

Toward a macro-regional strategy for the Carpathians

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Abstract: *One of the most important European Policy is the Regional Policy. With the deepening of integrationist European Regional Policy, its objectives have changed and oriented according to new priorities. One of these priorities determined the appearance of new concepts, such as the “macro-region” one. In order to contribute to the development of regions that exceeds the national borders, European Union focused on new elements regarding the over-national strategies – integrated strategies sustained by different states. This article tries to motivate the necessity of developing a macro-regional strategy for the Carpathians and to open some technical discussion about the situation of implementing such a strategy.*

Key-words: *macro-region, over-national governance, regional strategy, integrated strategy.*

1. Introduction

The European Union's Regional Policy represents one of the most representative European policies. During its evolution this policy knew new themes of researching, new directions of approaches, because of the challenging regional context.

Since the Treaty of Rome European countries declared the Community's objective to achieve a harmonious development by reducing disparities between regions. Regional problem was better taken into account with the Single European Act (1986), which introduced the concept of economic and social cohesion. This concept - fundamental for the EU - defines the declared objective of the Community to reduce the gaps between the member states.

With the deepening of integrationist European Regional Policy, the objectives have changed and orientated according to new priorities (Chiţu, 2006). In terms of socio-economic and cultural aspects it implies the existence of specific macro-regions. This orientation results from the fact that macro-regions include regions from different countries with different levels of development, with different social problems and with cultural differences.

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2. Objectives

Europe 2020 strategy - to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - set five objectives (relating to employment, innovation, climate change, education and poverty) that help to maximize the expected useful effects. Achieving these objectives it requires a greater involvement of the regions through a better mobilization of regional and local authorities.

In this context, from a scientific perspective two issues could be highlighted for analysis:

a) New directions - oriented towards regional strategies

One of the new guidelines on regional strategies has been the creation of macro region and its specific strategies. Regions involved in a macro-region become more involved in their own development.

b) Institutional aspects

Aspects of effective institutional mechanisms are increasingly concerned over national and supranational authorities, since it is known that only an efficient institutional architecture can support the implementation of strategies, even more so those of supranational dimension.

Illustrative in this is the introduction of an additional criterion for accession to the Madrid (1995), criterion according to which candidate-states must have the institutional capacity to support its accession to the European Union.

This article focuses on main issues regarding a possible macro-regional strategy for The Carpathians.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Considerations upon the European Cooperation

At the European Union level, the cooperation has one of the most significant roles in the Regional Policy. The main forms of the cooperation between regions and countries consist in the main following directions:

1) European Territorial Cooperation

- Cross-border cooperation – which take into consideration the challenges from the border regions with the development of European Union
- Trans-national cooperation – which creates a new type of cooperation, by adding an important extra European dimension to the regional development, through

- Innovation, especially networks of universities, research institutions, SMEs;
 - Environment, especially water resources, rivers, lakes, sea;
 - Accessibility, including telecommunications, and in particular the completion of networks;
 - Sustainable urban development, especially polycentric development.
- Inter-regional cooperation – in order to create networks to develop good practice and facilitate the exchange and transfer of experience by successful regions
 - Regional development co-operation programmes outside EU - instruments available to support regional development along the EU's external borders with countries which are either candidates for EU membership or potential candidates, and also with so-called third countries
 - European Grouping of European cooperation – which allows to set up cooperation between regional and national authorities by grouping in legal entities
- 2) Macro-regional strategies - integrated strategies for regions that include areas from different countries located in the same geographical space (The Danube Sea Strategy, The Baltic Sea Strategy, The alpine Region Strategy, The Adriatic and The Ionian Strategy)
- 3) The international cooperation - programmes of cooperation with non-EU countries (Brazil, China, Japan, Ukraine, Russian Federation) and international organizations (World Bank, United Nations, Forum of Global Association of Regions)

3.2. European Macro-Regional Strategies

Until now, European Union had some preoccupation on macro-regional strategies. As a result, 4 macro-regional strategies were created and implemented:

1. The Danube Region Strategy
2. The Baltic Sea Region Strategy (EUSBSR)
3. The Alpine Region Strategy (EUSALP)
4. The Adriatic and Ionic Strategy (EUSAIR)

To express the concern for the macro-regional strategies, the European Commission elaborated a document – “Report From The Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions - concerning the governance of macro-regional strategies” (May, 2014),

In this document the Commission points the importance of a better governance to improve integrated strategies of macro-regional cooperation.

