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## "A new kind of beast": Assembling the macro-regional collective, the case of the EU BSR-strategy

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## **“A new kind of beast”:**

### **Assembling the macro-regional collective, the case of the EU BSR-Strategy**

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#### **Abstract**

*The paper examines the novel governance approach underpinning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). The EUSBSR was launched in the summer of 2009 as the first macro-regional strategy of the European Union. The strategy does not supply any new instruments, legislation or funding. Instead it collects and highlights diverse and often already existing initiatives and instruments within a Baltic Sea Region framing, adding a macro-regional perspective.*

*The paper discusses how the practice of constructing the EUSBSR can be seen as an example of heterogeneous engineering, whereby a macro-regional collective is composed through the application of a stratagem of translation. By formulating common matters of concern, a “voice of the region” is established and the idea of shared regional interests is introduced.*

*In the paper, it is argued that we must see the application of the EUSBSR as but a step in a wider process towards Baltic Sea regionalization. It is further suggested that if we analyzed the EUSBSR as a novel application of strategic spatial planning, we might not only gain a better understanding of the governance approach behind the strategy, but also be able to further highlight some of the original aspects of the governance approach that has become known as the “new strategic spatial planning”.*

*“What was necessary was a tool adapted to the problem. No work without this tool.”*

– Michel Serres, *Conversations on science, culture and time* (Serres & Latour, 1995:91-92)

The purpose of this paper is to discuss retooling. Primarily, it is about what appears to be an emerging retooling of EU territorial cohesion policy through the introduction of the concept of macro regions and the novel policy processes that have been developed in the application of this concept. In addition to this, it is also about the ongoing retooling of strategic spatial planning. This process is already well underway since more than a decade, as documented by eminent scholars in what could perhaps be called the “new strategic spatial planning” paradigm, such as Andreas Faludi, Louis Albrechts and Patsy Healey (cf. among others Healey et al, 1999; Albrechts, et al, 2003; Albrechts, 2004; Sartorio, 2005; Albrechts, 2006a; Albrechts, 2006b; Faludi, 2008).

Using the above-mentioned contemporary literature on strategic spatial planning as a point of departure, this paper aims at exploring the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) as an innovative way of practicing strategic spatial planning. Further, as a senior official at the EU *Directorate General* for Regional Policy (DG Regio) has noted, the

EUSBSR can not only be seen as a novel application of strategic spatial planning, but also constitutes a “a new kind of beast” in the context of established European Union territorial cohesion policy approaches.<sup>1</sup> In relation to this illustrious comment, it can be interesting to recount sociologist John Law’s discussion on “hopeful monsters”, those things “born slightly before their time; when it is not known if the environment is quite ready for them” (Mosley, 1991 quoted in Law, 1991:1). Perhaps, the “new kind of beast” of the EUSBSR can be seen as such a “hopeful monster”; or maybe we should then rather label it more benevolently as a hopeful *creature* not to make it too ominous sounding, but to highlight it as a phenomenon through which we might be able to catch a fleeting glimpse of something new in its emergence (Andersson, 2009:170). What we perhaps can see emerging here is not only a somewhat new take upon strategic spatial planning, and the development of a new tool in the EU territorial policy toolbox, but also the seeds to a new conceptualization of how planning as an activity not only has the power to shape pre-determined spatial entities, but actually also often strongly contribute to the constitution of hybrid regional collectives through practices of heterogeneous engineering, and how the deployment of stratagems of translation in planning processes contribute to the advancement of processes of regionalization and the formation of a recognized “voice of the region”.

The paper consists of three main sections. The first section of the paper discusses the phenomenon of regionalization, the processes through which regionalization occurs, and how strategic spatial planning can be seen as a practice that takes place within these processes. The second part of the paper examines the development of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and attempts to situate the Strategy project within the broader process towards a Baltic Sea regionalization. The paper is rounded off with a concluding discussion that examines the fruitfulness of analysing the EUSBSR as a project in strategic spatial planning, and how such an analysis also to some degree generates a need to reconsider what we regard to be the core practices of the new strategic spatial planning.

## **Planning and regionalization**

Planning work always begins “in the middle”, never with a tabula rasa – always having to work with materials from the past, in a situation constrained by multiple factors that for different reasons are beyond the control, and often even the knowledge, of the planner

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<sup>1</sup> Speech by senior advisor David Sweet, DG Regio, at the conference “Urban regions as drivers: the new strategies in the Baltic Sea Region”, arranged by Nordic Working Group on Urban Development, 24<sup>th</sup>-25 October 2009, Nordregio, Stockholm.

(Hillier, 2007). Perceived this way, planning is about attempting to stake out a desirable future for some entity, but within the constraints set by the present and the past – a “delicate balancing act, between what is and what could be” (Healey, 2006:268; Hillier, 2007:258). To understand this “in the middle”-situation of planning practice, it is important that we analyse planning work and planning exercises as parts within larger processes towards *regionalization*.

Law (2000:2) notes that “...spatialities are brought into being, enacted, with the objects which are located within them”. In the context of this paper, *regionality* is thus defined as a property based upon spatiality and ascribed identity, which together could be said to constitute the idea of *territoriality* – that things residing in proximity to each other in Cartesian space also share a family resemblance and/or relation (cf. Amin, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Jessop, 2006). This does not mean that they necessarily share *everything*, but it means that at least some shared aspect or concern is picked out and used by an actor as a basis for ascribing a commonality between some things that reside in the proximity of each other in space (Metzger, 2010; cf. also Law, 1999a; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; cf. Callon & Latour, 1981; Latour 2001, 2005).

