

THE IMPACT OF EUSAIR ON TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE AND SPATIAL PLANNING:  
EVIDENCE FROM ITALY AND ALBANIA

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**ABSTRACT**

This contribution aims to shed light on the potential impact of the EU macro-regions on territorial and spatial planning systems. From a theoretical perspective, the EU macro-regions have been seen as a natural consequence of the sub-regionalisation which emerged in the EU after 1989. Building on a careful analysis of the existing literature, the paper reflects on the capability of the EU macro-regions to influence the mode in which domestic territorial governance and spatial planning systems adapt towards a new spatial governance configuration. Adopting a comparative approach, it concentrates on the potential impact of the EUSAIR in two different national contexts, Italy and Albania. Methodologically, the research focuses on three levels of analytical interpretation: (i) territorial governance, thus paying particular attention to the changes in the configuration of the existing territorial governance environment (internal, horizontal and external perspectives); (ii) sectoral issues, hence exploring sectoral changes which derive from the implementation of the four pillars on which EUSAIR is based and, (iii) spatial planning systems, thus highlighting the main potential changes in the domestic spatial planning systems.

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## **1. Introduction**

EU macro-regions are gaining momentum in the field of European studies. Scholars and academics are increasingly engaged in understanding the importance of these new institutional configurations within the panorama of EU territorial governance (Gänzle & Kern, 2016). This contribution, differently to other recent investigations, seeks to understand the domestic political and spatial effects of the EU macro-regions. In particular, it explores the potential impacts of the EU macro-regions, and specifically of the EU strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (hereafter EUSAIR) upon the territorial governance, sectoral policies and spatial planning of the Adriatic-Ionian countries, by analyzing the specific cases of Italy and Albania. Using these two cases, it demonstrates that the EUSAIR does not have a single impact but, instead, is characterized by a differentiation of influences depending on how each country is dealing with the strategy.

Accordingly, the paper is structured in six main sections. After this introduction on the scope and content of the contribution, section two presents the EU macro-regional approach and looks at its relations with EU territorial governance by briefly presenting the more recent theoretical discussion on this topic and illustrating the major EU macro-region strategies already active. Section three focuses on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and in particular on its process of institutionalization, governance structure, objectives and priorities. Section four then delineates the analytical approach adopted to explore the potential impacts of EUSAIR on territorial governance and spatial planning, and to identify the key analytical factors that better represent of the EUSAIR's impacts and influences. Section five applies the methodology to Albania and Italy and presents some empirical findings from the two case studies revealing a number of important differences. Finally, section six presents the conclusions and some recommendations for future research initiatives.

It is important to keep in mind that this paper is a first attempt to explore the potential impacts and thus to open up the debate on future theoretical and methodological integrations. Its scope is not therefore to provide an exhaustive explanation of EUSAIR's impact (it is still too early), but rather to establish a common starting point for future research activities and to make a contribution to the scientific and academic debate in this field.

## **2. Conceptualisation of EU macro-region approach and setting it within EU territorial governance**

The discussion on macro-regional approaches has a long history in the literature of various fields (e.g. international relations, geography, economics). However, the concept of macro-regions applied to the European context is relatively new. One of the first definitions given by the EU Commission refers to macro-regions as areas “including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges (European Commission, 2009). Since then the interest of academics and policy makers has been growing and a relatively high number of contributions are exploring the question of macro-regions from various perspectives.

This section introduces the concept of EU macro-regions, highlighting their main features and challenges and focusing the debate on their role as a new form of European territorial governance. It is therefore divided into two subsections. The first (2.1) explores the concepts of EU macro-regions, territorial governance and regional cooperation, taking into consideration the existing debate on the topic and the related literature review. The second (2.2) presents and discusses the existing macro-regional strategies, such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR).

## 2.1 EU macro-regions, territorial governance and regional cooperation

Just under ten years ago, macro-regional strategies were endorsed by the European Council to enhance trans-governmental cooperation between EU member and non-member states, strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion also in the neighbouring areas. EU macro-regions are integrated frameworks that address common challenges in areas that share geographical/territorial, policy/functional and natural/ecological issues. These EU strategies aim to strengthen cooperation and connectivity in the entire region, harmonising territorial governance and trans-governmental cooperation.