According to the Commission, the European countries should take into consideration the following main aspects, in order to establish macro-regional strategies:

- a) Using the good practices from the current macro-regional strategies, already implemented by European Union (as added value for EU)
- b) Establishing a much more complete meaning for the “better governance” concept (using the capacity of regional institutions and the smarter use of the existing funds)
- c) Establishing levels of governance for the next strategies

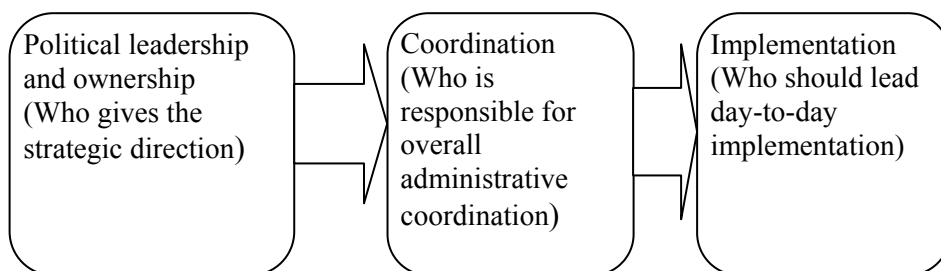


Fig. 1. *Level of governance for macro-regional strategies*

At the end of this process the over-national institutional structure is able to lead to a proper strategy implementation.

4. Results and discussions. Considerations upon the Carpathian macro-regional issues

Carpathian Region involves the geographical area with a length of 1500 km along the following countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia.

This region has made the object of the international concerns, but not for integrated strategies - strategies macro-regional type - but especially in terms of tourism development. The Carpathian Convention may be mentioned in this regard.

The objectives included in the Carpathian Convention are related to the following:

- 1 favourable conditions for the development of sustainable tourism products and services, including the promotion of the Carpathians as a single destination
- 2 development of innovative tourism management, integrating the needs of local communities and maintain natural and cultural capital
- 3 development of a continuous process of awareness, education and training at all levels for sustainable tourism. Nowadays, it is quite acknowledged the fact that tourism must develop in a controlled and sustainable manner which must be materialized in a well-established plan (Albu, 2005, pag. 160).
- 4 biodiversity conservation in The Carpathians
- 5 the arrangement of the territory

The Carpathian Convention is a sub-regional strategy which has been ratified by all seven signatory states, each state will adopt plans for its implementation.

A macro-regional strategy assumes that the elements that compose it aims to integrate several strategic areas: economic, social, cultural, energy, transport, environment, sustainable development (Epuran, 2006). The macro-regional approach subordinate general objectives such as helping economies with low-carbon dioxide to climate change.

In order to develop such a strategy and its effective implementation requires an efficient institutional system, a system that satisfies the requirements of the decision at regional and macro-region level (a multi-level governance system). In this respect, a system must be designed to take into account both the interests of the regional and macro-region.

Based on this, we appreciate that the Carpathian Region has some features that could raise the difficulty of developing regional strategies. The main difficulty is that the countries that compose the macro-region are heterogeneous in terms of level of development. It includes both developed countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary) and developing countries (Romania, Ukraine and Serbia). In addition, not all countries that compose it are European Union member-states, even more, some are not even candidate countries. These issues can hinder the implementation of a strategy in this macro-region. Examples of good practice at European level have shown, however, that in terms of heterogeneity can create and implement regional strategies.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that the European Union's experience shows that across regions Convergence objectives, despite Community and national concerns, have been achieved, but with certain limitations. It can be appreciated that certain regions responsiveness is not always expected, leading to the necessity of creating strategies to consider in greater local and regional attitude. Also, to improve the implementation at local and regional level is the need for better coordination between levels involved (community level - national level - regional and local) (Fig. 2)