Saying that identity must be *ascribed*, means that someone or something must be doing the work of ascribing, so thus the ascription of identity must be seen as a practice, and a deeply political practice at that, since it pertains to questions of inclusions and exclusions and the ascription of sameness and difference, which can have dramatic social, economical, ecological and political effects (Law, 2004a; Latour, 2004, 2005). Certain things are picked out as sharing something, while other things are “othered” (Law, 2004b; Law, 2007a; Callon & Law, 2005; cf. Hillier, 2007:153) and thus excluded as an externality, *that* which isn’t part of *this* (Latour, 2004; Latour, 2005; Paasi, 1996), while those things that are seen as belonging together are “folded” into commonality (cf. Hillier, 2007:140; Latour, 2005).

As the ascription of identity and the establishment of boundaries are based on practices, on interventions in the world, we also see that the establishment of regionality must be understood temporally, as a process of action. Paasi (1996, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2009), has therefore persistently argued that when we talk about regions, we must also always try to remember that these regions are the congealed, or at least partially stabilized products of processes of *regionalization*, which are always interventions in the world, and where through the drawing up of boundaries, both tacit and explicit, and both internally and externally, effects of inclusion and exclusion are produced.

The above suggested way of defining regionality must be understood as a spatially generic concept that does not exclusively pertain to any specific level of (ascribed) scalarity (cf.

Marston et al, 2005; Painter, 2008; Paasi, 2002a; Paasi, 2002b). Rather, processes towards regionalization go on all the time at all sorts of geographical scale levels, thus it is a distinctly trans-scalar concept that more than anything highlights the manipulation of scale (Law, 1999b) and the production of new scale units through the drawing up of boundaries between that which is ascribed as possessing identity, in addition to – or due to – spatial proximity, and that which is considered lacking identity and thereby ascribed “Otherness” due to spatial distance, and/or being within spatial proximity, but being deemed as negative or undesirable. In a historical perspective, we can for instance see the establishment of nation states as a new type of regionalization that established new scalar entities (cf. Paasi, 2004). The same goes for the establishment of the European Union and also, to give a contemporary example, the current rise of macroregional regionalizations within the EU that, again, establishes a new scalar concept, both overlapping and nesting with other regional articulations.

Regionalizations can also cut across administrative borders, such as in the case of cross-border regionalization, as long as ascribed identity and ascribed spatial coherence persists. So, hence we can see that regionalizations exist all across geographical scales, not only on the sub-national level, as usually referred to, but also at any other level where efforts are being made to ascribe identity, to qualify (and disqualify) actors as being part of the region, and to institutionalize specific articulations of regionality.

By taking our cue from Paasi, we see that spatial entities, such as regions, don’t come into the world neatly bundled, wrapped up and packaged. Rather, they must be seen as *spatiotemporal frames* (Painter, 2008; Callon & Law, 2005; cf. also Jessop, 2006), established through intensive labours and political interventions. These “framing” activities function through providing ascriptions of inclusion and exclusion, sameness and otherness – what is to be considered to be on the “inside” of the region, and what is its “constitutive outside” (cf. Hillier, 2007:142). And, lest we forget, there is of course always also an “outside on the inside”, consisting of those elements in geographic proximity that are deemed not to qualify for regional identity, and which thus are deemed alien, and not belonging to the region proper (Painter, 2008; Marston et al, 2005).

Processes towards regionalization are seldom streamlined, but are generally marked by strife and struggle over the right to determine the ascribed boundaries and substance of a certain regionalization. Thus, displacements and negotiations back and forth of what the region really *is* and *should be* will always occur in processes towards regionalization (cf. Latour 1987, 1999). As various actors intervene and suggest new variations upon how we should conceive of a certain region in the becoming, this often leads to situations with multiple and often

conflicting suggestions as how to envision a certain region floating around at the same time. Following Law (2000, 2007b) and Mol (1999), this means that we often can not talk of the region in the singular, but must rather refer to it in the multiple, as simultaneously existing, alternative propositions to the region that are often (but not always) mutually exclusive (cf. Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989:388; Callon, 1986; Callon & Latour, 1981).

In the resulting “ontological politics” (Law, 2009; Mol, 1999), the jostle between different propositions to regionality, the more allies a certain version of the region will be able to muster, the more influential and dominant it will become, leading to increasing costs (both financially and otherwise) for those who wish to dispute or challenge this particular “proposition for regionalization” (cf. Latour, 1987). As a certain version of the proposition for regionalization gains momentum and weight, and increasing degrees of closure are achieved around a singular version of the region, the specific regional proposition will within time achieve some degree of irreversibility, it becomes objectivized and institutionalized (Paasi, 1996; Paasi, 2001; Paasi, 2009; Painter, 2008; cf. Latour, 2004). In this context, partly following Paasi, but also inspired by Latour (2004:109, 243), I use the term *institutionalization* to refer to the processes through which regional proposition are translated into durability through delegation into more durable forms than discourse, for instance material and semi-material forms such as organizations, transport links, legal statutes, etc (Latour, 1999:187; Law, 2001; cf. Latour, 1994:38). As a certain proposition for regionalization – a certain “version of the region” – becomes all the more established, accepted and institutionalized it will within time become more or less of a “collateral reality” which is taken for granted and reproduced daily without much reflection (Law, 2009).

### **Assembling the regional collective through heterogeneous engineering**

In processes towards regionalization we will often find conflicting ideas and propositions with regards as how to conceptualize and draw the boundaries of a specific region. But when we speak of conflicting propositions, what is it that is really being proposed? What is the difference in substance between conflicting propositions towards regionalization? In this paper it is argued that these conflicts propositions can be seen as differing representations of a *regional collective*, or in other words, different suggestions with regards to what is to be seen as the essence of a specific region – the “stuff” of regionality. *Collective* is here used in line with Callon & Law’s (1995) definition of the term, that is – not as a collectivity, but as a “hybrid collectif”, an “emergent effect created by the interaction of the heterogenous parts that make it up” (Callon & Law, 1995; cf. Callon et al, 2009). Callon & Law further make

two central points regarding the collective: first, that they sometimes generate discretionary places, and second that agency is usually attributed to a particular part of the collective.