For Soukos (2017), EU macro-regions are “hybrid forms of organization” which include both a territorial and a functional dimension that need to be carefully managed and balanced. In fact, EU macro-regions are affected by pre-existing institutional arrangements and include countries that have different historical, political, cultural, and normative backgrounds. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that, as the macro-regional motto states, “no new funds, no new legislation, no new institutions” are provided; nevertheless, EU macro-regions may be supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

As Gänzle et al. (2018: 1) point out, “both the macro-regional strategies and the macro-regions themselves have been met with increasing interest across several disciplines, including geography, regional planning, political science and public administration, triggering questions and debates on issues such as their impacts on existing practices of territorial cooperation and their relation to previously established forms of regional cooperation”. Thus, Gänzle et al. (2018: 10) further suggest that scholars should reflect more extensively on “the impacts and outputs of macro-regional strategies”, focusing on their political relevance and effectiveness.

This paper aims to make a contribution in this direction, shedding light on the possibility that macro-regions might influence and promote cross-fertilization across Europe. Thus, this process could also lead to a transformation of the existing patterns of spatial development and territorial cohesion, as well as the role of international actors at the different levels, leading to new forms of government and of territorial governance, of multilevel governance and to the creation of soft spaces. Indeed, as Stead (2014a) observes, macro-regions are currently fostering the establishment of new stakeholder networks, resulting in a rescaling of actor involvement.

## 2.2 EU macro-regional strategies

The first EU macro-regional strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), was launched in 2009. As can be seen in table 1, the main objectives and policy areas of the EUSBSR aim to protect the sea, increase the prosperity and to enhance the connectivity of the region. Each objective relates to a wider range of policies and has an impact on the other objectives. Moreover, the macro-region has three horizontal actions, which are: spatial planning, neighbours, capacity and climate. The Strategy aims to strengthen cooperation between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea in order to meet the common challenges and to benefit from common opportunities facing the region. The EU member states involved in the EUSBSR are Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The EUSBSR implementation is coordinated in close contact with the European Commission and all relevant stakeholders, such as other member states, regional and local authorities, inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies. Moreover, the Strategy is also strengthening cooperation with EU neighbouring countries (Russia, Iceland, Norway and Belarus).

*Table 1: EU macro-regions*

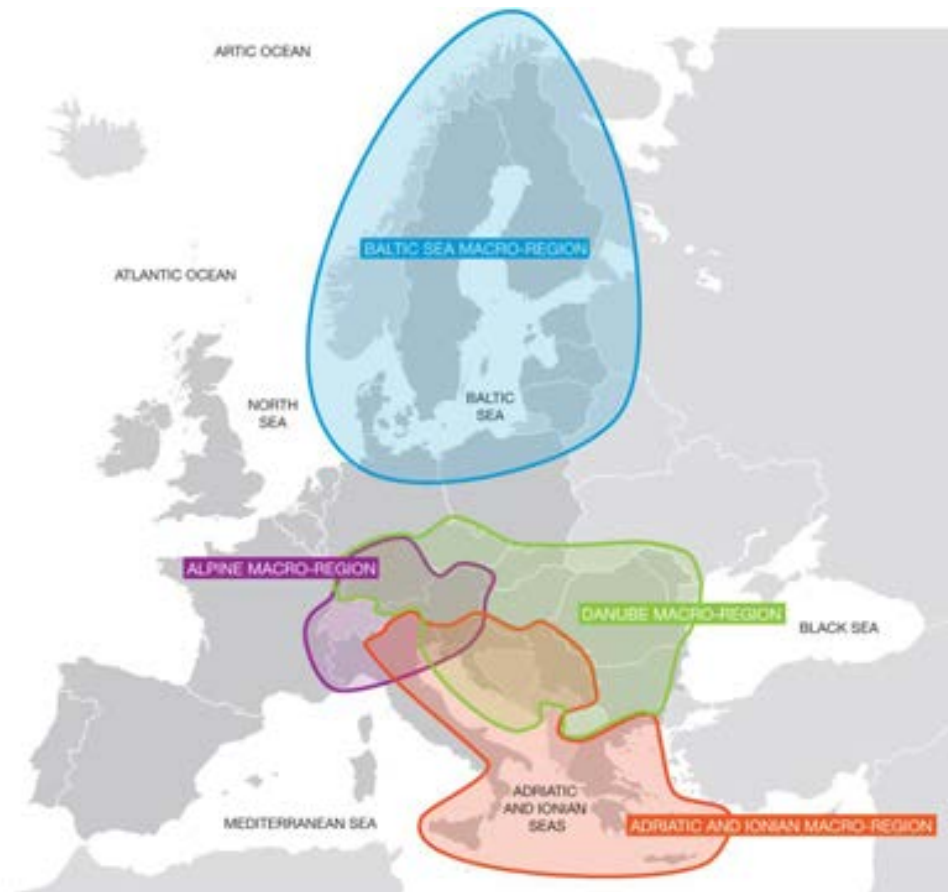
<i>EU Transnational Strategies</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Geographical coverage</i>	<i>Main objectives and policy areas</i>
Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)	2009	<b>7 Member States</b> (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland)	save the sea, increase prosperity, connect the region
Danube Strategy	2011	<b>14 countries</b> , of which 9 EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic,	connect the region, protecting the environment, strengthening the

