to the absence of new legislation: MRS are based on Action Plans as a main document. They take the form of “communications” issued by the European Commission and authorized by the Council. Only at a second stage, the involved Member States can decide whether they want to implement these communications. Therefore, no binding regulations have been done on the EU level, and Member States take on the MRS voluntarily. Also, in this case, the idea behind the ‘no legislation’ rule aims to more efficiency: in particular, to improve the already existing policies and strengthen the cooperation among different sectors in various countries or regions (Schymik, 2011).

#### 3.1.4. The relevance of the MRS for the EU

When the countries around the Baltic Sea carried on the proposal for a Baltic Sea Macro Regional Strategy, the Strategy was presented as a pragmatic approach to finding new ways to make public policies more efficient (Stocchiero, 2010a) and promoted as a new layer of governance “located between the national state and the supranational community” (Schymik & Krumney, 2009, p. 200) because it involves the local, regional and national administrations and communities.

According to the Commission (2009) the novelty of the Macro Regional Strategies stays in the integrated approach, which includes different actors, policies and financing plans, towards common objectives.

The convergence of many political wills and resources with the scope of implementing projects in a common space is said to be another relevant characteristic of the Strategies (Stocchiero, 2010b), but it regards only the initial phase of them. For this to happen, it is essential that the governments involved are ready to harmonize their domestic policies with those of their partner countries, and to pool their resources to realise the MRS’s goals, even

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<sup>3</sup> An explanation of what PACs are, and on how the terminology varies across Strategies is given in paragraph 3.2.1.

when the project takes place over the borders of their own state. Moreover, the central governments are the main economic contributors to the projects.

Nevertheless, given that the Macro Regional Strategies are a trans-national political instrument, we must not think of them as re-nationalization of EU policy (Stocchiero, 2010b). As a matter of facts, the role of the regions and the local administration in promoting “bottom-up” projects, and implementing the initiatives is essential and should not be undervalued.

### 3.2. The four Macro Regional Strategies in a nutshell

In this section, I explain the vocabulary related to the Strategies, explaining terms as: Pillars, flagship projects, horizontal activities etc. Moreover, I will give a brief overview of the four Macro Regional Strategies in place.

This is important to better understand the ideas discussed in the following chapters.

#### 3.2.1. Macro Regional Strategy: basic vocabulary

Reading about Macro Regional Strategy is an arduous task, due to the very different terminology used by each Strategy to indicate equal concepts.

When reading about MRS, one of the first recurring term is ‘Pillar’, these are the goals that the Strategy wants to achieve. Nevertheless, ‘Pillar’ is the name used only by the EUSDR and the EUSAIR to refer to the Strategy’s aims, ‘Objectives’ is instead the noun with whom the EUSBSR and EUSALP refer to them.

In the same way, the thematic fields in which the Strategy wants to take action to achieve the goals take different names in each of the Strategies. They are named ‘Policy Areas’ (EUSBSR), ‘Priority Areas’ (EUSDR), ‘Topics per Pillar’ (EUSAIR) and ‘Actions’ (EUSALP).

There are then the cross-cutting issues to be tackled by the MRS, namely those which go beyond single Pillars. They are called ‘Horizontal Actions/Principles’ by the EUSBSR and the EUSAIR, and respectively ‘Priority Area 10’ and ‘Objective 4’ by the EUSDR and EUSALP.

As explained in paragraph 3.1.3., the MRS do not have any own funding to support the projects. Nevertheless, they can recognise the particular contribution of some EU-funded projects to reach the Strategy’s goals in the region. These projects are labelled ‘flagship’ by the EUSBSR and ‘Indicative actions’ by the other three Strategies.

The differences in vocabulary affect also the way how the actors and stakeholders are named in each Strategy. With the exception of the ‘National Coordinator’ who is, in all cases, the person responsible for the coordination of the Strategy’s implementation at the national level, all the other bodies are called differently in each Strategy, even if they have more or less the same functions.

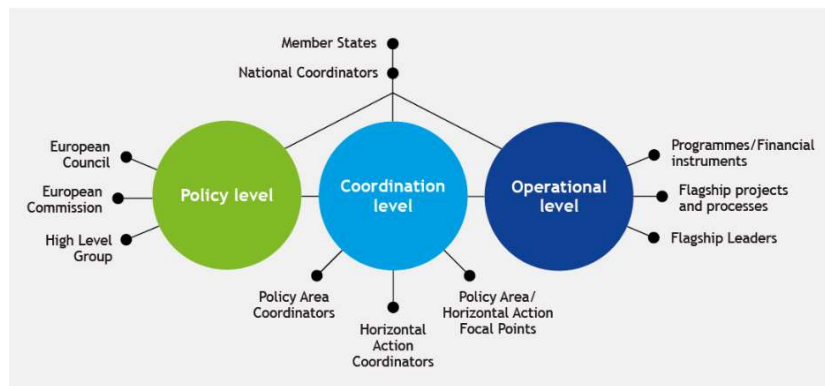
For example, in each Strategy, there is a body deciding on the strategic implementation and the development aspects of the Strategy. They are called ‘National Coordinators Group’ by the EUSBSR, ‘Meetings of National Coordinators’ by the EUSDR, ‘Governing Board’ by the EUSAIR and ‘Executive Board’ by the EUSALP.

Each thematic field has its own coordinator body, which changes name according to how the Strategy calls the goals to be achieved. Therefore, the body will be called, in order, ‘Policy Coordinator’, ‘Priority Area Coordinator’, ‘Pillar Coordinator’ and ‘Action Group Leader’, for the EUSBSR, the EUSDR, the EUSAIR, and the EUSALP.

### 3.2.2. The governance structure: the example of the EUSBSR

Despite the difference in names, the governance structure of the Strategies is pretty homogeneous across them, with only minor differences regarding supplementary bodies. To give an example of how the MRS work, I chose the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, because it is the oldest in place and most clearly defined one<sup>4</sup>.

As mentioned in paragraph 3.1.1., the Member States are the initiators of the Strategy, and the Commission is the key actor in drafting and approving the policy. The Commission is also responsible of the supervision, the coordination and the follow-up of the Strategies.



**Fig.1.** The governance system of the EUSBSR. *Source:* EUSBSR website<sup>5</sup>

As illustrated in Fig.1, the Commission is in charge of the strategic coordination, taking policy initiatives in collaboration with the High-level Group, the highest body established for all Macro-Regional Strategies (composed by the 28 Member States and the non-EU countries included in at least one Strategy). The High-level Group advises the Commission providing opinions on the review of the Strategies’ implementation (Kern & Gänzle, 2013a).

The Member (and non-Member) States are responsible to make sure that the policies and financial instruments are in line with the Strategy. To do so, they rely on the National

<sup>4</sup> The specific names of the governance bodies in this section are specific to the EUSBSR. The differences in terminology have been explained in the paragraph 3.2.1.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/about/governance-menu> Accessed last time on 20.06.2018)



Contact Points (NCP), whose task is to pursue political support and collaboration by exchanging best-practices with the NCPs of the other participating countries.

The overall coordination of the Strategy relies instead on the Policy Area Coordinators and the Horizontal Action Coordinators. They are responsible to apply the necessary measures to ensure the visibility of the Strategy and the achievements of its goals. They have also the tasks of reviewing the results and suggesting changes or dismissing of actions from the Action Plan.

Finally, the success of the Strategy at the operational level depends on the projects financed by different EU and national sources.

### 3.2.3. Brief overview on the Macro Regional Strategies in place

The first Macro Regional Strategy approved by the Commission has been the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, in 2009. This Strategy is composed by eight countries (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) located alongside the 8000km of the Baltic Sea coastline which they share with only one country not participating to the Strategy, Russia. Their goals are articulated in three objectives, which represent the three key challenges of the Strategy: ‘Save the sea’, ‘Connect the region’ and ‘Increase prosperity’. Each objective is developed in four sub-objectives (EUSBS webpage, 2018<sup>6</sup>).

The second EU Strategy in order of time is the one covering the Danube region (EUSBSR), approved by the Commission in 2010. Its territory covers the area from the Black Forest in Germany, to the Black Sea. The Strategy involves nine EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia), three accession countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) and two neighbouring countries (Moldova, and Ukraine).

The issues addressed by the Strategy are divided among four Pillars (‘Connecting the Danube region’, ‘Protecting the environment’, ‘Building Prosperity’, ‘Strengthening the Danube Region’) and subdivided in twelve Priority Areas (EUSDR webpage<sup>7</sup>).

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR) has been the third Strategy to be approved and it is in implementation since 2014. It includes the eight countries surrounding the Adriatic Ionian Sea: four Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia).

The Strategy is founded on four Pillars representing key challenges of the region: ‘Blue Growth’, ‘Connecting the Region’, ‘Environmental Quality’, and ‘Sustainable Tourism’. Each of the Pillar is divided into two or three Topics (EUSAIR webpage<sup>8</sup>).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/> Accessed last time on 20.06.2018

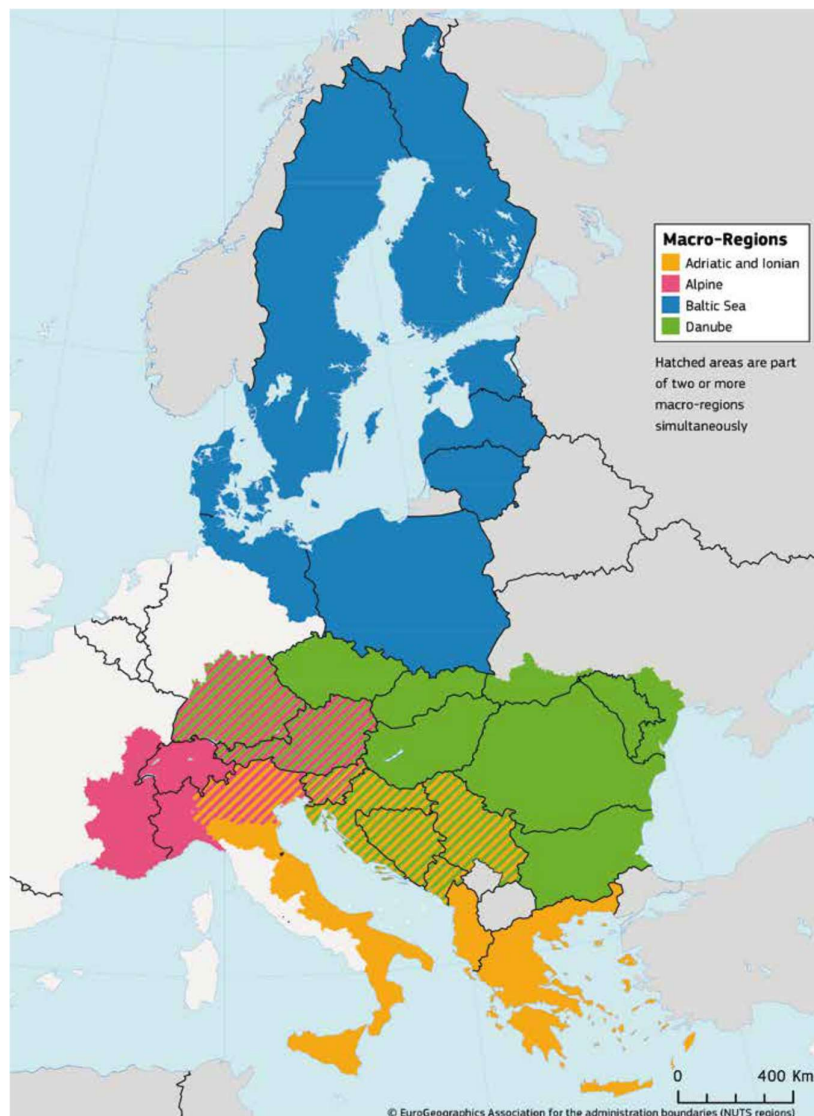
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.danube-region.eu/about/priorities> Accessed last time on 20.06.2018

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/about-eusair/pillars/> Accessed last time on 20.06.2018

Finally, the youngest EU Strategy is the one for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), which includes the area over the Alpine chain. In the EUSALP, established in 2015, seven countries are involved: five Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) and two non-EU countries (Liechtenstein and Switzerland).

The Strategy is built upon three general action-oriented thematic policy areas (‘Economic Growth and Innovation’, ‘Mobility and Connectivity’, ‘Environment and Energy’) and one cross-cutting policy area (‘Governance, including Institutional Capacity’). Each of them is carried on by multiple Thematic Groups (EUSALP webpage<sup>9</sup>).