The first point about “discretionary places” as the product of interactions and processes ties in neatly with the above discussion on processes of regionalization. So to focus on the second point instead, we can here relate to Bruno Latour’s further development of the concept of the collective, where he points out that collectives of humans and non-humans must be *collected* – some actor must underwrite or ascribe them their commonality and labour to make the collective stick together; someone must undertake the political labour of performing “grouping talk” (cf. Latour 2004, 2005). So here we find appointed or self-appointed spokespersons for the collective trying to act as its mouthpiece, *talking for* the collective, which at the same time amounts to a *definition of* the collective (cf. Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987, 2004). So we can thus call *regional spokespersons* those actors that take upon themselves or are vested with the capacity to act as the mouthpiece of the region, to speak of and for the region, thus acting as the clearing house of regionality and establishing what belongs to the region and not (Latour, 2005:31), and hence articulating the essence of a particular proposition for regionalization (Latour, 2004).

That which is taking place when regional spokespersons articulate a certain version of the region or proposal for regionalization can be understood as an act of *heterogeneous engineering* (Law, 1987; Law, 2002). *Engineering*, so as to highlight the active, performative and practical aspect of the undertaking. *Heterogeneous*, to clarify the diversity of the many-natured parts being enscribed into the regional collective, both human and non-human, and including everything from biotopes to cultural practices, institutions, transport infrastructure and much, much more which are articulated and grouped together as all being aspects of a common regional entity (cf. Hillier, 2007:152ff). So thus, we can conditionally follow Paasi (2009) and Donaldson (2006) when they state that regionalization is a social process, if we by “social” mean to indicate that it is about generating *associations* between various heterogeneous elements, and do not limit ourselves to only seeing the human and discursive elements of propositions for regionalization, but rather see that regionalization processes entail the binding together of many disparate elements, both human and non-human (cf. Latour, 2005).

One way to phrase this is to say that what practices of heterogeneous engineering actually do is to attempt to weave disparate bits and pieces together; so as to create a sense of totality and of commonality between the elements being grouped or bound together through articulating

them as an entity (cf. Hillier, 2007). The actor doing the articulation, the binding – in the case of propositions for regionalization, the regional spokesperson – attempts to delineate the boundaries and establish the essence of a regional collective, thus generating a sense of inside and outside, what is part and isn't part of the region and what is essence and what is an anomaly within the context of the regional collective.

Of course, as a proposition, the version of the region being touted by a specific, maybe self-elected, regional spokesperson can always be challenged; and often we will see many different actors scrambling to make a claim to being the legitimate spokesperson of a region, all with their own slightly (or majorly) different propositions for regionalization.

The perhaps most important method for a regional spokesperson to attempt to strengthen the position of its proposal for regionalization is the enrolment of other actors as carriers and supporters of the specific proposal for regionalization. Or as Callon & Law argue, “the way forward is to make alliances, partial connections” (Callon & Law, 1995). The proposal for regionalization that manages to muster the strongest and widest alliances will, within time, to increasing degrees become institutionalized (cf. Paasi, 1996; Paasi, 2001; Painter, 2008), that is, transposed into more durable materials than discourse – such as organizations and physical infrastructure (Latour, 1999:187; Law, 2001; cf. Latour, 1994:38).

Strategic spatial planning is potentially a very powerful tool in recruiting allies to a specific proposal for regionalization and thus contributing to the institutionalization of a region, a notion that will be further discussed in the following section of the paper.

### **Establishing the singular voice of the region through strategic spatial planning**

The perspective on regionality and regionalization being elaborated upon above enables us to perceive planning not only as an activity that is reflexive of a region, or an attempt to steer the fate of a region. Rather it is also an activity that is constitutive to regionality by attempting to define the essence and boundaries of a region through the articulation of a specific proposal towards regionalization. By attempting to define what the region is in the present, it articulates boundaries both internal and external and delineates both the geographical scope of a region and the elements of identity within that spatiality, thus suggesting a specific articulation of a regional collective. Thus, planning *enacts* regions (Donaldson, 2006), which means that strategic spatial planning activities must be analysed as exercises in ontological politics (Law, 2009; Mol, 1999); because when planning processes function to establish and mobilize one specific, singular articulation of the region from the multitude of potential or possible regionalizations (cf. Berg, 2001:183), it also functions to guide this proposed



regionalization into a specific trajectory towards the future by delimiting what can be considered to be realistic future developments for the proposed regionalization. ‘Is’s’ and ‘ought’s’ become corollarily and simultaneously produced in the same process (cf. Latour, 2004).

One of the most powerful ways through which planning practice can advance processes towards regionalization is through establishing and deploying a voice that is perceived as speaking legitimately in the name and interests of the region as a totality. If the job of establishing an accepted voice of the regional collective (and hence indirectly, the composition of the regional collective itself) is carried out with success and without encountering too much dissent and opposition, a very powerful/empowering process has taken place which in a way could be seen as the constitution of a regional “Leviathan” (cf. Callon & Latour, 1981), whereby the singular voice comes to legitimately speak in the name of the multitude. When a multitude accepts to be represented by a singular voice in this manner – when it accepts that this voice might speak in their name – this gives the singularized voice a tremendous rhetorical power.

This general alignment of the proposition for regionalization to one dominating and (perhaps) undisputed version – this singularization – takes great effort to achieve. Neither is it ever absolute or incontestable (cf. Callon 1986; Latour, 1987; Latour, 2004), rather, it means that contestation will be more difficult and costly the more established and widely accepted a certain regional spokesperson becomes (cf. Latour, 1987). Thus, it could be said that propositions for regionalization being presented by widely accepted regional spokespersons often generate their own additive, snowballing logic with regards to the recruitment of allies: the more allies (human and non-human) you have attached to your specific proposition of the region, the stronger it becomes rhetorically – and hence, the more undeniable and unavoidable as a reality that actors must take into consideration.