(EUSDR)		Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), 3 accession countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and 2 neighbouring countries (Moldova, Ukraine)	region, building prosperity
Adriatic-Ionian Strategy (EUSAIR)	2014	<b>8 countries</b> , of which 4 Member States (Croatia, Greece, <b>Italy</b> , Slovenia) and 4 non-EU Countries ( <b>Albania</b> , Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia).	blue growth, connecting the region, environmental quality, sustainable tourism
Alpine Strategy (EUSALP)	2015	<b>7 Countries</b> , of which 5 EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, <b>Italy</b> , Slovenia) and 2 non-EU States (Liechtenstein, Switzerland)	growth and innovation, mobility and connectivity, environment and energy, governance

*Source 1: Authors' own elaboration of the available information*

In 2011, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) was endorsed by the European Council. The Strategy has been jointly developed by the Commission, together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, in order to address common challenges. The Strategy seeks to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives taking place across the Danube Region. Moreover, the Strategy addresses a wide range of issues, which are divided into four main pillars and twelve priority areas. This macro-regional strategy involves a high number of stakeholders geographically located in fourteen different countries, of which nine are EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), three accession countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and two neighbouring countries (Moldova, Ukraine).

In 2014, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR) was endorsed by the European Council. The Strategy aims at creating synergies and fostering coordination among all territories in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The Strategy involves eight countries: four Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia). It has four main pillars: I) blue growth (drive innovative maritime and marine growth in the Region, by promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs, as well as business opportunities in the blue economic sector); II) connecting the region (improve connectivity within the Region and with the rest of Europe, in terms of transport and energy networks); III) environmental quality (protect marine, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems in the Region, ensuring economic and social well-being for its people); and IV) sustainable tourism (develop the sustainable and responsive tourism potential of the Region, through innovative and quality tourism behaviour on the part of all stakeholders across the Region). Since the aim of the study is to understand the potential impacts of this particular macro-region on territorial governance and spatial planning, the current state of the art of EUSAIR will be further analyzed in the following section. In particular, the research focuses on the case studies of Italy, which deals with pillar II, and of Albania, which deals with pillar IV.



**Figure 1: EU macro-regions (source: European Commission, 2017)**

In 2015, the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) was launched. The Strategy aims to improve cross-border cooperation in the Alpine countries as well as identifying common goals and implementing them more effectively through transnational collaboration. This Strategy concerns seven countries, of which five are EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) and two non-EU countries (Liechtenstein and Switzerland). Moreover, the Strategy builds upon three main three general policy areas and one cross-cutting policy area which tries to improve cooperation and coordination within the governance macro-region.

Currently, there are other macro-regions in consideration, such as: the Carpathian Region, the North Sea, the Black Sea, the Atlantic Arc, and the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea. As can be seen in Figure 1 above, some of the areas involved in certain macro-regions overlap with other EU macro-regions. It is important also to remember that some of the EUSAIR regions overlap with other EU macro-regions. For example, some areas of Slovenia and Italy are both part of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region as well as the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region; while Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, involved in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region, are also part of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

Thus, the territorial governance and spatial planning system of Italy and Albania might be subject to certain influences or cross-fertilization from the EUSALP and the EUSAIR (see also table 1).