To sum up, the territory covered by the four Macro Regional Strategies includes nineteen Member States and eight non-EU countries. Some countries, like Germany and Slovenia, are involved in three Strategies, while Croatia, Italy and Austria, as well as the non-Member States Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia are involved in two (Map.1).



**Map 1.** The geographical coverage of the EU Macro Regional Strategies.  
*Source:* European Commission, 2017

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.alpine-region.eu/> Accessed last time on 20.06.2018

### 3.3. The relation of the Strategies with the Cohesion Policy

The Cohesion Policy (CP) is the principal tool of the EU to deliver the Europe2020 goals: reducing the unemployment, investing more in Research and Development, tackling climate change by reducing emissions and increasing energy efficiency, increasing the number of people with a complete education, and reducing poverty and social exclusion (European Commission, 2010). The Cohesion Policy was developed on the key principles of multi-annual programming, strategic orientation of investments, and involvement of regional and local partners. That is the reason why the CP includes the Structural Fund (European Regional Development Funds, ERDF, and European Social Fund, ESF) in its total budget. More than one third of the whole EU budget is invested into the Regional and Cohesion Policy (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016) and in the current programming period, €351.8 billion are the total budget available for projects financed by ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund.

One important element of the CP is to encourage the cooperation among regions and cities in Europe through joint programmes and networks (CEC, 2014). The programmes to enhance the collaboration and the exchange of know-how among regions constitute the ‘European Territorial Cooperation (ETC)’ objective of the Cohesion Policy and are realized through the Interreg programmes.

Interreg programmes are distinguished in three types: The cross-border regional cooperation ‘Interreg A’ for which NUTS3 level regions<sup>10</sup> are eligible, the transnational cooperation ‘Interreg B’ for which the Commission identified thirteen cooperation zones (European Commission, 2007), and interregional cooperation ‘INTERREG C’ which finances networks to exchange knowledge, for which all regions are eligible.

Even if not formally part of the Cohesion Policy, it is important to mention the instruments which are available for the development of the neighbouring regions belonging to non-EU countries. These are: The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for the cooperation between regions of candidate countries and EU Member States, and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) which sustains the cooperation of EU- and partner countries.

The Macro Regional Strategies do not belong to the CP framework but serve the same objectives of Europe2020, functioning as a further policy framework in a, already complex, policy area.

That is the reason why the links of the Strategies with the Cohesion Policy programmes are of particular relevance.

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<sup>10</sup> NUTS is the acronym for “Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. The level of analysis goes from larger (NUTS1) to smaller (NUTS3) units of territory. NUTS1 are major social economic regions, NUTS2 are basic regions for the application of regional policies, and NUTS3 the smallest regions for specific diagnoses. Under the NUTS level, there are the LAUs (Local Administrative Units) which are cities, towns, villages, and rural areas (Eurostat website: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background> Accessed on 21.06.2018)

On the one hand, for the MRS, programmes such as Interreg are sources of potential funding because the EU-financed projects are “asked to be ‘coherent’ with the relevant ‘external’ strategies, such as the macro regional ones” (McMaster & van den Zwet, 2016, p. 54). On the other hand, if the projects explicitly link themselves to a Strategy, it means that they see some added value in doing so. This second point is investigated in my thesis, and it requires some further background information, provided in the following paragraphs.

### 3.3.1. Links of the MRS with the CP: Strategic and thematic focus

Each Strategy is realized through its own Action Plan. The Action Plans are structured in Pillars and subdivided in Priority Areas<sup>11</sup>.

The territorial cooperation programmes which contribute to reach the Strategy’s goals give their contribution through the projects they finance. The results of the Strategy are then delivered through the projects outcomes, and the expectation is that belonging to the Strategy will add value to the existing interventions. Among the projects, a couple of them are chosen to be ‘flagship’ or ‘structural’ of the Strategy, because of their capacity of integrate more than one Pillar and their “reproducibility” (Gherardi, L., Managing Authority Interreg ADRION, Annual ADRION Forum, 22.05.2018).

In the Cohesion Policy for the current programming period (2014-2020), a number of adjustments were made to the regulation to facilitate the thematic and strategic linkages between the MRS and the programmes operating in the areas under the Strategy. In the specific regulation covering territorial cooperation programmes, the key role of the Strategies was acknowledged, and specific provisions made to assign resources to “enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by developing and coordinating Macro Regional Strategies” (McMaster, van der Zwet, 2016, p. 58).

However, how to link programmes to the MRS is still under debate for those programmes which are only partly covering the regions involved in the Strategy (McMaster, van der Zwet, 2016).

### 3.3.2. Links of the MRS with the CP: Financial resources

In paragraph 3.1.1, I explained the ‘three-No’s rule’, saying that the second of the ‘no’ refers to the funding. It might then seem then that the MRS do not receive any kind of economic support from the Union to carry on their objectives. This has been a point on which big debate has been conducted. The Strategies receive funds from the Member States, and from the regions, and one of the main reason for their existence is to administrate more efficiently existing resources. Therefore, the question arose whether territorial cooperation programmes, namely Interreg B type, can cover the exact same territory than the MRS. In all four the MRS in place, an Interreg B programme is also in place on the

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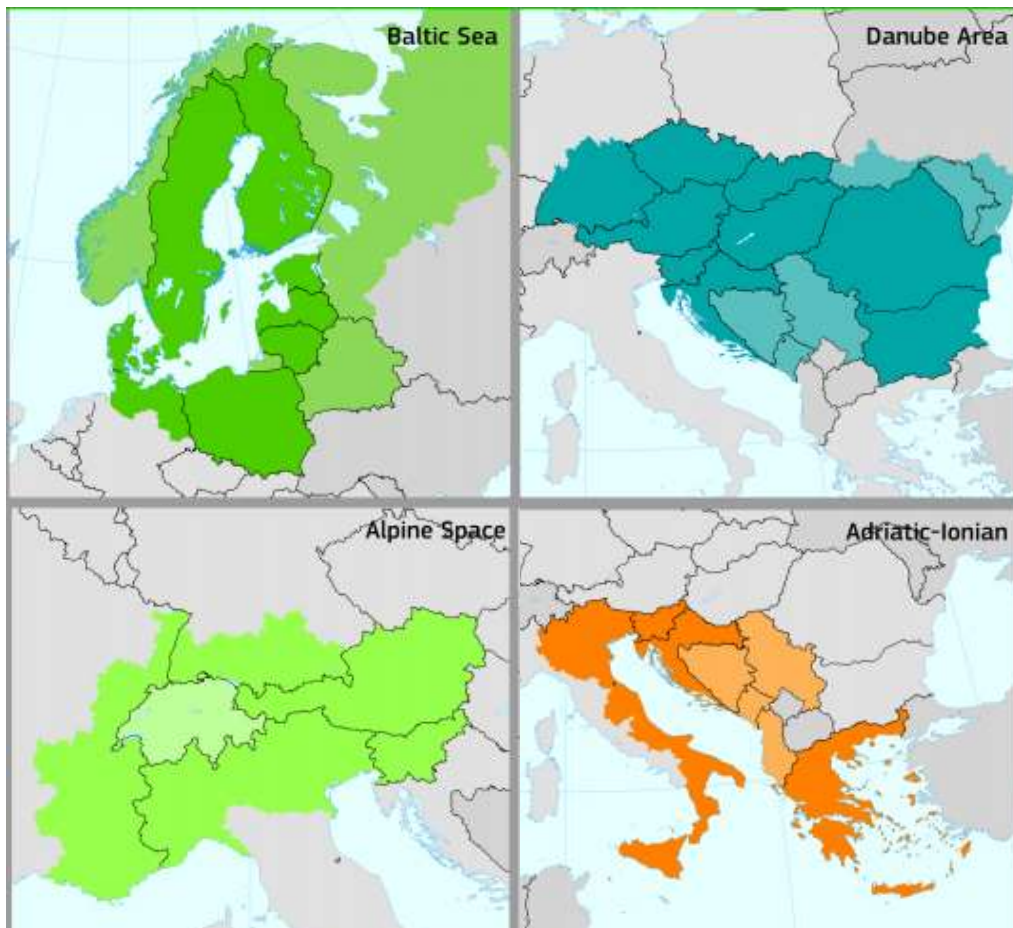
<sup>11</sup> The names of the governance bodies used in this section are specific to the EUSAIR. For differences in terminology across Strategies, check paragraph 3.2.1.

macro region covered by the Strategy. The Interreg ADRION for the EUSAIR, the Interreg Baltic Sea for the EUSBSR, the Interreg Danube for the EUSDR and the Interreg Alpine for the EUSALP. The projects selected as flagship projects for the EUSBSR and for the EUSDR have been selected from the correspondent Interreg B programme, and their Priority Axes correspond to the Strategies' Pillars.

This reflects the Fifth Cohesion Report stating: “Macro Regional Strategies should be [...] supported by a reinforced transnational strand, although the bulk of funding should come from the national and regional programmes co-financed by the Cohesion Policy and from other national resources” (CEC, 2010, p. xvi).

### 3.3.3. Interreg B and MRS: what difference aside from the financial aspect?

The strong geographical connection between the territorial cooperation programmes (Interreg B), and the respective Strategies (Map 2) must not anyway blur the distinction between these two EU regional development instruments.



**Map. 2** The Interreg B programmes covering the same geographical areas of the Macro Regional Strategies.  
*Source:* [adapted from] European Commission (2014)<sup>1</sup>

The three main differences between Interreg B and the MRS are: the core idea, the number of themes addressed, the way it is implemented and managed.

First of all, in fact, Interreg is a *strategic programme document* designed to implement certain regional development priorities within certain budget and in a time-period, co-financing transnational cooperation programmes. The MRS, instead, is the *strategic framework* of cooperation, without any strictly set timelines nor funding limits for its implementation.

Secondly, each Interreg B selects only four most relevant thematic objectives, from the those provided in the common provision regulation. On the contrary, the MRS priorities are agreed by the countries involved: they reflect the specific needs of the area and are not limited in number, nor restricted to the number of agreed priorities.

For example, the Interreg Baltic Sea regional cooperation (Interreg Baltic Sea) focusses on four programme priorities: capacity for innovation, management of natural resources, sustainable transports, and EU macro regional strategy support. While the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has three objectives, involving thirteen policies areas, and four horizontal actions, addressing a broad scope policy.

Fourthly, each Interreg has its own *ad hoc* programme management. On the opposite, the implementation of a MRS is done through existing governance structures in the participating countries, because of the no-new institutions principle.

For example, in the Interreg for the Danube area, the transnational programme has been set up, and the first call for projects proposals has been launched in the autumn of 2015. To do so, a programme management team has been created: namely, Managing Authorities and Joint Secretariat, which are there to manage the programme.

As explained in paragraph 3.2.2., the Strategy is initiated by the Member States, which establish the actions and nominates the National Contact Points. The Commission is responsible for the supervision, the diffusion of relevant information to the relevant institutions and to facilitate the application procedure of the Strategies (McMaster & van den Zwet, 2016).

As described in paragraph 3.2.2 the Strategies are implemented at three different levels: policy making, coordination level, and operational level. In particular, the political responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy belongs to the Ministries of the participating countries, the coordination function is assigned to National Coordinators, and the operational function is fulfilled, again, by Ministries.

Therefore, it is clear that no new bodies are created to exercise the managing function.

## CHAPTER 4. Theory

In this chapter, I give an overview over the relevant literature which theorize MRS. I selected three complementary theoretical approaches which help to understand the functioning of this policy instrument: Multilevel, External, and Experimentalist Governance.

Each of these theories and how they are suitable to explain the Macro Regional Strategies is explained in a separate section.

The research question is then introduced and operationalized in the final sections of the chapter.

### 4.1. Theorizing MRS: Multilevel, External, and Experimentalist Governance approaches.

#### 4.1.1. Multilevel Governance

The Multilevel Governance (MLG) theory has been used in the last twenty years to explain the dynamics governing the EU. Departing from the work of Hooghe and Marks (Marcks, 1992, 1993, 1996; Hooghe & Marcks, 2001, 2003, 2010) Piattoni (2010a, 2016) constructs a ‘three-dimensional analytical space’ which can justify many EU dynamics (Piattoni, 2010a, 2016). Piattoni (2016) identifies three axes of political mobilization that drive institutional change in the EU: international cooperation (inside – outside the EU), subnational articulation (relations between national centres and subnational units), and transnational mobilization (state – society relations) (Piattoni, 2016, p.87; Gänzle, 2017, p.5).