Previously in the paper it was stated that strategic spatial planning has the potential to act as a powerful tool in furthering processes towards regionalization, and that this primarily can be achieved through generating a singular and accepted voice of the region, that is, to act as a legitimate spokesperson of the region and its interests. But what is it that makes strategic spatial planning processes so well suited to generate this “voice of the region”?

To begin to get an idea of this we can start by extracting a few strands from the contemporary academic literature on strategic spatial planning. Faludi (2006:122) defines the concern of strategic planning as entailing the continuous process of co-ordination of a multitude of actors in situations of uncertainty, where the involvement of a multitude of actors contributes to the

complexity of the situation. As an elaboration on this basic perspective, Faludi (2008:1478) further states that “strategic spatial planning is not about shaping places but about shaping the minds of the stakeholders”. In a similar vein, Healey et al (1999:340) have argued that strategic spatial planning “can provide a frame of reference, language and metaphors for focusing and coordinating the actions of the many stakeholders in urban regional changes”, and that the strategies thus developed do this not so much by influencing actions directly but rather through their capacity to “‘frame’ mindsets” and organize attention (Healey et al, 1999:340).

In a more extensive definition, Albrechts (2006a:1152) describes strategic spatial planning as a “transformative and integrative (preferably) public sector-led... sociospatial... process through which a vision, coherent actions, and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and what it might become”. He further states that strategic spatial planning must focus upon a limited number of strategic key-issue areas, be based on a SWOT-analysis and involve studying the external trends, forces and resources at hand in the specific context being taken into consideration in the planning exercise. It further involves identifying and gathering “major” public and private actors, allowing for a multilevel and multisectoral governance approach which creates “solid, workable long-term visions” and strategies at different levels, all taking into account various types of power structures, uncertainties and competing values. In practice, Albrecht highlights that this amounts to building new ideas and processes that can carry the ideas forward, thus generating ways of understanding, ways of building agreements, and ways of organizing and mobilizing for the purpose of exerting influence in different arenas. Finally, Albrechts concludes his definition by stating that strategic spatial planning is about “focusing on framing decisions, actions, projects, results and implementation, and incorporating monitoring, feedback, adjustment and revision” (Albrechts, 2006a:1152).

In a more abbreviated characterization, Albrechts (2006b:1492) gives the following definition of *strategic projects* in spatial planning:

*Strategic projects are spatial projects, (preferably) coordinated by public actors in close cooperation with the private sector, and other semi-public actors. These projects are strategic to achieve visions, policy objectives, and goals embedded in strategic planning processes at different policy levels. They aim at transforming the spatial, economic and socio-cultural fabric of a larger area through a timely intervention. Strategic*

*projects aim to integrate the visions, goals and objectives from different policy sectors, as well as the ambitions and goals of the private sector. It also aims to integrate the inhabitants and users of the area. In this way these projects are transformative and integrative. They are strategic in the sense that they deal with specific key issues in an area.*

While holding Albrechts definition of strategic spatial planning and strategic spatial projects in mind, I would still like to argue that what constitutes the really “new” in new strategic spatial planning – in comparison with more traditional, comprehensive spatial planning – is actually not so much in *what* is attempted to be achieved, but *how* it is envisaged to be achieved. The point being made is that it appears as if the new strategic spatial planning focuses more on employing what here will be called *stratagems of translation* instead of working through *stratagems of calculation* – thus building regionality from below instead of attempting to impose it from above.

### **Planning stratagems: translation and calculation**

Notwithstanding the powerful potential of the practices of strategic spatial planning in articulating and institutionalizing propositions for regionalizations, planning literature provides countless examples of when planning in practice has failed to live up to these potentials. Especially the shortcomings of what today, perhaps a little bit sloppily, could be called “traditional” strategic planning practices have had a tendency to propose regionalizations that have failed to perform, even when they were vested with formal power and legal capacities (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; Albrechts, 2006b). Building on Albrechts (2006a, 2006b) what is here referred to as traditional planning practices is the comprehensive tradition of strategic spatial planning that aimed at “the integration of nearly everything” (Albrechts, 2006a:1149; also cf. Albrechts, 2004; 2006b). Comprehensive plans, which primarily began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, were often formally binding, but not so seldomly met with fierce opposition from strong policy sectors that according to the plan were to subordinate their activities under the aegis of the plan. As a result, important actors often actively ignored or opposed the plans, and sometimes even proceeded to attempt to sabotage them (cf. Albrechts 2006b). Healey (2001) notes that traditionally, the agendas of spatial planning were technically defined by experts, meaning that political questions become translated into questions of technique (cf. Latour, 1999:98). The planning work being done is then still very much political, but since democracy formally has very little room for

technocratic politics (even though it takes place all the time) it was most often performed covertly and even unconsciously, without what could be called a “due democratic process” – especially during the era of grand modernist planning (cf. Latour, 1993).

Perhaps we can gain a deeper understanding of what differentiates traditional spatial planning practices from new spatial planning practices by analyzing traditional spatial planning as attempts to propose regionalizations through employing *stratagems of calculation*, whereas the new strategic spatial planning first and foremost appears to focus upon achieving regionalization through the employment of *stratagems of translation* (cf. Metzger, 2010).

If we first consider the *stratagem of calculation* it primarily leans against a Scientific (capital S) mode of thinking and acting (cf. Latour, 2010). In employing this stratagem, an actor claiming regional spokesperson status attempts to define reality through establishing scientific authority, claiming overview over a region as an objectively existing entity in its own right, which the spokesperson can speak for due to its privileged access to the unconditional, latent truths of primary qualities – uncovered through scientific methods. When employing a stratagem of calculation, the proposition for regionalization immediately becomes extremely singular, as there can only be one objective reality and the scientific truth cannot – must not – be betrayed; it is a “take it or leave it”-deal that demands to be truthfully mediated without distortion (cf. Latour, 1999, 2001, 2005). As Latour notes, the idea that once discovered, facts “speak for themselves”, generates an enormous political power for those that can claim that they master the facts, as this provides “the great political advantage of shutting down the babble with a voice from nowhere that renders political speech forever empty” (Latour, 1999:140). But, at the same time, stratagems of calculation locks the spokesperson into a commitment to their own non-negotiable version of reality, of the “objective region” as the stratagem proclaims: “this *is* the region in truth and reality, take it or leave it”. As Healey (2006:227) notes, this “techno-corporatist” form of governance can when successful provide very stable horizons for public policy, but quite generally also appears to fail to interest and attach important groups of actors to the proposed regionalization, as the regional propositions become very rigid, inflexible and non-negotiable, thus making it difficult for actors to assimilate the proposition and make it “their own”.