### **3. EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region**

This section shows how the EUSAIR went through the process of institutionalization by illustrating the main formal steps followed. Subdivided in four subsections, the first investigates the main historical steps starting from the first declaration in this topic known as Ancona Declaration (2000) arriving at the actual formal institutionalization structure (3.1). The second focuses more on EUSAIR's governance structure

showing how the EUSAIR is managed and which role each country has (3.2). The third, instead, concentrates its attention on the EUSAIR objectives and strategic priorities (3.3), while the fourth subsection analyzes the integration of EUSAIR with the existing EU transnational strategies and programmes in the Adriatic and Ionian Region (3.4). In this respect, particular attention has been paid to their discursive interaction and cross-fertilization.

### *3. 1. Steps towards the process of institutionalization of EUSAIR*

As has been mentioned, the approval of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region dates back to 2014 after the introduction of the EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea and Danube Region in 2009 and 2011, respectively. The institutionalization of the EUSAIR comes after years of discussion between the EU Commission and the authorities of the main participating countries led by the Italian central government (among others by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the Ministry for the Economic Development) and by other subnational actors like the Marche Region that has been particularly active in this area (Cagusi & Stocchiero, 2016). In this regard, it has required almost fifteen years of cooperation to officially launch the EUSAIR (table 2).

At the beginning of 2000, Italy hosted the first Summit on Development and Security on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas that was attended by almost all the EUSAIR countries, except Montenegro and Serbia that were included later on. The main objective of this Summit - known as the Ancona Declaration - was to guarantee the political and economic stabilisation of the Adriatic and Ionian Region after years of instability. In that event the focal point was recognized of enhancing “regional cooperation as an effective incentive to fostering political and economic stability making most solid basis for progress in the European Integration process” (The Ancona Declaration, 2000: 1). Four macro areas of cooperation were identified. The first concerns the cooperation in the field of economy, tourism and maritime transport in the Adriatic and Ionian area. The second refers to the cooperation for the environment and the safeguarding of the resources in the Adriatic and the Ionian. The third regards interuniversity cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian, while the fourth, instead, focuses on contrasting the organised crime in the Adriatic and Ionian basin and the role of coastal states and supranational and multilateral organisations. Beside the definition of these cooperation macro-areas, on that occasion the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) was launched as an “Initiative for dialogue and cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian region and to this end to establish the Adriatic and Ionian Council (AIC)” (The Ancona Declaration, 2000: 3). Over time, a progressive consolidation of cooperation activities between countries and institutions has taken place. Once per year, the AIC organises an annual meeting<sup>3</sup> where progress in cooperation is usually assessed and new initiatives are presented. In 2008, to further formalise these cooperation activities, the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic Ionian was established in Ancona. The main objective of the Permanent Secretariat was to make the AII more project oriented by coordinating several transnational cooperation activities. The turning point for the consolidation of the EU macro-region strategy was, certainly, the declaration, in 2010, of the EU in favour of preparing a EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Basin. In the same period, at the annual meeting of the AIC in Ancona, the EU’s support for the developing regional cooperation was recognised and welcomed through a specific EU macro-region initiative, as happened with the Baltic and Danube regions. With the document “Declaration of the Adriatic Ionian Council on the support to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region”, the AIC affirmed definitely its readiness to foster an attractive, secure and prosperous Adriatic Ionian Region; to play an active role in increasing the participation of stakeholders from different social spheres and interests (public and private sector, especially regional authorities, companies, universities); to activate a process aimed at placing the region within a European regional policy perspective taking advantage of the intergovernmental experiences etc. This position has been confirmed also in the subsequent AIC appointments in Brussels (2011), where the importance has been recognized, among others, of collaborating with the EU Commission for the preparation and implementation of the Strategy, involving national, regional

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<sup>3</sup> The AII has been held in Split (2001), Athens (2002), Bari (2003), Portoroz (2004), Cetinje (2005), Tirana (2006), Sarajevo (2007), Zagreb (2008), Athens (2009), Ancona (2010), Brussels (2011), Belgrade (2012), Brussels (2014), Dubrovnik (2016) and Catania (2018).