The author argues that the mobilization process can also start from non-state actors, e.g. civil society or subnational authorities. At any level the political mobilization starts, it “induces institutional and non-institutional actors to interpret, narrate, and promote their interests and to press for institutional solutions, and (...) therefore set[s] in motion political and institutional dynamics” (Piattoni, 2016, p. 87). This “simultaneous action at different jurisdictional levels” (Piattoni, 2010b, p. 159) characterize the MLG approach. Another characterizing element of this paradigm is the recognized possibility for institutions’ interests to change and be redefined during the process of identification, narration and adjudication (Hall et al., 2014). Moreover, it draws the attention on the effect of these dynamics on the relations influencing all the three axes: at the international level, among Member States, inside the Member States, both between central and peripheral institutions and between the state and the civil society (Piattoni, 2010a, 2016).

Macro Regional Strategies are “prime examples of MLG” (Piattoni, 2016, p. 90).

They are multilevel because they are the result of the activities at all governance levels (international, national, and sub-national), and they tend to create governance

arrangements, e.g. the three-No's rule, which lead to an institutionalised path of consultation, decision-making, administrative roles and expected behaviours (Piattoni, 2016).

Their structure as well is includable in the MLG paradigm. The MRS are in between the Type I (hierarchical, general-purpose political institutions), and the Type II (overlapping single-purpose functional jurisdictions) of the MLG spectrum (Hooghe & Marcks, 2003). To conclude, MRS are multilevel regarding the governance layers involved, and functional regarding the purpose, given their function of coordination of inter-connected policies, which otherwise would be implemented separately (Piattoni, 2016).

This makes it possible to see them through the lenses of the MLG approach. The significance of the Strategies to this paradigm is related to their capacity of mobilizing institutional and non-institutional actors belonging to different levels of governance on themes which the EU as a whole had on its agenda since the 1990s but, at least partially, failed to achieve.

#### 4.1.2. External governance

The External Governance approach focusses mainly on the processes through which the EU stretches its practises, norms, and policies onto non-EU Member States (Lavenex, 2013).

According to this paradigm, the EU developed a mechanism that allows greater interaction and cooperation with non-EU countries, which helps to move towards alternative forms of integration in which regulative expansion goes together with the opening-up of the policy-making administrative structures. (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2013).

The external governance perspective on MRS focusses strongly on the participatory elements used by the Strategy to include non-EU countries (Chilla et al., 2017), namely on the external dimension that three out of four MRS (EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR) show.

In an interconnected trans-national space, internal policies, like the Strategies, have an external dimension (Stocchiero, 2010b; Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016), even though it may have different meanings according to the political situations. It may strengthen the Member States against a difficult neighbour or the increased internal cooperation allows to gain the cooperation of external countries (Stocchiero, 2010b).

For example, the 'Baltic Europe' Intergroup of the European Parliament asked, about the Baltic Sea region, the involvement of Member States to establish a closer cooperation regarding security towards Russia, but also called for the opportunity to directing the Common Economic Space with Russia (Stocchiero, 2010b).

An even stronger example of external dimension of the Strategies is provided by the EUSAIR, which has among its explicit objectives, the integration of the Balkan States. During the EUSAIR stakeholders' conference in Athens, in 2014, the Commissioner for Enlargement declared that the MRS can strongly contribute to the exchange of know-how, to the strengthening of the political and administrative capacities, and to "the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*" (Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016, p. 182). If on the one side, the EU



uses the Strategy to expand its policies and realize its goals beyond its formal borders, on the other side, the informal setting of the MRS provides the opportunity of benefitting of economies of scale to smaller countries, or small regions in big countries. This is of particular relevance for the Balkan regions.

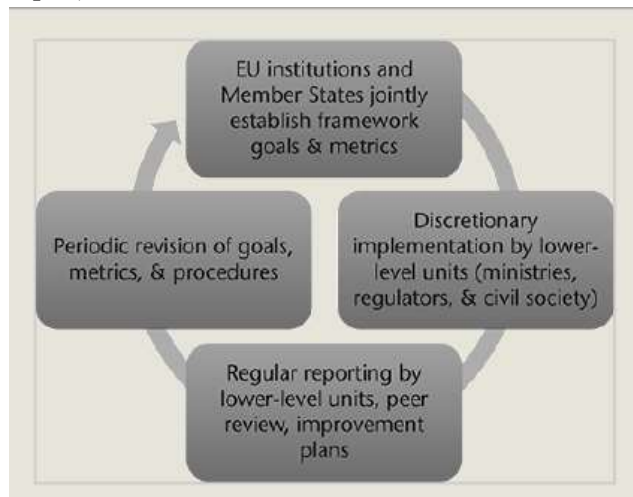
#### 4.1.3. Experimentalist Governance

The idea of Experimentalist Governance has provided some more tools to explain the rule-making of the EU under conditions of continuous uncertainty, and crisis (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008, 2010, 2012). ‘Experimentalist’ refers in fact to an “attempt to conceptualize the institutional innovations that actors, in persistently uncertain domains, have devised to make best use of the malleability of their circumstances while reducing the dangers it creates” (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012, p. 424).

The institutions’ role, according to this theory, is to promote innovation through temporary goal-setting coming from “the recursive review of [the] implementation experience in different local contexts” (Sabel & Zeitling, 2010b, p. 3).

The local units, such as Ministries, or civil society actors are given the discretion to realize the – generally broad – goals established by joint action of the EU and the Member States. Zeitlin (2015, p. 4) suggests the representation of the iterative circle of goals establishment, implementation, reporting, and revision in a diagrammatic form (see Fig.1). As visible, the approach is much more focussed on the process than on the outcomes (Gänzle, 2017).

The process is articulated in four phases: the framework goals and how to reach them are established by the Member States and the EU institutions together; then the lower level units, e.g. Ministries, regulatory authorities etc., have the task of implementing the framework rules and propose changes to them; thirdly, in return to the freedom of implementation, these lower-level units must regularly report their performances; fourthly, the framework goals and the metrics are periodically revised according to the lessons learnt during the implementation (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012).



**Fig. 1.** The EU experimentalist governance as iterative, multi-level architecture.

Source: Zeitlin (2015) p. 4

The concept has been used to examine the governance of the EU in regard to different policy fields, e.g. energy, financial services, food and drug safety, data and environmental protection, justice, as well as internal security (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008, 2012), and EU

Cohesion policy (Mendez, 2011). Moreover, the notion has been applied to the EU to explore the circumstances in which the Union stretches its rule and its policies beyond its borders (Lavenex, 2004).

The Macro Regional Strategies are an example of experimentalist governance, too (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017, Chilla et al. 2017).

As a matter of fact, the MRS follow the experimentalist policy cycle in various aspects (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017; Gänzle, 2017; Chilla et al., 2017). They developed an innovative framework to allow national actors, EU institutions, and different stakeholders to collaborate on groups of inter-connected policies. “Their National Coordinators and Policy and Horizontal Action Coordinators (...) often refer to them as an ‘experiment’ of policy making and fostering multi-level governance” (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017, p. 18). An experiment in the sense of something new, but also of something replicable under similar conditions.

As explained in the paragraph 3.1.2, the first Strategy was launched in times of economic crises and mistrust in the EU, as a low-cost-high-hopes solution to a general problem of budget scarcity. When the EUSBSR resulted to be a successful experiment, the EUSDR was ready to be put in place, and the “macro-regional fever” (Dühr, 2011, p. 2) to spread.

All the four constitutive elements of the Experimentalist Governance approach, illustrated above, contribute to shaping the governance architecture of the Strategies.

The broad framework of goals and necessary joint endeavours, decided among the authorities at different levels of government, are expressed in the Strategies’ Action Plans. They are conceived as periodically revisable and follow a recursive path (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017). Moreover, even if the Strategies are based on the principle of ‘no institutions’, they have the tendency to institutionalize consultation patterns, decision-making procedures, administrative roles, and behavioural expectations (Chilla et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the MRS mobilize public and private actors giving them the chance to see their interest represented (Chilla et al., 2017) and entrust the local units of their implementation (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017). The National Coordinators, which are mostly Foreign Ministries or Ministries dealing with regional development, have a key role in the supervision of the Action Plans’ implementation. In addition, Thematic Coordinators, representing sub-national government agencies or, in fewer cases, NGOs, can be appointed by EU Member States or partner countries and confirmed by DG Regio with the tasks of: choosing their counterparts in each state participating to the Strategy, and being responsible for the coordination of priorities within the MRS.

The reporting activity of the performances has been requested by the Council to the National and Thematic Coordinators, to ease the periodical revision of the framework. The Coordinators also report to the Commission on how the implementation of the MRS is proceeding in their national territory.

These evidences support the interpretation of the MRS through the lenses of an Experimentalist Governance perspective.

It follows that to guarantee the well-functioning of the governance mechanism the flow of information and the continuous feedback between and within the different levels of governance in the macro region, and among the four Strategies, must not be interrupted, and on the opposite, it has to be always encouraged. As well as the evaluation of the MRS reporting against agreed indicators is fundamental. In an Experimentalist Governance structure, in fact, these are the only mechanisms that allow the Strategies to develop and improve.

#### 4.2. The difficulty in monitoring and evaluate the MRS

The vague nature of the MRS and their intangible effects led some scholars to categorize the Strategies in the theoretical framework of Experimentalist Governance (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2016; Chilla et al., 2017).

Even if the ‘three-No’s rule’ has been partially overcome, as evincible from the section 3.2, the MRS have still the task to be strategic frameworks aiming to support a better implementation of existing policies and legislation and a more efficient use of the available resources.

Due to their broad scope, the overlapping themes with the Europe 2020, and the alignment of the territorial cooperation programmes’ goals to the ones of the Strategies, their impact, outputs and results are not easy to estimate (Sielker & Chilla, 2017), but nevertheless, their estimation is essential for this governance ‘experiment’ to improve.

On this regard, the European Commission has lately increased the demand of reports from the Strategies, from the programmes, and from the single projects about their single contributions to the MRS. The Commission also launched a number of studies to analyse the contribution of the MRS to the EU territorial cooperation, but this ‘monitoring process’ is just at the beginning, and most of the works focussed on the two earlier MRS, the EUSBSR and the EUSDR.

Moreover, “the terms evaluation and monitoring are often used jointly, sometimes even as synonymous” (Sielker & Chilla, 2017, p. 79). Instead, evaluation is an assessment done on a regular basis in which the results are confronted on the basis of pre-established targets, it can be done ex-ante, ex-post or during the implementation of the measures. In other words, it gives a picture of the situation, establishing how close the results are to the goals, at a determined point in time.

Monitoring instead is a continuous action of observation. The changes registered during the monitoring process are not weighted against pre-defined indicators or targets.

One more difficulty is that each Macro Regional Strategy is different in regard to governance, goals and content, because they are planned to be tailor-made solutions to macro regional challenges.

Besides, the goals are long-term (Chilla et al., 2017), and intangible. Developments like increased political, territorial and institutional integration not only require long time to happen, but require an assessment of the situation *ex ante*, at the moment of the implementation, and at different other following points in time.

In addition to this, the identification of indicators is not an easy task in itself (COWI, 2017). Furthermore, both the direction of the effect (from the Macro Regional Strategy implementation to the increased political, territorial and institutional integration, or vice versa) and the causality linking the policy and the desired results are difficult to affirm, given the number of other EU policies concurring to reach the same goal.

Considering all these factors, the evaluation of the impact of Macro Regional Strategies on territories presents a number of difficulties. There is indeed a lot of research to be done in this field.

#### 4.4. Research question

As explained in chapter 3, the Macro Regional Strategies strictly related to the Cohesion Policy of the Union (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016). A key element of the Cohesion Policy is that it tries or aims to encourage regions and cities from different Member States to learn from each other and collaborate to achieve common objectives. The policy does that through joint programs (Interreg), projects and networks (INTERACT, ESPON, URBACT). Differently than the MRS, economic assistance is provided by the Union to advance regional cooperation: in the programming period 2014-2020, one third of the whole EU budget is devoted to these goals. The links between the Cohesion Policy programs (especially Interreg) and the Strategies are important, given that the latter need to be ‘coherent’ with ‘external’ strategies (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016). Hence, for the MRS, the territorial cooperation programs are a potential funding source, and vice versa, links with the Strategies should represent a source of added value (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016).