On the other hand, *stratagems of translation*, in the meaning used here, more directly and overtly engage in the messy, immanent world and the political manipulation of this world “in the wild”.<sup>2</sup> They focus upon the “netting, lacing, weaving, twisting” of ties that are weak in

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<sup>2</sup> An analogy can here be drawn to the argued difference between laboratory research and research “in the wild”, cf. Callon & Rabeharisoa (2003) and Callon et al (2009).

themselves but become strong in totality (Latour, 1996) and also attempt to approach the world in a more accommodating, diplomatic fashion (cf. Latour, 2004). The underlying rationale of the stratagem is to attempt to generate a margin of manoeuvre (Callon, 1986), a little leeway, in allowing for a certain degree of “slack” or translational drift (Latour, 1987, 1999), so as to be able to incorporate the goals and objectives of other actors in the articulation of the own proposed regionalization; thus creating potentials for *interessement* and enrolment of new allies for the proposed region through incorporating their specific issues into it (cf. Callon, 1986; Latour, 1999, 2001). So the translational stratagem is to a high degree about “convincing others of what their interests are and what they ought to want to be” (Latour, 1981:144), but in a process of mutual accommodation and adjustment. Through processes of what Callon (1986) calls problematisation, *interessement*, enrolment and mobilisation actors are enticed into accepting a certain definition of reality and programme of action, convinced that subscribing or attaching themselves to this programme of action is of benefit to them, and attaching themselves to this programme of action – thus modifying their own previously established interests, but to some extent also modifying the proposed programme of action, and finally – picking up the programme of action and proceeding with implementing it (cf. Faludi, 2006). Thus, successful translation could be said to be founded on the generation of shared interests (cf. Latour, 1987) and strategic convictions (cf. Healey, 2006).

So when the calculative stratagem says “the facts are speaking to me, and therefore I am speaking”, and thus appoints itself as the scientific spokesperson of a preconfigured objective reality without seeing the need to anchor the truth-statements anywhere else (why would they, they have objective reality on their side!), translational stratagems on the other hand rather proclaim “I am speaking, because you were all speaking, and I listened to you”, thus avoiding to take the role of a scientific authority imposing itself from above *upon* an ascribed collective, but rather presenting itself as a voice *of* the collective, assembled from below. We will now turn to examine how the employment of a stratagem of translation might unfold in practice by looking closer at the project to formulate a European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

### **The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: background and process**

Until now, not very many academic accounts of the *European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region* (EUSBSR) have been produced. Here I am primarily leaning on a working paper

by Dubois et al (2009) and a published paper by Lehti (2009), participatory observation in conferences, reading of source materials and interviews.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, there have existed numerous initiatives for a proposed regionalization of the wider transnational Baltic Sea area. In the early 1990s, common heritages were articulated and various programs and projects were initiated, where cooperation and networking most often emerged on very spontaneous and pluralistic terms (Lehti, 2009:19). Initiatives generally came from the western shores of the Baltic as part of the enthusiasm to include the new eastern Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – into a new European transnational community. Soon it turned out that there was widespread dissensus regarding the desirability of a Baltic Sea regionalization. Because, while the western countries of the Baltic Sea area found themselves within an emerging process of neo-regionalization, the former communist republics were still focusing on consolidating borders and national boundaries, and were busy crafting a national – and to some extent “western” and European identity – wherein a label of “Balticness” was not seen as very befitting. This led to a mellowing out of the first scramble for regionalization of the Baltic Sea towards the end of the 1990s, when it thus seemed as if the proposed regionalization of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) was already a lost cause as a “future-region” (Lehti, 2009:18). Even if the BSR regionalization efforts of the 1990s failed to generate any lasting momentum, they still left a living heritage of a wide and disparate organizational patchwork of actors that saw themselves as part of a wider BSR context. These included various EU *INTERREG* programs, the *Council of Baltic Sea States*, the *Nordic Council of Ministers*, the *Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation*, *Union of Baltic Cities*, *Baltic 21*, the *Helsinki Commission* and the *NB8-group* – to mention but a few of the organizations and constellations that are sometimes referred to as the “alphabet soup of the BSR”, due to the many acronyms of organizations with overlapping agendas and activities in the region. Or as one senior EU Commission official has phrased it: take any four or five letters with a “B” in them, and there will be an institutional group to match them in the Baltic region.

In EU policy circles it has been repeatedly claimed that the initiative for the EUSBSR emanated from Sweden’s concern with the environmental state of the Baltic Sea. Lehti (2009) traces the origins of the EUSBSR project to a memorandum delivered to the EU commission by the so-called Baltic Strategy Working Group, consisting of seven members of the European Parliament; three of whom were Finnish, one German, one Estonian, one Latvian and one British – all representing multi-partisan political interests. In their 2006 report to the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso the group stated that a probable

successful approach would be to attempt to coordinate EU institutions and existing Baltic Sea organizations to develop a more secure, stable and competitive region. In December 2007 the European Council called upon the Commission to initiate work on a Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The task was delegated to DG Regio, the EU Directorate for regional affairs. The core team within DG Regio came from the Unit for Territorial Cooperation, headed by Colin Wolfe, who also formally headed the core six person taskforce within the DG who worked with developing the strategy. The core DG Regio-team performed what perhaps could be labeled as a major feat of “shuttle diplomacy”, consulting and coordinating various DGs, nation states, multinational and transnational organizations, NGOs and regional authorities. The process included local stakeholder hearings and a major public consultation which resulted in considerable and substantial response from both EU member states, non-member states (Russia, Belarus, Norway) over thirty regional and local authorities, and a great number of inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies.