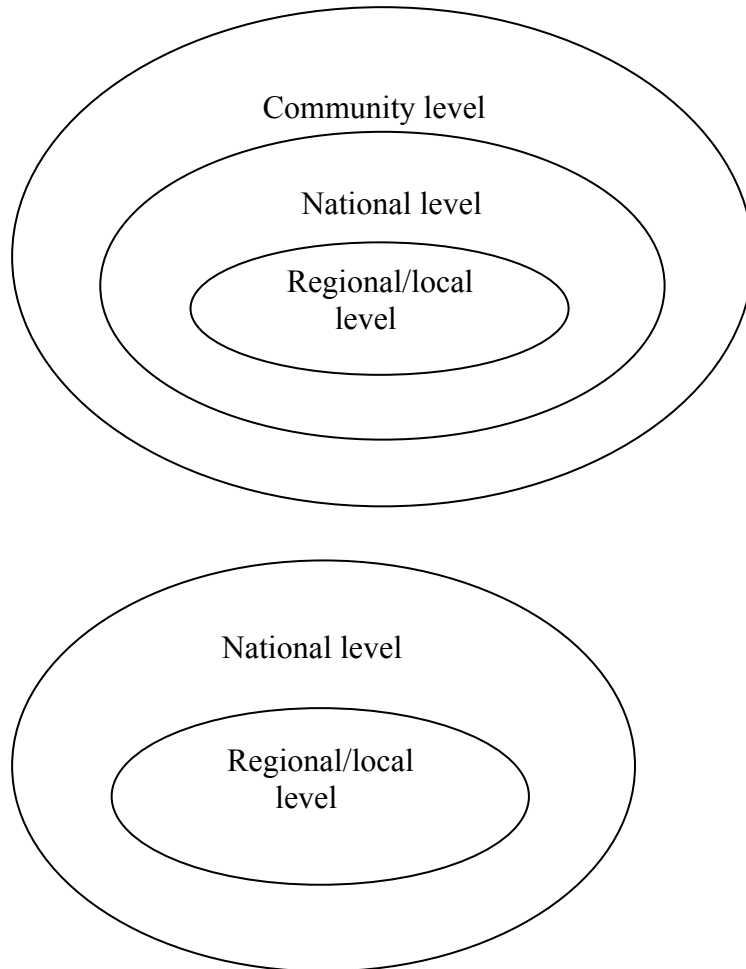


Fig. 2. *Levels involved in a macro-regional strategy development*

These levels of the macro-regional governance system is sustained by the following principles:

- Integration
- Cooperation
- Coordination
- Partnership

The current stage shows us the fact that despite of the theoretical approach about

the Regional Policy, the inter-regional cooperation is not so well approached in theory. It could be specified the fact that the European Commission was preoccupied to establish some general directions in documents, such as: „European Territorial Cooperation – Building Bridges Between People”, „Reports of the Governance of Macro-regional Strategies”)

5. Conclusions -

Elements needed to build a macro-regional strategy in the Carpathians

Starting from the existing macro-regional strategies and knowing the specific elements of The Carpathian region listed above, we can appreciate that a Macro-regional Strategy for the Carpathians would be a good initiative. Its main goals should cover benefits, such as:

- Added value for the region – without necessary creating new institutions or new funds
- Development of Trans-European Networks
- Improvements of environment aspects
- Development of other European Politics inter-related with regional matters
- A better integration and coordination

In order to accomplish the strategy objectives, the following methods and instruments of scientific investigation should be used:

- Documentary analysis based on secondary data in order to obtain some conclusions about the current approaches of the territorial cooperation between regions in European Union and the level of institutional involvement in the macro-regional European strategies.
- Quantitative research using the method of survey among the employees from the institutions involved in the regional matters, with the objective to find the potential impact of a macro-regional strategy in the different regions involved
- Qualitative marketing research using the method of focus-group, which should approach to different categories of groups – specialists from the academic environment, representatives of the business environment and representatives of public authorities.

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