Nevertheless, the exact meaning of ‘added value’ of a Strategy remains not clearly defined due to the intangible nature of the policies and the very recent implementation.

Likewise, no academic research has been done to assess the contribution of the MRS to the EU-funded projects.

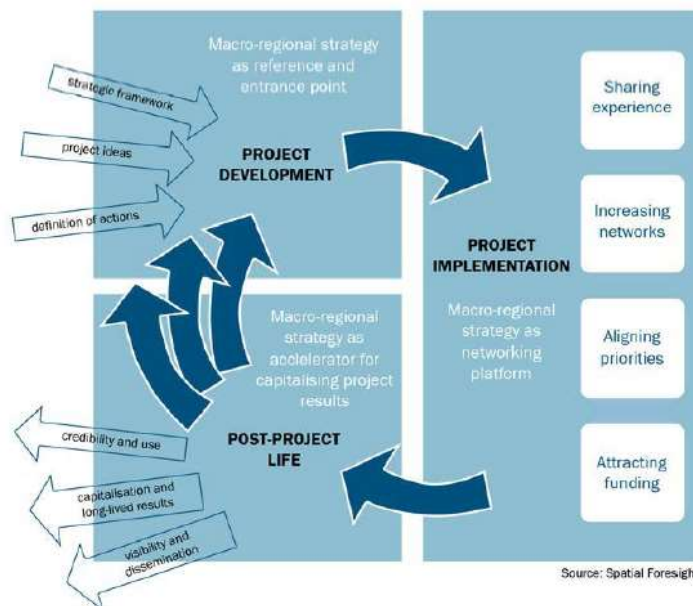
Therefore, my thesis aims to contribute to address this research gap by answering the following research question:

***To what extent does a Macro Regional Strategy add value to ongoing EU-financed projects in the macro-region?***

The only attempt to investigate the added value of the Strategies for EU projects has been done by a recent study by INTERACT (2017a), which aimed to investigate the benefits that

a MRS gives to programs and projects funded by the EU in three main domains of regional development: research and innovation, environment, and transports. The study focuses on the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the EU strategy for the Danube Region and collects information up to the end of the 2016.

To answer my research question, I will use the definition of added value suggested by this study. The study states that the MRS contribution to the projects is distributed along the full project life-cycle. The project lifecycle is divided in three main phases: the policy development, the policy implementation, and the policy closure and future (see Fig.2).



**Fig. 2.** Added values of Macro Regional Strategies throughout the project cycle  
*Source:* INTERACT (2017a), p. 22

The benefits that a project can receive during the development phase are mainly related to the content of the project itself: the thematic focus can benefit, in fact, from the structural framework of the Strategy. Moreover, links of the project to the Strategy can help improve the contents of a project by inducing the believe that the links facilitate access to EU-funds. Furthermore, the macro regional network should help to find more relevant stakeholders and partners.

In the implementation phase, the main added value of the MRS to the projects concerns the possibilities for networking that the Strategy gives to the stakeholders, and the exchange of good practices and know-how among different projects leaders that are working in the same thematic area. This could help the projects to gain new partnerships and apply to different funding sources.

Finally, in the project closure phase, particularly relevant benefits individuated by INTERACT for projects which link themselves to a Strategy are increased visibility and credibility of the projects' results, which might lead to a better capitalization of them. This can make it easier for a project to have continuity, especially in phases when one funding period is over and a new one is starting.

In my research I use the framework suggested by INTERACT to distinguish between the three phases of the project lifecycle. I investigate whether and to what extent the Strategies add value to all the three phases.

#### 4.4.1. Operationalization

To answer the research question, I focus my analysis on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR).

The contribution of my thesis is to the overall literature on Macro Regional Strategies, but also to the literature on the EUSAIR itself, which is the least studied Strategy of the four in place.

The EUSAIR case is an interesting testing ground due to two factors: its powerful external dimension and its recent implementation, in 2014.

The external dimension of the EUSAIR is particularly strong because it involves four EU countries and four non-EU countries, which are in the accession procedure. The Strategy is therefore an opportunity for these latter countries to better align themselves to the EU accession criteria.

Moreover, its recent creation, launched at the same time as the current programming period, 2014-2020, is the reason why all the projects implemented in the region are in the first or second phase of their life-cycle. This allows me to collect recent impressions of the people working on the projects about the actual value that the MRS adds to their daily work and future developments of their projects.

## **CHAPTER 5. Methodology**

### 5.1. Case study: the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

For my research I took the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR) as case study.

Among the four MRS in place, this the less studied one, because of its very recent implementation (2014) and its powerful external dimension.

Moreover, its recent implementation is the reason why most of its projects are still in the implementation phase.

The macro-economic situation of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region is very differentiated, with differences among the countries, and within them. Even if their economic and trade integration is pretty high (COWI, 2017), the countries participating in the Strategy are still going through the consequences of the economic and financial crisis. They exhibit modest level of competitiveness and innovation, together with scarce connectivity infrastructures and overall sustainability lower than the EU average.

Their governance is multilevel with a strong bottom-up involvement (Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016) and one country, Italy, performing the driver role, for more than twenty years.

Its long-lasting history in territorial cooperation and its strong external dimension, together with its difficult macro-economic situation, and its recent creation, differentiate the EUSAIR from the EUSBSR and the EUSDR, allowing me to test the definition of added value of the INTERACT study under different conditions. Comparing my results with the ones of INTERACT will contribute to the knowledge and the understanding of Macro Regional Strategies.

The following sections give more detailed information on the Adriatic Ionic macro-region and its Strategy, offering the necessary basic informational background on the region to understand the case selection.

#### 5.1.1. The Adriatic Ionian macro region: macroeconomic situation, and macro-regional integration

The territory of the Adriatic Ionian macro region includes eight countries, four of them belonging to the EU (Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, and Greece) and four non-EU Member States (Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) which are currently going through the accession procedure (see Map. 3).

COWI (2017) performed an analysis of the economic characteristics of the macro region.

The region results very heterogeneous in terms of economic development because of the presence of more advanced countries like Italy and Slovenia and countries in process of convergence to the EU standards. Moreover, in this region there are some of the countries which were badly hit by the economic and financial crisis, and which have not completely recovered yet (e.g. Greece and Italy).



**Map. 3.** Map of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region  
*Source:* European Commission, COM(2014) 357 final, p. 13

In all the Member States of the region there are still strong differences between the rural and urban areas, being the first ones much less developed than the second which show higher GDP growth rates compared to other areas in the same country. Unemployment is as well a big problem for most of the countries belonging to the macro region, and even if the unemployment rate has been reduced in Slovenia and Croatia in recent years, it is still very high in Greece and in the candidate countries, and quite high in Italy. Economic and trade integration is above EU average in the macro-region, due to the strong economical and historical neighbourhood relations. Nevertheless, the macro-region remains a less attractive business partner compared with other parts of Europe.



Among the fields which need further improvements there is the region accessibility and connectivity. Even though the Cohesion Policy has already helped a lot in the improvement of the transports infrastructures, big investments are still needed. Regarding connectivity infrastructural improvements in the current programming period, Greece is the best performer in the region (COWI, 2017 p. 39) followed by Italy and Slovenia, the other countries lag much behind. Improvements to the regional connectivity would help the tourism, the key competitiveness factor of the Adriatic Ionian area, together with fishery, even if, with the exception of Italy, all the countries of the region are below the EU median in terms of blue growth.

Lastly, regarding the environment, the situation is very different from one region to the other in the same country, but it is overall worse performing than the rest of the EU, against the common environmental indicators (COWI, 2017, p. 40).

### 5.1.2. The EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region: origins and characteristics

The political commitment is an essential ingredient to carry on the Strategies (Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016) and it is for sure the main factor that keeps the Adriatic Ionian region together (Stocchiero, 2010b; Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016). As a matter of fact, “the Adriatic Ionian countries are bound not only by historical links and common cultural heritage, but also by a shared responsibility of their sea” (Damanaki, 2011, p. 2).

Nevertheless, apart from the challenges and opportunities geographically linking the countries surrounding the Adriatic Ionian Sea, the long process of construction of what today is the EUSAIR is the fundamental element that keeps the Adriatic Ionian countries together.

The Adriatic Ionian region can count on more than twenty years of territorial cooperation, not only among countries but also through regional initiatives, which evolved from the initial humanitarian and reconstruction purposes to an economic, environmental and institution building focus (Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016).

The country which played the biggest role to favour the territorial cooperation in the area has been Italy. Since the times of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the Italian government, the regional institutions and the civil society were all very active in supporting the neighbour populations. This first ‘emergency’ cooperation became more structured overtime evolving in institutional networks like the Forum of Adriatic Ionian Cities and Towns, the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chamber of Commerce, and the UniAdrion, an academic network linking the university from one side to the other of the sea.

Apart from this theme-specific networks, the creation of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), in 2000, was essential to foster the communication and the cooperation among countries and region in the Adriatic Ionian macro region. This initiative, still in place, can be seen as the ancestor of the EUSAIR, and it is one of its main supporters and promoters.

Italy kept its role of territorial cooperation driver also for what concerns the promotion of the EUSAIR at the EU level. The national action was supported by the consensus building action of the Marche region, which already assisted the secretariat of the AII (Stocchiero, 2013).

What makes the EUSAIR peculiar is “that the process of building up [the] Strategy has been characterized by the political entrepreneurship of subnational level and in particular of (...) the Marche region located at the centre of Italy’s coastline on the Adriatic” (Cugusi & Stocchiero, 2016, p. 175).

The official implementation of the EUSAIR started in 2014.

The EUSAIR Action Plan establishes four thematic Pillars around which the Strategy is developed, each of them is carried on by one EU Member State and one non-EU country (Table 1). The Pillars reflect the main challenges that the macro region faces, namely the environmental risks related to the sea and to the overall scarce sustainability that the region exhibits, the necessity of better transport infrastructures and connections from one region to the other, and the need to improve the regional competitiveness investing in the tourism, the economy-driver sector.

As already mentioned in chapter 4, the strong external dimension, coming from the high proportion of non-EU states involved, is another characteristic defining the EUSAIR. If, on one side, this can be seen as a first step towards the accession to the EU, on the other, it implies that the political commitment of the accession countries has to be shown in the investment of own economic resources, and the use of appropriate staffing for the coordination. With the economic and financial crisis which still affects the countries of the region, and the following budget restrictions, it remains to see the extent to which the countries will be able to contribute to the Strategy.

Pillar	Coordinators
Blue growth	Greece, Montenegro
Connecting the Region	Italy, Serbia
Environmental quality	Slovenia, Bosnia Herzegovina
Sustainable tourism	Croatia, Albania

**Table 1.** EUSAIR Pillars and coordinating countries (the colours used are the official identifiers of each thematic objective).

*Source:* Own representation

## 5.2. Methods

I take as a starting point for my research the elements of the ‘added value’ definition suggested by INTERACT, namely the contribution of the Strategy to the EU-financed projects. In particular, the indicators of a Strategy’s added value to EU-financed projects are: a more structured definition of the actions to take (first phase of the policy lifecycle), the support in combining diversified funding opportunities, the networking and partnership opportunities, the increased knowledge and experience sharing, (project’s implementation phase), and the perception of increased visibility and future continuity of the projects (closure phase).

Using these indicators, I test the extent to which the EUSAIR adds value to the EU-funded projects on the Adriatic Ionian territory.

To do so, I use the process tracing method (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) which allows me to overcome the main difficulty of the topic, namely, to keep clear the direction of the effect. I will perform my research taking as sample the full population of projects financed in the first call of the current programming period by Territorial Cooperation programmes, both transnational and cross-border cooperation. The total number of selected projects is of 83.

First, I make an analysis of their, websites and advertised events, to see if any connection to the Adriatic Ionian Macro Regional Strategy is mentioned. An explicit link to the EUSAIR on the projects’ and programmes’ websites will be an indicator that the MRS might give some benefits to the projects. Vice versa, a link to the projects on the EUSAIR website will indicate that the visibility of the projects is increased by their connection to the EUSAIR’s Pillars.

Secondly, a questionnaire is sent to the coordinators of the projects (province offices, regional offices, port authorities, private institutes etc.) to investigate their perception over the added value of the EUSAIR to the project they carry on. In this way, I furtherly verify if the eventual official link project-Strategy on documents, websites etc. is translated in actual advantages for the people working on the projects.