Already in the initial, probing stages of formulating the strategy it became apparent that if relevant actors were to be made to share the concern of the environmental state of the Baltic Sea, there were many other concerns being articulated by a wide array of different actors in the wider Baltic Sea area that needed to be taken into consideration for there to be any chance of producing a resilient strategy, accepted by a multitude of actors. Thus, a wide array of issues became entangled in each other in the very first stages of the strategy process, including environmental issues, security and economic well-being. Within time, the expanded strategy process gained its own momentum and in June 2009 the European Union formally launched its new *Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region*. The development and application of the EUSBSR marks the introduction of a new territorial concept in the EU policy toolbox, that of the transnational *macro region*. It also positions the EU as a major player in the efforts to regionalize the Baltic Sea Region.

### **The Baltic Sea Region of the EU Strategy: An emerging heterogeneously engineered (hybrid) regional collective?**

So what is it really then that has been produced in the EUSBSR process? What are the results, considering that the EU Commission has followed through on a promise not to deliver any new funding, legislation or institutions in relation to the EUSBSR? If we choose to be myopic, one could say that the main outcome consists of a small stack of paper – containing a thin strategy core document, an action plan and a background and analysis document. But if we follow the threads that have been woven around this small stack of papers, we will soon

see that many other things also have been produced, things that are perhaps even more important: such as an emerging Baltic Sea Region stakeholder community, what appears to be a quite widely accepted voice of the shared interests of the region, and – within time – perhaps, an established regionalization.

If we first turn to look at the documents themselves, a basic tenet of the strategy appears to consist of an ambition to be as non-imposing as possible, and to try to build upon the specific conditions of the wider Baltic Sea area with the aim of efficiently coordinating and facilitating the dialogue between all the existing multi-level initiatives that are already in place in the region (Dubois et al, 2009:32).

Some of the major goals of the strategy are thus the coordination of multiple sectoral strategies and financial instruments with territorial impacts, a focus on common regional features and challenges as the unifying factor in transnational cooperation, and an emphasis on action-driven cooperation based on joint challenges and met on different geographical scales (Dubois et al 2009). This coordinating, building from below, “bricoleurish” approach appears to have been developed partially due to choice, partially to necessity, as the European Commission has very clearly stated that there will be no new instruments, legislation or institutions developed in relation to macro-regionalizations within the EU (known as the “3 no’s” of EU macro-regionalization).

A carrying principle in the strategy is that it primarily aims at supplementing and coordinating previous and existing initiatives, and thus introducing a dimension of “European added value” by establishing a double vision where actors are induced to frame their activities in multiple spatial frames by attaching what perhaps could be dared to be called the EUSBSR “brand” to their activities, and thus highlighting that what they are doing also should be seen as an activity that has positive effects for the whole Baltic Sea Region. The idea appears to be that by attaching the EUSBSR label to specific interventions that are considered gainful for the whole region, and therefore included in the official Strategy Action Plan, a sense of shared concerns and mutual assistance will arise building on a “your concerns are also mine, if my concerns are also yours”-logic (cf. Dubois et al, 2009:25). As Dubois et al (2009:39) note, this approach has resulted in “a negotiation process in respect of what a potential future could look like for the macro-region”, including “the identification of trade-offs among a bundle of stakeholders representing different levels... and diverging interests”.

Dubois et al (2009:9) see macro-regionalization as it is performed in the context of the EUSBSR-project not as a “grouping of homogenous territories” but rather “based on heterogeneity”, and on the shared and common issues of a heterogeneous group of actors.



Looking at the Strategy document and the Action Plan, we can also see what appears to be an ambition to non-discriminatorily trace all the entanglements of issues across what is normally seen as rigid dividing lines between the realms of nature, culture, economy, politics, etc. The fate of the Baltic clams, as traced in the Action Plan, is tied to Cyanobacterial algae, which are connected with wetland recreation, and further on with agricultural practices regarding the use of fertilizers, and further on with land use planning to produce buffer strips along water courses.<sup>3</sup> But not only do the Strategy and Action Plan present the tracings of many heterogeneous networks. In itself, by collecting all these disparate elements within the single framework of the Strategy and Action Plan documents, the strategy in itself also ties together diverse elements such as eels, cods, ballast water reception facilities, SME-networks, environmentally friendly tourism, functioning economic competition, east-west railway linkages, picturesque landscapes, and much else into a seemingly coherent regional whole envisioned as being desirable; by stating that all these disparate elements share something, that they are associated through being part of the same proposed Baltic Sea regionalization. At the same time water fleas, perfluorooctanesulfonic acid, organized crime, outdated oil tankers, overfishing, fragmented electricity markets, violence, drug abuse, tuberculosis and many other things are "othered" in the documents – that is: highlighted as elements to be excluded from the proposed regionalization.

So what we can see from the documents of the EUSBSRs is that we are definitely looking at a project of attempted heterogeneous engineering of a macro-regional collective. *Engineering*, because it is obvious that a lot of effort has gone into producing the documents and ascribing the relations that are stated within it. *Heterogeneous*, because of the blatant and very constructive disregard within the Strategy and Action Plan for separating out and cordoning off entities and issues as belonging either to the social, natural, political, economic or cultural realm; and instead mixing all these together, pragmatically tracing threads and associations wherever possibilities emerge. The emerging result is a proposal for a Baltic Sea Region *hybrid regional collective*, consisting of everything from plankton to SMEs and east-west transport linkages, but excluding such things as organized crime, phosphate-intensive agriculture, and to some degree: Russia (which will be discussed further below).