and local administrations. A new emphasis towards the development of the Strategy came from the official launching of the EUSAIR Strategy through which the European Council gave the European Commission the mandate in order to present the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (2012), and the establishing of the Adriatic-Ionian Intergroup of the Committee of the Regions (2013) aimed at fostering a broader engagement and the proactive role of local/regional communities in the EUSAIR (Athens Declaration, 2014). In 2014, the European Council approved the final version of EUSAIR and its Action Plan confirming and appreciating the long process which started in 2000 with the first Ancona Declaration.

*Table 2: Main steps towards the process of institutionalization of EUSAIR*

<i>Main steps</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Year</i>
First Ancona Declaration	Summit on Development and Security on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas	2000
Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic Ionian	Inauguration of the headquarters of the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic Ionian at the premises of Marche Region	2008
EU Declaration	Support for the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Basin	2010
Second Ancona Declaration	Reconfirm the importance to establish of an EU strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region	2010
Launching of the EUSAIR Strategy	European Council gave the European Commission the mandate in order to present the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region before the end of 2014	2012
Establishing of the Committee of the Regions	Setting up of the Adriatic-Ionian Intergroup of the Committee of the Regions	2013
Approval by the European Council	Communication from the European Commission to the other EU Institutions and introduction of the Action Plan	2014

*Source 1: Authors' own elaboration of the available information*

With the introduction of the EUSAIR, the need has been officially confirmed to adopt a multilevel governance perspective by anchoring its activity on intergovernmental approach, as has always been done through the AII. After the institutionalization of the EUSAIR, however, the role of AII has been put into discussion since a duplication of authorities has been recognized between AII and EUSAIR. In this sense, the challenge was to reconsider their responsibility to make both more effective. The XVIII Meeting of the Adriatic and Ionian Council held in Brussels (2015) introduced two important novelties. The first regards the need to align the AII and EUSAIR priorities and to put into practice the principle of subsidiarity by changing the type of participants of the AII's Round Tables (no more ministerial representatives but privileging other stakeholders). The second point was the need to have a common political management. The idea is to merge both the highest political levels since the AIC participants and the governing body of the EUSAIR are almost the same authorities. In its last meeting held in Catania (2018) the AIC confirmed the growing importance of the EUSAIR in the region shown by the intention of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to become the ninth participating country. Additionally, on that occasion the AIC recalled the "need for establishment during the new Programming period 2021-2027 of a dedicated Territorial Cooperation Programme with substantial and balanced financial resources (ERDF-IPA) to have the same geographical coverage as EUSAIR and aligned to it" (Catania Declaration: 2). On the other hand, it supports the establishment of National EUSAIR Committees aiming at enhancing the implementation of the EUSAIR in each domestic context. The next challenge of the EUSAIR is to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the new Western Balkans strategy recently adopted by the EU and to address the emerging geopolitical challenges (i.e. migration movements and refugees and the growing international investments promoted by China and similar actors).

### *3. 2. Governance structure*

Differently from other EU transnational initiatives, EU macro-regions have no possibilities to benefit from new funds (funds can be obtained by using existing EU financial channels); from new legislation (laws