Furthermore, I participate to the 3<sup>rd</sup> EUSAIR Forum and its side events, in Catania, from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2018. This gives me the chance to listen to both the official institutions supporting the Strategy and financing the programmes, and to some stakeholders in representation of the single projects. Moreover, I can collect up-to-date inputs and ideas by attending the panel discussions, which will improve the global image of the EUSAIR that I gain from the literature.

### 5.2.1. The sample: projects under exam

The sample for my study includes Interreg-financed projects in the fields of environment, blue growth, transports, and sustainable tourism (which constitute the Pillars of the EUSAIR), to guarantee that at least a thematic link between the project's scope and the MRS's goals is there. Moreover, the selected projects have as main goal the connection of regions belonging to Member States and neighbour countries, with the scope of helping the regional development and the territorial cohesion.

It is important to keep in mind that Interreg is part of the Cohesion Policy (see section 3.3.) which has financed projects since very longer before the MRS. Therefore, these projects would have been implemented even without the existence of the EUSAIR (INTERACT, 2017a).

The programming period under exam is the current 2014-2020, this guarantees that the projects belonging to my sample have been designed and have participated to the calls, being aware of their due contribution to the Strategy.

For my research, I chose to address only the project's lead of each project. This allows me to receive only one opinion per project, by the institution or stakeholder which should be the most informed. As a matter of fact, the questionnaires are anonymous. Sending the questionnaire to a bigger number of project's partners per project, would have probably given me a bigger number of responses, but without the possibility to count the effective number of projects responding to it.

Among the total number of 83 selected EU-financed projects for the first call of each programme, it was possible to obtain the names and contacts of the contact person or institution responsible for 80 projects. All of them have been invited to give their contribution by filling in the questionnaire. The distribution of the contacted projects according the thematic areas and programmes is illustrated in **Table 2**.

EUSAIR Pillars	Interreg Italy-Greece	Interreg Slovenia-Italy	Interreg Italy-Croatia	Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro	Interreg ADRION	Total number of projects per Pillar
Blue Growth	2	/	5	4	5	16
Connecting the Region	3	1	5	3	8	20
Environmental quality	8	/	2	6	2	18
Sustainable tourism	5	1	5	7	8	26
<b>Total number of approved selected projects (per programme)</b>	18	2 <sup>12</sup>	17	20	23	<b>80</b>

**Tab. 2.** Number of contacted projects per Programme contributing to the EUSAIR Pillars.  
*Source:* Own representation (the colours used are the official identifiers of each thematic objective).

### 5.2.2. The questionnaire structure and content: beyond the single questions

Among the goals of the MRS there is e.g. the exchange of good practices among members working on similar topics, or the complementarity of projects working on the same issue. The questionnaire will investigate whether and to what extent these fundamental and most practical advantages that the MRS is planned to give, are being delivered, and to what extent.

The survey will have as goal to test whether the projects' leads perceive any benefit coming from their project being in line with the MRS objectives.

The questionnaire (see **Appendix A**) is structured in six sections.

The first section asks personal information related to the respondent and the project he or she supervises: in this way, I have an idea of the degree of his or her experience in the

<sup>12</sup> The very small number of Interreg Italy-Slovenia projects compared to the other programmes is the total number of projects approved in the first call.

sector in terms of number of years (Q.3) and number of EU-funded projects previously supervised (Q.4). The respondents who have already supervised at least one more EU project and have at least five years of experience, are considered experts in the sector. They were in fact working in the same position already before the MRS was launched, therefore they can better notice the extent to which the EUSAIR makes the difference for their current project.

The second section generally test the added value of the MRS to the projects asking in reference to the respondents' expectations when the Strategy was launched (Q.5, Q.6) and asks of individuate the policy lifecycle phase in which the value added by the strategy is more visible, distinguishing between project initiation and development, project implementation, and project closure and future (Q.7).

The third, fourth, and fifth parts are respectively about each single phase of the project lifecycle and investigate and quantify the added value of the EUSAIR to the projects in terms of: number of new stakeholders found thanks to the Strategy (Q.9), increased visibility of the project (Q.12, Q.14), networking (Q.12), funding opportunities (Q.11), and knowledge sharing (Q.13). The questions are practice-oriented, inducing the respondent of thinking about practical examples in which the, above mentioned, situations occurred.

Finally, the fifth part asks the respondent the extent to which he or she agrees on a number of statements (Q.16). The statements are formulated in a theoretical way and often repeat the questions asked above in a different construction. This helps me to distinguish between the stakeholders' theoretical knowledge and practical experience which might have an influence on their answers.

### 5.3. Expectations

The INTERACT study provided a first concrete definition of added value in reference to the benefits that EU-financed projects can receive by linking themselves to a MRS.

They individuated these benefits throughout all the phases of the project life-cycle, for the EUSBSR and EUSDR.

I therefore test the INTERACT definition on the EUSAIR, representing a very different case, given its characteristics and its recent creation.

From the exam of the websites and official documents related to the projects, I expect to find some links to the EUSAIR on the websites and documents of the projects under exam, due to the fact that project leaders need to fill in a box on the application sheet in which the contribution of the project to the Strategy must be clarified.

Nevertheless, taken alone, the reference to the Strategy in the projects' websites, or vice versa to the single projects in the EUSAIR online page, would not constitute a proof that the projects receive any benefits by the link with the EUSAIR.

The questionnaire instead gives me clearer answers to the question of whether and to what extent the EUSAIR adds some value to the projects in place at the moment.

My expectations are threefold:

First, the long-lasting tradition of territorial cooperation in the Adriatic Ionian area is still the main contributor to the networking activities, therefore

**H1:** the EUSAIR does not add value in terms of increased networking opportunities.

Secondly, bodies like the AII, the Adriatic Ionian Chamber of Commerce, the university network UniAdrion, are the consolidated knowledge-sharing channels in the macro region, hence

**H2:** the EUSAIR does not add value in terms of knowledge sharing.

Thirdly, the difficult economic situation affecting the countries surrounding the Adriatic Ionian Sea does not allow the participating states and regions to invest large resources for the implementation of projects, therefore

**H3)** the projects link themselves to the EUSAIR hoping for further funding possibilities connected with the Strategy.

#### 5.4. Limitations and further research

As my thesis focuses on one MRS, its results do not apply directly to the other Strategies. Nevertheless, the sample is big enough to reach reliable conclusions regarding the EUSAIR.

Another limitation is the limited number of project's lifecycle phases I analyse because most of the projects under exam are currently at their implementation phase.

Nonetheless, this allows me to collect more vivid impressions from the people coordinating the projects.

Even if none of the projects is in the closure phase, in the questionnaire I included one section about the project's future. The answers and the conclusions about this point must be seen as expectations of the projects' leads and not as driven by their actual experience.

On the one side, this represent one more limit of my work, on the other, the stakeholders' expectations regarding the future of the project and the expected contribution of the EUSAIR to it are an important indicator to understand the reasons that pushed them to link their project to one of the Strategies.

On this point, my work is meant to be a starting point for filling the gap about the 'future' lifecycle phase of the EU-funded projects of the Adriatic Ionian region. It can be useful to

compare the expectations of the projects' leads with their future experiences at the end of the programming period 2014-2020.

As explained in paragraph 5.2.1., I sent the questionnaire only to the project leaders of the projects. The sample would have been bigger if the survey had been sent to a larger pool. However, given the anonymous character of the survey, I would not have been able to count the effective number of projects responding to it.

For further research, it would be interesting to send the questionnaire to all the project partners of the projects, to investigate their perceptions about the added value of the EUSAIR to the projects and to understand to what extent the perceptions of the lower units is uniform to the ones expressed by the network leaders and the institutions.

Also, it would be interesting to verify the obtained results for the current programming period for the other three MRS in place, to identify similarities and differences.



## CHAPTER 6. Analysis

As explained in chapter 5, to answer my research question and investigate the added value of the Macro Regional Strategies on EU-funded projects I use the EUSAIR as case study and the Interreg projects supporting the thematic Pillars of the Strategy as sample.

To do my analysis, I followed a two-step procedure.

I first examined the websites of EUSAIR and the of various projects and programmes to see if there are any explicit links between the EU- (Interreg) financed projects and the Strategy, and, vice versa, if the website of EUSAIR contains connections with the projects. Secondly, I administrated a questionnaire to the project leaders of the sample, to investigate to what extent, according to their experience, the EUSAIR adds value to their projects.

Additionally, I participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> EUSAIR Forum and its side events in Catania, to gain further insights on the perceptions of the Member States and the project stakeholders about the results of the Strategy and their goals for the future, and to get a better insight into the most recent up-to-date topics of interest for the EUSAIR.

In the following two sections, I present the results of my analysis of the websites and the results from the questionnaire. This is followed by a discussion of the insights that I gained at the EUSAIR annual Forum. In the last section, I will compare the outcomes of my research with the findings of the INTERACT study (2017a).

### 6.1. Analysis of the websites

#### 6.1.1. The EUSAIR's webpage

The EUSAIR webpage contains the necessary information and links to official documents about the Strategy's governance, objectives, activities, and events.

In the upper banner, it is already possible to see the logo of (and the link to) the Interreg ADRION programme. Moreover, the second call for project's proposal of ADRION is advertised in the homepage of the Strategy's website<sup>13</sup>.

The European Investment Bank (EIB), the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF), and specific funds for each Pillar are mentioned in the section "Funding sources" as the funding possibilities for the projects which want to contribute to the Strategy.

There is no reference to any other Interreg programme operating in the macro region (e.g. Interreg Italy-Croatia, Interreg Italy-Slovenia etc.) even if their projects must be in line with the Strategy goal to participate to the calls.

Furthermore, in the Strategy's website, no project is mentioned as good-practice example of contribution to the EUSAIR's Pillars.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

### 6.1.2. The Interreg Programmes' webpages

From the analysis of the websites of Interreg Programmes part of my sample, namely Interreg ADRION<sup>14</sup>, Interreg Italy-Croatia<sup>15</sup>, Interreg Italy-Slovenia<sup>16</sup>, Interreg Italy-Greece<sup>17</sup>, Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro<sup>18</sup>, emerges that none of the webpages has a link to the EUSAIR page. The exception to this is the Interreg program ADRION. Moreover, except for Interreg ADRION and Interreg Italy-Croatia, none of the websites of the various Programmes advertised the 3<sup>rd</sup> EUSAIR Forum, which is supposed to be the biggest macro-regional event of the year. Also, on none of the webpages, except on the Interreg ADRION's, it is possible to find any explicit link to the Strategy's Pillars or on how the Programme aims to contribute to the MRS.

### 6.1.3. The websites of the projects

In most of the cases, it was very difficult to find information about the individual projects and the project leaders. The webpages were often not existent, not ready yet or only in the language of the country leading the project. Only on the websites of Interreg Italy-Greece<sup>19</sup> and Interreg ADRION<sup>20</sup> there is a list of the approved projects. It is even more complicated to obtain the contact names and addresses of the project leaders of funded projects. Only Interreg Italy-Croatia<sup>21</sup> and Interreg ADRION (only for projects approved under Priority Axis 2<sup>22</sup>) provide this information.

The objectives of the projects are only connected with single Interreg Programmes but never explicitly with the Strategy Pillars, even when the correspondence between the MRS Pillars and the Programmes' objectives is often easy to deduct.