### **Situating the EUSBSR-project within the longer process towards Baltic Sea area regionalization**

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<sup>3</sup> *Commission staff working document...: Action Plan*. SEC (2009)712, 10.6.2009, Commission of the European Communities: Brussels.

But apart from the documents containing the proposal for what the Baltic Sea Region is, and could become, other things – at least as important – have also been produced in the EUSBSR-process. At this point, it is relevant to remind ourselves that the Strategy, and the regional collective being traced in the Strategy document and Action Plan, have not popped up out of nowhere. The strategy is clearly not just an act of pure willing of something out of nothing. Rather, we must see the EUSBSR as a project within a longer process towards a regionalization of the Baltic Sea area. This was a process that had come to a grind, and appeared to be failing in producing a functioning regionalization; and the EUSBSR appears to have become an important infusion of energy to the faltering project of Baltic Sea area regionalization, which otherwise might have been relegated to the dustbins of history.

If we roughly attempt to situate the EUSBSR-project within the longer process towards Baltic Sea area regionalization, we can see that preceding the project there already existed loose and non-coherent but quite widely spread ideas about the existence, or possible existence of some sort of Baltic Sea Region. By paraphrasing Marres (2005) we could say that especially during the 1990s, a *regional public*, carrying ideas about regionalization for the Baltic Sea area, had begun to emerge. Marres argues that publics are ushered into existence through the formulation of issues which existing are claimed to be unable to settle (Marres, 2005:31). So what appears to have been happening in the Baltic Sea area in the 1990s is that actors began to raise issues concerning among other things security, environmental concerns and prosperity, which they claimed could not be solved optimally within existing administrative frameworks, but that these issues called for a Baltic-wide approach to be successfully tackled. One could in other words say that a “community of concern” was emerging around the Baltic Sea area (Marres, 2005:61), focused upon common and shared issues of various sorts. But this community of concern appears to have become somewhat stagnant, with a multitude of actors all pursuing their specific sectoral interests and issues without succeeding in articulating the region and the concerns of the region as a singularized whole.

It appears to be at this stage of the process towards regionalization that the EUSBSR-project makes its entrance. It intervenes through approaching the existing community of concern and by activating it again through actively tying together the various issues already on the table into a coherent whole. What the EUSBSR appeared to have managed to achieve is the transformation of a loose regional public into a more stabilized *regional stakeholder community*. This process has entailed the *fostering of regional stakeholder subjectivities* whereby actors who have previously been attached to different logics of operation, such as sectoral logics, through conscious efforts are encouraged and helped along to renegotiate their

attachments, and explore how concerns can be shared and interests converged on a territorial, BSR-basis (cf. Metzger, 2010). So it is about establishing not only shared interests and concerns, but also about framing these in territorial terms – as part of a wider taking-in-regard of the well-being of a specific place; placing concerns and interests within a specific territorial frame. It appears as if the taskforce behind the EUSBSR worked very committedly and consciously to achieve this outcome by actively and arduously laboring to weave together the existing institutional actors in the region by establishing a climate that generated a sense of “your concerns are mine, if my concerns are also yours”. So, by employing this type of stratagem of translation the team behind the strategy appears to have managed to generate an approach where the canvassing and highlighting of existing concerns of actors that might become relevant in the regionalization process were translated into a singularized proposition for regionalization, articulated by a clear and seemingly well-anchored voice of the region – the EUSBSR Strategy document and Action Plan. In the strategy documents, one could say that different issues, concerns and interests are made to meet, intermingled, entangled; and from this, new values are generated (cf. Corvellec, 2001:202).

Of course, all interests and values can never be made commensurable, the issues which actors really appear to be unable to share must be shifted out of the process, and with that – some actors that are strongly attached to these issues might fall off as they are unable to agree upon what perhaps could be called the emerging “terms of regionalization”. In the case of the EUSBSR, the greatest issues of contention appear to have surrounded questions such as the *Nordstream* gas-pipeline, a geopolitical issue of contention, and also a few issues which appear to have aggravated Poland (perhaps particularly the actions aimed at reducing phosphate-intensive agriculture and the omission from the strategy of certain proposed north-south transport linkages through Poland), to the degree that they were on the verge of blocking the strategy in the European Council. But it appears as if it was not in the member states that the strongest dissent with the strategy existed, but rather among some of the EU “ministries”, the DGs – *Directorates-General*, such as Environment, Mare (Maritime affairs and fisheries) and Agriculture, who all had strong and clearly articulated sectoral interests to guard. These differences were generally solved with great effort using established mediation techniques within the EU administration. For most other actors in the region, it generally appears as if the contents of the Strategy and Action Plan is seen as an acceptable composition, or as one senior DG Regio official expresses it, many appear to see it as “not 100% what they wanted, but better than nothing” – which can probably be seen as a very

positive outcome of a process aiming at the translation of multiple interests and concerns into a set of shared concerns and interests.

At the present stage, where it appears as if the Strategy and Action Plan in themselves will “stick”, the question is how effectively they will be translated into practice. A loose governance structure for the implementation of the Action Plan is in place under the coordinating aegis of DG Regio, but with action implementation being the responsibility of other actors in the region who have accepted the role as priority area coordinators. At this stage, we could perhaps point to at least four issues that will be of crucial importance in determining how successful the EUSBSR will be as a step towards the institutionalization of a resilient Baltic Sea regionalization:

First: to what degree will actors in the region accept the proposal for “double vision”, that is – to begin seeing themselves not only as local, region, national and/or sectoral actors, but also as stakeholders in a proposed Baltic Sea regionalization? Will the loose, flexible governance regime being put into place for the implementation of the EUSBSR succeed in stabilizing and also expanding upon the emergent, but probably still fragile BSR stakeholder community?