## 6.2. The questionnaire

### 6.2.1. The respondents

I addressed the questionnaire to 80 project leaders, one per project. This allowed me to receive one opinion per project by the institution or stakeholder which should be the best

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.adrioninterreg.eu/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.italy-croatia.eu/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

<sup>16</sup> <http://ita-slo.eu/it> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

<sup>17</sup> <http://greece-italy.eu/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/ems/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

<sup>19</sup> <http://greece-italy.eu/discover-project/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

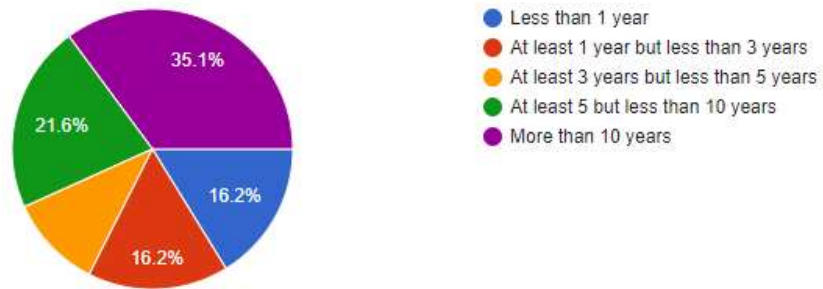
<sup>20</sup> <http://www.adrioninterreg.eu/index.php/projects/list-of-approved-projects/> Accessed last time: 22.06.2018

<sup>21</sup> Webpage not available anymore. Date: 22.06.2018

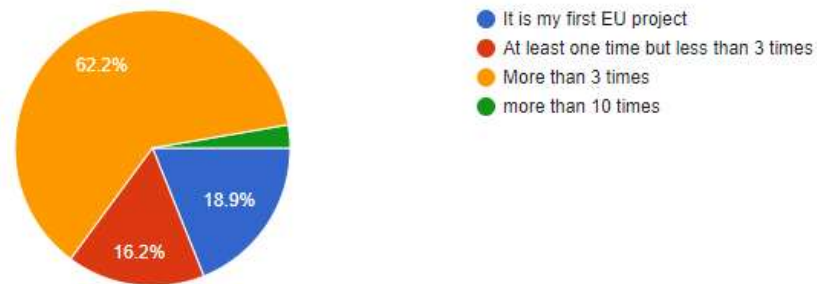
<sup>22</sup> <http://www.adrioninterreg.eu/index.php/second-call-for-proposals-priority-axis-2-funded-projects/> Accessed last time 22.06.2018

informed. I received 44 replies<sup>23</sup>. The biggest number of respondents can be classified as ‘expert in the field’, having between 5 (21.6%) and ‘more than 10’ years (35.1%) of working experience in the same job position (Fig. 4). Moreover, 64.9% of the project leaders’ have supervised at least 3 other EU-funded projects. Only less than a quarter of them are leading their first EU project (18.9%) (Fig. 5), and /or have less than 1 year of experience in their current position.

**Fig. 4.** Share of respondents per year of experience in their current job position.  
*Source:* Questionnaire. Answers to Q.3.



**Fig. 5.** Number of previous EU-projects supervised (respondents share).  
*Source:* Questionnaire. Answers to Q.4



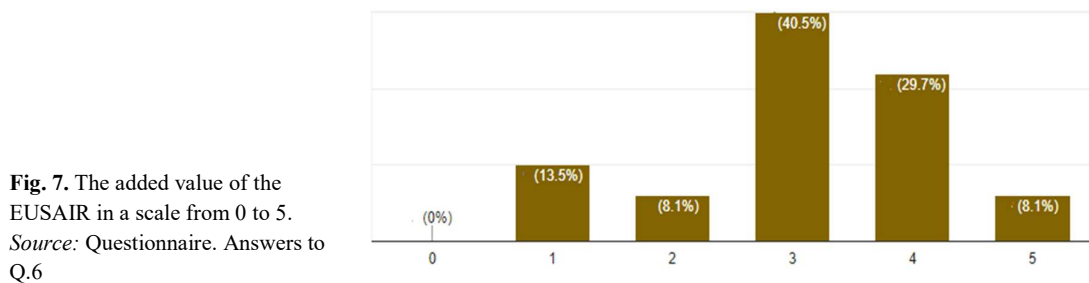
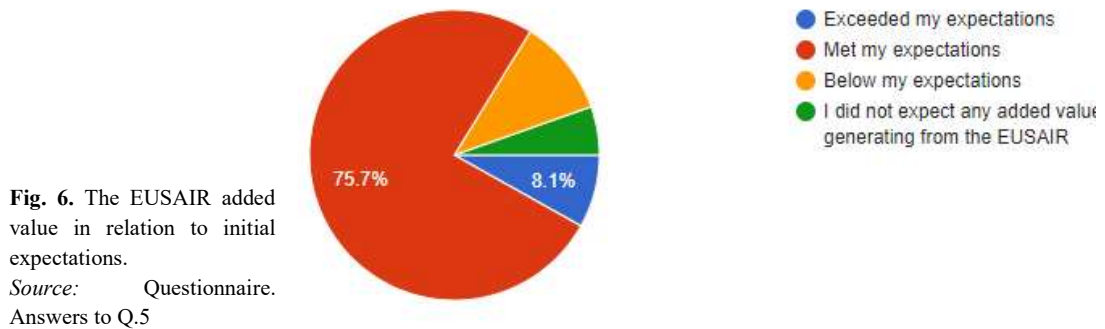
The distribution of the respondents per level of experience, in terms of years in the same job position and number of previous EU-funded projects supervised, is particularly positive for the scope of this research. As a matter of fact, the diversified number of expert and non-experts allows to verify eventual differences in opinions due to the high/low expectations generated by past experience. Still, the majority of respondents are experts, so they are supposed to be well informed about the EU policies and the MRS tool, having already witnessed the implementation of other two Strategies (EUSBSR and EUSDR). Moreover, their previous experience in supervising EU-funded projects enables them to make a comparison of the situation before and after the implementation of the EUSAIR.

<sup>23</sup> Given the scarcity of information available online, to obtain the necessary information on the projects’ leaders, I needed to contact the National Contact Point or the Managing Authority of the Programmes in order to get their names and email addresses.

## 6.2.2. The questionnaire results: the overall perceived added value of the EUSAIR

Looking at the responses, the EUSAIR is perceived to add value to the EU-funded projects. Nevertheless, the value perceived by the respondents is often related to indicators such as visibility and credibility, which belong to the third phase of the projects' life-cycle ('future and closure'). None of the projects under exam have been through this phase yet, though. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the respondents' answers reflect more their future expectations and hopes, rather than their actual experiences.

As a matter of fact, a large majority of the respondents (83.8%) affirms that the EUSAIR met or exceeded their initial expectations in terms of added value (Fig.6), and 78.3% of the questionnaire participants quantify the added value of the MRS to their projects within a range of 3 and 5 points, on a scale from 0 to 5, where 0 indicates no value added (Fig.7).

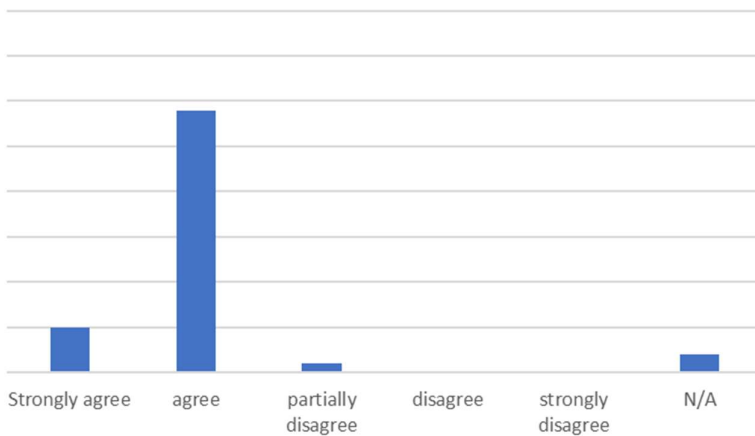


Also, all the respondents, except one, find that being in line with the EUSAIR Pillars increases the visibility of their projects, and that the Strategy contributes to their prominence (Fig. 8 and 9). The increased visibility of the project is also one of the most frequently named arguments explaining the EUSAIR added value, in the open question Q.17. Nevertheless, none of the respondents mention an example to clarifying how the value has been added but instead always refer to future possibilities, in both the open questions (Q.17 and Q.15)<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Some answers to Q.15 and Q.17 include:



**Fig. 8.** The added value of the EUSAIR in terms of increased visibility of the project.  
 Source: Questionnaire. Answers to Q.14



**Fig. 9.** The EUSAIR increases the visibility of the projects.  
 Source: Questionnaire. Answers to Q. 16a

When questioned on how the visibility of their project would be or has been increased by the link with the EUSAIR, some respondents relate the visibility of the projects with the chance of increasing the dissemination of projects' results and outcomes in other territories (e.g. "covering a geographical area and related topics under the EUSAIR umbrella will foster the transferability of the project's outcomes"). Nevertheless, the dissemination of projects' results is the outcome of the projects' visibility, and not the cause of it. Others refer only to the quality of the project itself as reason motivating the visibility (e.g. "(...) a successful project with a positive impact on the region, means an increased visibility and using this project as a good model for replication in other areas"; "because [the visibility] can demonstrate the progress towards achieving certain objectives, thus indicate what follow-up actions need to be taken [*sic.*]").

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A: "Basically visibility and the opportunities of a concrete sustainability in the framework of other similar initiatives [*sic.*]"; B: "The visibility and promotion of the A.P. project outputs in the whole EUSAIR area could facilitating the design of further projects"; C: "The best practices developed in the project shall be made available to the EUSAIR community through the Thematic Steering groups, thus I expect that sooner or later, the projects and its results will be presented in that context"; D: "Because our project could have the chance of being included in the new list of labelled EUSAIR projects"; E: "maybe it will be mentioned in EUSAIR publications"; F: "Major alignment with EUSAIR Strategy may ensure a better visibility towards policy makers and key stakeholders".

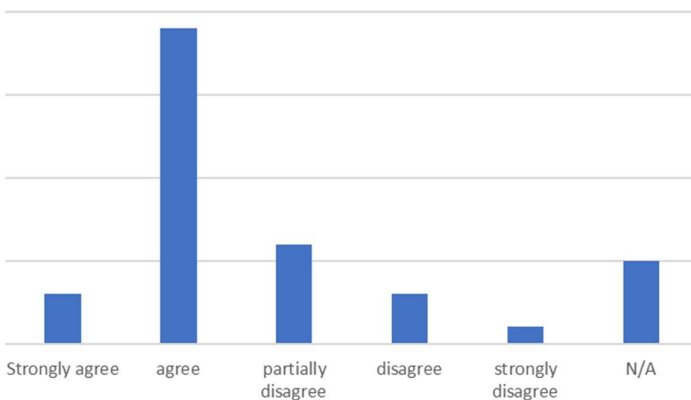
In contradiction to these answers, which refer to the ‘future and closure’ phase as the one that benefits the most from EUSAIR, the majority of the participants localize the biggest added value of the Strategy in the first phase of the project life-cycle. In answering Q.7, 54.1% ticked the choice ‘project initiation and development’, 32.4% ‘project implementation’ and the remaining, only 13.5%, opted for ‘project closure and future’. The fact that most of the projects are in the initiation and implementation phases might have driven the respondents in this direction.

It is also contradictory that, when answering to more specific questions on the EUSAIR’s contribution to the project in the initiation and implementation phases, the respondents are generally not seeing benefits coming from the MRS. In the following paragraphs, the most significant questionnaire’s results on these points are illustrated.

### *The networking opportunities*

One of the main added values of an MRS to EU-funded projects is the chance for the stakeholders to have more networking opportunities (INTERACT, 2017a). An MRS aims to put into contact projects that with the same issue, so that they can better coordinate their actions to address common challenges. The Thematic Coordinators, namely the Pillar coordinators, the funding programmes, e.g. Interreg, and the project partners themselves are the organisers of these network activities.

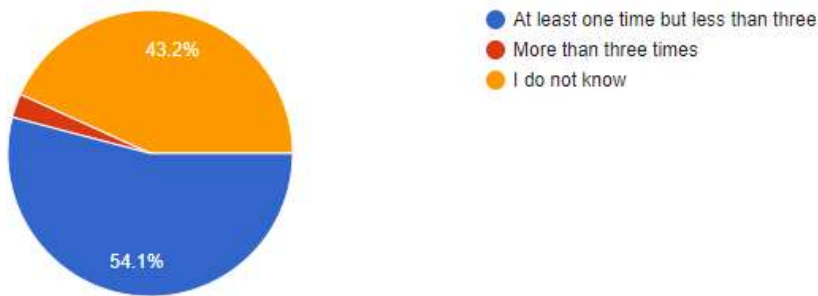
When asked, in general terms, what they think about this function of the Strategy, the respondents demonstrate to have a positive view over the networking occasions given by the Strategies to the stakeholders, and generally see them as an opportunity that might help their project (Fig.10).



**Fig. 10.** The macro-regional networks provided by the Strategy might be useful to the project.

Source: Questionnaire. Answers to Q.16

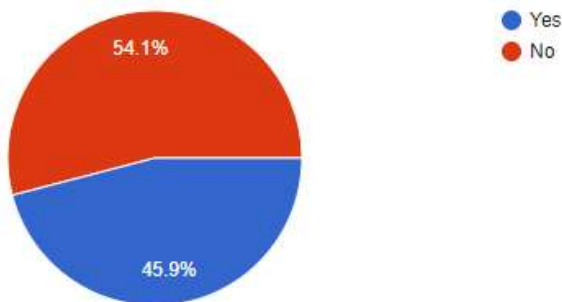
The questionnaire also enquired about how many times project leaders or their partners have been invited to events related to the EUSAIR to present their project. Almost half of the respondents declared to have been invited at least one or two, but a large share of the interviewed was not aware of any invitation (Fig.11).



**Fig. 11.** Number of times the projects teams have been invited to EUSAIR-related forums.  
*Source:* Questionnaire. Answers to Q.10

Among those who have been invited to networking activities, almost 60% state that the organiser was the funding programme, and only the 8.1% participated in activities organized by the EUSAIR Thematic Coordinators. This shows how the Strategy has to improve its function of network-facilitator.

This role results to be weak also from another point of view: the number of projects which were not helped by the MRS in finding relevant stakeholders (Fig. 12), a number which included the majority of the respondents (54.1%).



**Fig. 12.** The number of projects' lead who have found new stakeholders thanks to the EUSAIR.  
*Source:* Questionnaire. Answers to Q.9

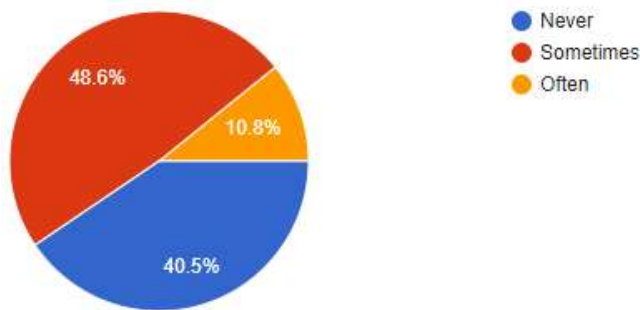
### *Knowledge-sharing*

The knowledge-sharing is one of the main sources of added value that a Macro Regional Strategy is supposed to give to the projects under its framework. As a matter of fact, the exchange of experience is essential during the whole project life-cycle to improve the final outcomes of the projects' but also to individuate eventual follow-up actions at the end of the programming period (INTERREG, 2017a).

As regarding the networking activities, also in this case the importance of the role of the Strategy is widely recognised among the questionnaire respondents. Some respondents see knowledge-sharing as one of the main forms of added value of the EUSAIR to their project (e.g. "the added value lies in the dissemination of good practices"; "[The EUSAIR is] a pro-active arena and forum of exchange, confrontation and cross-fertilization of regional and trans-national policies and strategies").

Nevertheless, none of the respondents shared an experience or example of how knowledge-sharing is done in practice in the EUSAIR. Moreover, only 10.8% of the respondents

affirmed of having been often approached by other project leaders or partners to share experiences, and 40.5% of the total has never been asked (Fig.13).



**Fig. 13.** Frequency of approach by other projects' lead or partners to share knowledge.  
*Source:* Questionnaire. Answers to Q.13

Figures 11 and 13 indicate that the contribution of the EUSAIR in terms of knowledge-sharing is weak. In fact, not only the frequency of direct contacts between projects' leaders to exchange information is low, but also only a small portion of the teams has been often invited to events where they could have learnt from the others.

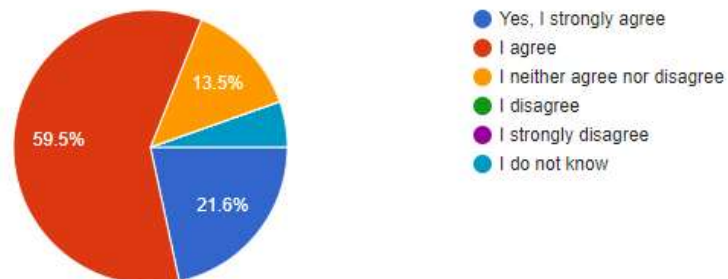
*Access to better funding opportunities*

When applying for funds to the Territorial Cooperation programme (Interreg), each project's lead is required to fill in a box to describe the value that the project adds to the EU Strategy.

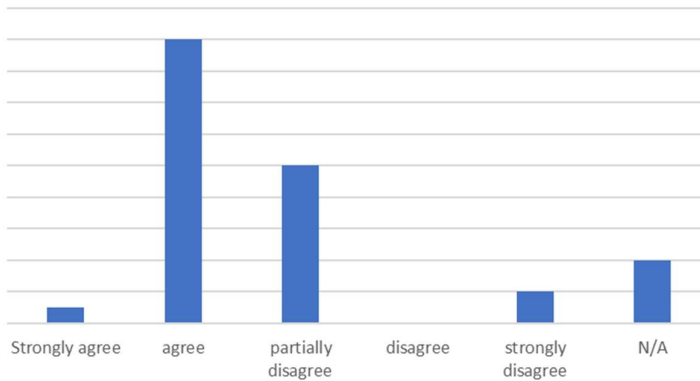
Nevertheless, it is clear that an official link to a Macro Regional Strategy does not guarantee funding for the project and the Strategy itself does not have its own budget, due to the no-funding rule.

Even if the projects' leads are supposed to be aware of it, a large majority of the respondents is convinced of the opposite. In particular, most respondents indicate that the link with the Strategy helps to get better funding opportunities (Fig. 14) or makes it easier for the project to receive funding (Fig. 15).

**Fig. 14.** The link to the EUSAIR guarantees better funding opportunities.  
*Source:* Questionnaire. Answers to Q.11



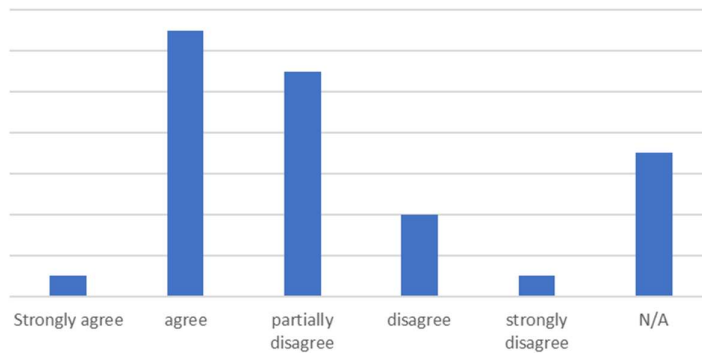




**Fig. 15.** The acknowledgement of the project by the MRS implies easier access to funding.  
 Source: Questionnaire. Answers to Q.16h

Moreover, the EUSAIR is supposed to give support to the actors and stakeholders to combine existing funding sources to finance their projects (INTERACT, 2017a). This support action is not perceived by the biggest share of respondents.

**Fig.16.** The EUSAIR help in combining funding from different sources.  
 Source: Questionnaire. Answers to Q.16g



This is probably motivated by the fact that the EUSAIR does not offer any tools for projects to search for funding in the region, nor does it provide an inventory of funding instruments available. Tools of this kind have been instead developed by both the EUSBSR and the EUSDR (respectively, the *Baltic Funding Portal*<sup>25</sup>, and the *EuroAccess Danube Region*<sup>26</sup> platforms).

<sup>25</sup> <http://funding.balticsea-region.eu/> Accessed last time:19.06.2018

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.danube-euroaccess.eu/> Accessed last time: 19.06.2018

### 6.3. The EUSAIR Forum

The EUSAIR Forum is an annual networking and knowledge-sharing event in which the progresses of the Strategy are presented. After the first two events in Dubrovnik (2016) and Ioannina (2017), this year the third annual Forum was held in Catania (Fig.17).

**Fig. 17.** The 3rd Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region.  
*Source:* EUSAIR webpage



The Forum was organised around two plenary sessions, one on the 24th and one on the 25th May, and many parallel sessions addressing themes related to the four Strategy Pillars. The Forum was preceded by three side events: “Territorial Cooperation in the Mediterranean: the Sicilian Region”, “Developmental trajectories for the Mediterranean: Scenarios and developments for Basin Cooperation”, and the “Interreg V-B Adriatic-Ionian Programme – ADRION first Annual Forum ‘a view ahead together’”.

The side events, and especially the first ADRION Forum, have been an occasion to listen to the experiences of the projects leads of some projects financed in the first call. The presented projects were not only best-practice examples, but they were emphasizing the contribution of their results to the EUSAIR, presenting Interreg ADRION as the most turning implementer of the EUSAIR.

The take away message of the ADRION Forum has been a call for strengthening and speeding up the collaboration between regions with different degrees of innovation and economic development.

The third EUSAIR Annual Forum was preceded by the Adriatic Ionian Council, namely the EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting, in which the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the eight participating countries and the European Commissioners met to discuss the future developments of the Strategy. The result of the Ministerial Meeting is the adoption of the ‘Catania Declaration’, the document which presents the EUSAIR and AII initiatives forwards.

During the Ministerial Meeting the parallel sessions were held for the participants to the Forum. In the session the themes of research and innovation, territorial potentials connected to migration flows and connectivity were addressed. Ministers, EU Commissioners, regional and local governors were the speakers joining the Forum and debating their views. Particularly interesting was the closing plenary session of the EUSAIR Forum “United we stand, together we progress” in which, following the report of the parallel sessions, the future of the Strategy has been debated.

The key notes of this session were two: the necessity of EUSAIR to look beyond the Pillars in terms of addressed themes, and the need of a stronger common vision.

Regarding the first point, the territorial potential connected to migratory flows, already subject of one of the parallel sessions, has been recalled. Stefano Bianchini, a political scientist from Bologna University, stressed the necessity for the Adriatic Ionian countries to stop thinking about the migratory flows as a crisis, but facing the situation through common policies for the area. In particular, his suggestion regarded the harmonization of the statistical offices in order to have a local common evaluation of the situation and give a joint response.

Secondly, it has been emphasized how the big number of projects and programmes on the territory are still missing a common approach to the territorial challenges, and a good communication system. These are strictly tasks of the EUSAIR on which the participating countries must work on, in order to create a long-term strategy, an actual common vision and, therefore, a stronger cooperation.

The EUSAIR Annual Forum and its side events, have been a great chance to hear the opinions of the relevant stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the Strategy, and to gain the newest insights on what direction the Strategy will take in the upcoming year. Moreover, I had the chance to ask questions, and administrate my questionnaire to the projects' leads attending the events.

#### 6.4. Compared results: INTERACT individuated added value and the situation in the case of the EUSAIR

I borrowed my definition of 'added value' from the INTERACT (2017a) study. This study takes as a sample a total of 31 projects implemented during the 2007-2013 programming period under the EUSBSR and the EUSDR.

The authors state that the projects would have existed anyway without the Strategies to be implemented, but that, nevertheless, the MRS improved their implementation in all the project life-cycle phases.

Regarding the project development and initiation phase, they found that the thematic focus of the projects has been oriented towards themes specific to the Macro Regional Strategy. For what concerns the implementation phase, the benefits given by the Strategies to the projects found by INTERACT are multiple. The link between national and regional projects is strengthened by the presence of the Strategies, and the networking opportunities and knowledge-sharing chances are increased by the macro-regional networks offered by the MRS.

Finally, in the future and closure phase, the visibility and credibility of the projects, and therefore, the chances to be continued in the following programming period are characterizing the projects related to a Macro Regional Strategy.

The results found by INTERACT, relative to the EUSBSR and the EUSDR differ from the outcomes of my research, especially regarding the implementation phase.

If, on the one hand, it was impossible to test the added value definition on the projects' closure phase, on the other, the projects' leads were very optimistic when answering to questions on the visibility and credibility of the project due to the link to the EUSAIR. Regarding the development phase, most of the projects' lead agreed on the fact that it is the phase in which the Strategy adds more value. Nevertheless, they do not mention any examples of benefits coming to the Strategy and related to this phase, in the open question. Finally, as mentioned above, the implementation phase is where the differences in outcomes between my research and the INTERACT paper clash the most. As a matter of fact, nor of the benefits that a Strategy is supposed to give in this phase, are detected in relation to the EUSAIR. The Strategy is in fact not contributing to the knowledge sharing, nor to the networking opportunities to the stakeholders. Moreover, no one refers to the harmonization of the national and regional projects with the EU-financed ones thanks to the EUSAIR, in the open questions.