Second, will the EU and DG Regio be generally and widely accepted as the legitimate spokesperson of the Baltic Sea region – both outside of the EU administrative apparatus and within it? If so, this could be seen as a quite dramatic development, not only for the Baltic Sea region, where the wide ranging acceptance of a legitimate voice for the interests and concerns of the region dramatically will push the region further ahead on the road towards a stabilized regionalization – but also for EU territorial cohesion policy, and further –for the power balance within the EU. The reason for this is that the macro regional approach – which the EUSBSR is seen as a pilot case of – unlike the *Europe of the Regions*-concept, does not entail a *devolution*, a simple shifting downwards of political rights and entitlements to smaller established scale units, but rather what perhaps could be termed a *re-volution*, an establishment of new territorial scale units that cut across national borders and reterritorializes the EU in a way that truly has the potential to generate “integration in patches” from an EU perspective, but also perhaps “disintegration in patches” from the perspective of both national sovereignty and sectoral power structures.

Third, will the EUSBSR succeed in delegating the proposal for regionalization in the BSR into more durable materials? As previously stated, a loose governance structure is already in place, and as mentioned, it appears as if the Strategy is already having a real impact upon the alignment of existing EU financial instruments and also on transport infrastructure development, where it appears as if the Strategy might have an impact upon the revision of

the EU TEN-T guidelines, which would mean that east-west linkages around the Baltic Sea rim will be prioritized over north-south linkages in Northern Europe, thus very physically contributing to the further institutionalization of the proposed Baltic Sea Region.

Finally, there is the issue of the openness and closure of regional boundaries, and how to continuously be able to renegotiate the composition of the regional collective. It is clear from the Strategy document that the EUSBSR sees the proposed Baltic Sea regionalization as a “fuzzy region”, without clearly defined geographical boundaries. The Strategy and the Council conclusions on the strategy also leave open the issue of how to include non-member states around the Baltic Sea rim – Russia and Belarus, and to some extent also Norway – into the proposed regionalization. This is a sticky and contentious issue for many reasons, both geopolitically and with regards to EU administrative statutes and procedures (how to include a third country as insiders within an EU policy framework). Still, this is most probably a crucial issue for the future of the BSR-region as it is presently being articulated, for the same day that the Russian federal government will begin to see the EUSBSR as a threat to their geopolitical interests in the region, this will probably spell serious trouble for the stability of the current process towards regionalization under EU leadership.

### **Concluding discussion: the EUSBSR, strategic spatial planning & regionalization**

In the introduction to this paper it was proposed that we might analyze the EUSBSR-project as an enterprise in “new” strategic spatial planning, but it was also suggested that it is perhaps a project in strategic spatial planning that also pushes the definition of the concept in new directions. For instance, in one way, the paper suggests that strategic spatial planning exercises to some degree are very powerful, as they must not only be seen as reflexive of a region, but actually to a high degree also as constitutive of regionality. At the same time, it is also claimed that strategic spatial planning must not be seen as acts of willing regions into being from nothing. Rather, they must be seen as situated within wider processes towards regionalization, where they often play an important part, often relating to the process whereby an accepted voice of the region is established and a singular proposition towards regionalization is articulated. With regards to more extensive and detailed attempts at defining strategic spatial planning, such as that of Louis Albrechts, there definitely appears to exist some clear convergences between the EUSBSR-approach and the strategic spatial planning approach as defined by him. Still, it can be maintained that the most important aspect that unites the EUSBSR-approach and the new strategic spatial planning approach is not so much in the quite detailed, although flexible, protocols for planning procedure suggested by

Albrechts, but rather in the general tack or *stratagem* being employed, which has here been defined as a *stratagem of translation*. The stratagem of translation has been defined as an approach that attempts to build regionality “from below” through enrolling actors as allies in the articulation of a proposed regionalization by translating existing concerns and interests into a coherent and shared proposition for regionalization.

As an example of planning work conducted through a stratagem of translation, we can see is that the EUSBSR taskforce within the DG Regio appear to have made it their mission to not only accept but actually also use as the basis for their approach the particular conditions of strategic planning work: to begin their work “in the middle”, laboring in a bricoleurish fashion with the materials at hand, arduously giving themselves to heterogeneous engineering. This has entailed hard work to attempt to tie up existing institutions, concerns and ambitions into a coherent whole: a BSR-regionalization that could be made faithful enough to the expressed interests and concerns of the actors so that they see a point in attaching themselves to it – yet collectivized to such a degree that adherence to the Strategy might generate a sense of shared concerns and of a shared fate for the Baltic Sea Region, thus building identity and regionality “from below” by establishing a logic of “if my concerns are yours, your concerns are also mine”. As stakeholders are tied down into commitment to the proposal for regionalization, an emerging stakeholder community comes into being, and the essence of the region also becomes defined in the process.

The EUSBSR has been labeled as a “new kind of beast” within the bestiary of EU territorial cohesion policy. In the introduction to the paper it was also suggested that perhaps it can also be seen as a “hopeful creature”, a sign of things to come. But if so, what is so hopeful about it? And for whom? Perhaps, from looking at the analysis performed in this paper, it could be seen as hopeful for all of those who wish to find new tools for destabilizing existing, ingrained territorializations and entrenched sectoral interests within the EU; that is, to find new ways to promote “European integration in patches”. It might be that it is also hopeful for strategic spatial planners, who in the practices employed within the EUSBSR-process perhaps can spot signs of new areas of applicability for spatial planning practices that resonate well with the current institutional climate in the EU sphere, thus opening new pastures for the planning professions. And perhaps, it is also hopeful for all the believers in “due democratic process”, as the EUSBSR also might be seen to represent a more open, transparent, multi-vocal and dialogic way of performing EU policy development than might often be the regular case. Maybe, some might even start to hope that with the apparent success of the EUSBSR process, a new impetus might even have been provided for opening up EU policy processes to

a higher degree of public participation, if it turns out that the modus operandi of assembling a stakeholder community “from below” – a stakeholder community which sees itself as attached to the agenda being generated and carries and performs this agenda as their own – will actually lead to a stronger performance and delivery for EU policy than otherwise might have been the case.

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