## CHAPTER 7      **Conclusions and recommendations**

The Macro Regional Strategies are a relatively new policy instrument, which functions as a policy framework for the existing EU-funded programmes and projects. They aim to face common macro-regional challenges through a better use of existing resources and mobilizing existing actors. The main benefit deriving from the actors implementing a Strategy is a stronger regional cooperation which overcomes the Member and non-Member States' borders. On this point the Strategies contribute to reach the Territorial Cooperation goal of the Cohesion Policy.

The vague nature of the Macro Regional Strategies, their broad scope, and their intangible effects create difficulties in evaluating their impact and outcomes. Hence, the importance of the monitoring activity of this policy instrument has been emphasized by the EU institutions and a number of scholars (Chilla et al., 2017, Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017, Sielker & Chilla, 2017). Nevertheless, no academic literature has investigated the added value of the Macro Regional Strategies, yet.

The monitoring and reporting activity is of essential importance for those policy instruments, as the EU Strategies for the Macro Regions, presenting the characteristics of Experimentalist Governance (Chilla et al., 2017, Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017, Gänzle, 2017). As a matter of fact, the MRS' multilevel architecture is based on four iterative phases of which the reporting activity is the most important. The broad framework goals, expressed in the Strategies' Action Plans are in fact conceived as periodically revisable, and this can be put into practice only by keeping all the level of governance in communication with each other (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2017).

The theoretical framework of Experimentalist Governance suggests in fact that the flow of information and feedback across and within the levels of governance involved in the Strategies has to be continuous and always encouraged. This cannot be done without the evaluation and reporting of the Strategies' implementation against pre-established indicators.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, there is no academic literature which aims to evaluate the Strategies' impact and outcomes. My thesis aims to cover this gap and contribute to the understanding of the Macro Regional Strategies, by answering the question whether the Macro Regional Strategies add value to the EU-funded projects implemented in the macro regions.

Answering this question constitutes a starting point for the evaluation of the other Strategies, and it has an academic and societal value, given that "the EU's macro-regional Strategies are gaining ground as an important instrument in the European interregional cooperation" (Peter Friedrich, Minister for the Bundesrat, Europe and International Affairs, Baden-Württemberg, in Gänzle & Kern, 2016).

To answer my research question, I borrowed the definition of added value from the study conducted by INTERACT (2017a), which assessed the added value of the EUSBSR and EUSDR to programmes and projects in the 2007-2013 programming period. The study

individuated the contribution that an MRS should give to an EU-financed project in each of its life-cycle phases, namely the development, the implementation, and the closure phase.

I chose the EUSAIR as case study. The EUSAIR results to be a good case for two reasons: first, it has a strong external dimension, because half of the countries involved in the Strategy are non-Member States, and second, because of its very recent implementation, in 2014. Moreover, given the fact that the countries surrounding the Adriatic Ionian Sea have been strongly hit by the economic, financial, and the migratory crises, the EUSAIR represents the most different case compared with the EUSBSR and the EUSDR.

I followed a two-steps procedure to answer my question.

The programming period under exam in my work is the current, 2014-2020, and none of the projects has been through the 'closure' phase. My sample is constituted by 80 projects belonging to five Interreg B Programmes, and whose scopes are close to the themes addressed by the four EUSAIR Pillars: Blue Growth, Connecting the Region, Sustainable Tourism, and Environmental Quality. It is important to keep in mind that the Interreg programmes are part of the Cohesion Policy and, therefore, would have been implemented even if the Strategy did not exist.

The first step to evaluate the added value of the EUSAIR to the selected projects was to analyse the websites of these projects, of the Interreg programmes they belong to, and the EUSAIR's one. I looked for explicit links of the projects with the EUSAIR and vice versa. Secondly, I administrated a questionnaire to the projects' leaders of the selected projects to investigate to what extent, according to their practical experience, the EUSAIR adds value to their projects in the different projects' life-cycle phases.

Moreover, to obtain up-to-date insights on the Strategy, I participated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> EUSAIR Forum in Catania, the most important annual EUSAIR event finalized to networking and knowledge-sharing among the Strategy's stakeholders.

I formulated three hypotheses regarding the added value of the EUSAIR to the selected EU-funded projects. I expected, first, the Strategy to not add value in terms of enhanced networking opportunities for the involved stakeholders (H1), nor, secondly, in terms of knowledge-sharing among the projects' leaders (H2). Thirdly, it is likely that the projects' leaders link their projects to the EUSAIR hoping for further funding possibilities connected with the Strategy (H3).

All the hypotheses resulted confirmed by the analysis.

As a matter of fact, the questionnaire shows that, even if the EUSAIR is perceived to overall add value to the EU-funded projects, this value often relies on indicators, such as visibility and credibility of the projects, belonging to the 'closure phase' which none of the projects has been through yet. This indicates that the projects' leaders see potential in the MRS tool, but they have not experienced any benefit yet.

Regarding the networking opportunities, more than a half of the respondents affirms that the EUSAIR did not help in finding relevant stakeholders. This reveals how the long-lasting

historical cooperation from one side to the other of the Adriatic Ionian Sea remains the reason why the projects have a sufficient number of stakeholders supporting them.

Moreover, very few projects teams have been invited to events related to the EUSAIR to illustrate their projects. Furthermore, the answers show that the largest share of the events they have been invited to were organised by the funding programmes or private stakeholders.

Hence, the role of network-facilitator which is supposed to be performed by the Thematic Coordinators of the Strategy results weak (H1).

Similar answers have been collected about the knowledge-sharing among the projects' leaders and stakeholders. Only 1 out of 10 respondents have been often contacted to share its experience, and 2 out of 5 have never been asked about their project by other projects' teams.

These results, reinforced by the data on the stakeholders' participation to networking (and knowledge sharing) activities, confirms my second hypothesis (H2).

Finally, the questionnaire's answers show that most of the respondents are convinced that linking their project with the Strategy helps to get better and/or further funding opportunities, and that the EUSAIR does not help them in combining funding sources, which instead it is what a Strategy should do.

My third hypothesis (H3) is then confirmed.

The websites analysis showed that nor the EUSAIR nor the projects mention each other on their website. The projects link themselves only with the Interreg programme they are financed by. Moreover, none of the programmes, with the exception of Interreg ADRION, mentions the EUSAIR on their web pages.

This demonstrates how the EUSAIR does not increase the visibility of the projects, at least at this point in time.

Some of the weaknesses individuated by my research have been highlighted also during the EUSAIR Forum. In particular, it has been stressed how the projects and programmes on the Adriatic Ionian territory are still missing a joint approach to the common challenges, and a good communication system, which are tasks to be performed by the EUSAIR.

Drawing upon the overall conclusion, there are a number of actions that the key implementers of the EUSAIR can do to strengthen the role of the Strategy and improving its benefits to the EU-financed projects. Some of these actions can be already taken for the current programming period and boosted in the post-2020.

My recommendations regard the National Coordinators and the Thematic (Pillar) Coordinators of the EUSAIR, and the projects' partners.

First, to achieve better a knowledge-sharing within the projects' partners, the National Coordinators might start a debate on the topics that shall be solved at the macro-regional level and show practical examples of projects relevant in reaching the Strategy's goals. This action might boost the exchange of good practices among projects, which will be motivated by the chance of obtaining an increased visibility of their outcomes, when in line with the Strategy. Moreover, the debate on the topics to be faced through the macro-regional approach would constitute a good preparation ground for the Strategy planning post-2020.

Second, the Pillar Coordinators can act to increase their networking efforts. They might increase the number of EUSAIR sponsored events. This will improve the chances for each of the projects' teams to present its project and find additional relevant stakeholders. Moreover, the collaboration of the Pillar Coordinators with the Thematic Coordinators of the other Strategies should be reinforced, too. This would help the Pillar Coordinators in supporting the projects' partners in the choice of topics with are relevant across the Strategies.

Finally, the projects' partners themselves should engage with the Pillar Coordinators to promote their projects' results and give them periodical feedback on how their project has or has not benefitted from its link to the EUSAIR in each project life-cycle phase. To do so, two actions by the European Commission are necessary. On the one hand, it is important to give a clear definition of Macro Regional Strategies, on the other, it is crucial to establish clear and transparent criteria to monitor and evaluate the Strategies, always considering their peculiar characteristics.



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## ANNEX A

Research questionnaire for Master thesis purposes



Universiteit Utrecht

Thank you very much for agreeing in filling in my questionnaire. It will only take 5 minutes of your time, but your inputs are essential for my research.

The aim of my thesis is to study the extent to which the EUSAIR gives value to the EU-funded projects on going in the current programming period.

For any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [enrica.corpace@gmail.com](mailto:enrica.corpace@gmail.com)

Questions marked with an asterisk (\*) are required.

### 1. Personal information

1. \* To which programme does the project you work for belong?
  - ADRION
  - Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro
  - Interreg Italy-Greece
  - Interreg Italy-Croatia
  - Other (please, specify)
  
2. \* In which sector are you employed?
  - Private
  - Public (regional)
  - Public (national)
  - Public (EU)
  - Other (please, specify)
  
3. \* About how many years have you been in your current position?
  - Less than 1 year
  - At least 1 year but less than 3 years
  - At least 3 years but less than 5 years
  - At least 5 but less than 10 years
  - More than 10 years
  - Other (please, specify)
  
4. \* Have you supervised other EU funded projects before?
  - It is my first EU project
  - At least one time but less than 3 times
  - More than 3 times
  - Other (please, specify)

### 2. The added value of the Macro-Regional Strategies to EU-financed projects

5. \* To what extent the Macro Regional Strategy adds value to your project compared to your initial expectations?
  - Exceeded my expectations
  - Met my expectations
  - Below my expectations
  - I did not expect any added value generating from the EUSAIR

6. \* Please, quantify the added value of the Macro-Regional Strategy to your project, choosing a value from 0 (none) to 5 (high).

0       1       2       3       4       5

*(If your previous answer was more than 0)*

7. \*In which of the following policy phases does the Strategy adds value?

Project initiation and development  
 Project development  
 Project closure and future

### 3. Project initiation and development

8. \*To what extent the strategic framework of the Macro-Regional Strategy helps the project to work in a more structured way? Choose a value from 0 (id did not help at all) to 5 (it helped a lot).

0       1       2       3       4       5

9. \*Did the EUSAIR help you to identify relevant partners and stakeholders during the project development?

Yes  
 No

### 4. Project implementation

10. \*How often has your team been invited to a national or international forum somehow related to the EUSAIR to present your project?

At least one time but less than three  
 More than three times  
 I do not know

11. \*Do you think linking your project to the EUSAIR will help you to get better funding opportunities?

Yes, I strongly agree  
 I agree  
 I neither agree nor disagree  
 I disagree  
 I strongly disagree  
 I do not know

*[if your answer to Q.10 was positive]*

12. \*Who organised the events you have been invited to?

Projects partners  
 Funding programmes (e.g. Interreg)  
 Thematic coordinators of the EUSAIR  
 Other (please, specify)

13. \*Have you been approached by other projects' lead partners to share previous experiences and practices?

Never       Sometimes       Often

**5. Project future**

14. \*Do you think the visibility of your project will be increased by being in line with the Macro Regional Strategy’s pillars and objectives?

- Yes
- No

15. Please, explain in one or two sentences your answer to the previous question.

**6. Final section**

16. \*Please, select the option that reflects your opinion on the following statements:

	I strongly agree	I agree	I partially disagree	I disagree	I strongly disagree	N/A
<b>a.</b> The EUSAIR increases the visibility of your project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>b.</b> The macro-regional networks provided by the EUSAIR might be helpful for your project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>c.</b> The link of your project to the EUSAIR and its forum increases the credibility of the project and helps exploiting leverage possibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>d.</b> The relevance given by the EUSAIR improves the link between regional and national projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>e.</b> The EUSAIR creates synergies among projects and across themes addressed by the Strategy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>f.</b> The EUSAIR might support the project giving continuity to it, especially when one funding period ends and a new one starts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>g.</b> The EUSAIR helps project to combine funding from different sources, or move from one source to another	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>h.</b> The acknowledgement of the project by the Macro-Regional Strategy guarantees easier access to funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. Please, describe in one or two sentences the added value you see in the EUSAIR for your project.

**Thank you very much for your cooperation and time!**