should be based on the existing EU legislation framework); nor to introduce new institutions (see section 2.1). For implementing the Strategy, however, an effective and operative governance structure is needed. In this sense, in its 2014 Communication, the European Commission (2014a) affirms that governance must have both a political and an operational dimension, stressing the importance of coordination and implementation. Coordination should be intended as both between participating countries and between the different ministries and decision-making levels within each country. While, implementation should focus on full participation of EU member and non-member countries, effective involvement of the EU Commission and key target stakeholders. In this sense, “better governance is not about new funds nor bureaucracy, but how and by whom the Strategy is implemented and joint actions initiated and financed” (European Commission, 2014a). Following these prerogatives, the EUSAIR’s governance structure consists of a number of actors and institutions as listed below (table 3). Starting from the political level, the Ministerial Board certainly represents a reference body concerning any political decision. The competent ministries for each country participate on it, in particular those that are responsible for EU funds management and foreign affairs. Concerning the coordination level instead, the main body is the Governing Board (co-chaired by the European Commission) that encompasses a series of participants from each country (national coordinators, at least two for each country) and European institutions (representatives from Commission services, the European Parliament etc.). The main duty of the Governing Board (GB)<sup>4</sup> is, among others, to coordinate the Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs); advancing potential revisions for the Strategy and Action plan; ensuring coordination with existing regional cooperation organisations; developing a monitoring and evaluation framework. In this respect, the Governing Board is seen as the link/hinge between the political/ministerial level and the operational/managerial level represented by the TSGs. On the other hand, the TSGs consist of four thematic groups according to each pillar identified by the Strategy. In this respect, each thematic group is chaired by a tandem of countries (for at least three years) on a rotating basis. As the operative body, each TSG is responsible for identifying actions and projects to be included in the Action Plan, guaranteeing their conformity to the pillars’ objectives; identifying relevant funding sources and facilitating the implementation of actions and projects, including monitoring and evaluation. In addition, each TSG should be in line with the other TSGs, liaising with the Managing Authorities (the relevant EU programmes managed directly by the Commission, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the regional cooperation organisations, etc.). In addition to the main strategic bodies (the GB and TSGs), the EUSAIR Facility Point Strategic Project was set up to facilitate the implementation of the Strategy on the condition of offering operational support to the governance structures of the Strategy. For this scope, the current Facility Point is delegated to the Government Office of the Republic of Slovenian for Development and European Cohesion Policy, which coordinates the ministries, one regional and one local authority for each of the participant countries.

*Table 3: EUSAIR governance structure and main responsibilities*

	<i>Governing Bodies</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Main responsibilities</i>
Political level	Ministerial board	Ministers for EU Funds and/ or Ministers of Foreign Affairs of eight participating countries	Takes strategic decisions at the EUSAIR annual forums’ ministerial meetings
Coordination	EUSAIR Governing Board (GB)	<div>National Coordinators</div> <div>Pillar Coordinators</div> <div>Commission services (DG REGIO, DG MARE and DG NEAR)</div> <div>A representative of the European Parliament</div> <div>A representative of the Committee of the Regions plus a representative of its Adriatic-</div>	Coordinates work of the four TSGs, provides strategic guidance for management and implementation of the strategy, advancing

<sup>4</sup> Responsibilities and procedures have been set up according to the following document: The Joint Statement of the Representatives of the Countries Participating in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region on a Governance and Management System, set up in Partnership with the European Commission, for the Implementation of the Strategy.



		Ionian Interregional Group	revision of the Strategy and Action Plan, ensuring coordination with existing regional cooperation organisations, developing a monitoring and evaluation framework
		A representative of the European Economic and Social Committee	
		The Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative	
		Representatives of the Managing Authority of Interreg ADRION and of the EUSAIR Facility Point under the programme	
	National Coordinators	Two formally appointed representatives of each country	
	Pillar Coordinators of policy areas/horizontal actions	Two formally appointed officials from an EU-MS and a non-EU state	
Implementation level		Chairs: Each TSG will be chaired by two Pillar Coordinators	Implement the strategy in according to pillars' priorities, evaluating which projects/action best contribute to achieving the strategy's objectives
	Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs)	Participants: representatives from the relevant administrations within the participating countries. Other participants are: the Commission, regional cooperation organisations, representatives of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) etc.	
	EUSAIR Facility Point	Participants from all of the eight EUSAIR participating countries	Its duties include: assistance to the Governing Board and Thematic Steering Groups; facilitating strategic project development and financial dialogue; building capacities for monitoring and evaluation of EUSAIR; developing and managing the EUSAIR Stakeholder platform.

Source 3: Authors' own elaboration of the available information

### 3. 3. Objective and priorities

As affirmed by the EU Commission (2013), the general objective of the EUSAIR is to promote the sustainable economic and social prosperity of the Adriatic and Ionian Region and to preserve, at the same time, the environmental and costal ecosystem. The EUSAIR Strategy is set out in two main documents. The first, the Communication of the EU Commission, provides a framework for a coherent macro-regional strategy. The second, the Action Plan, identifies instead the concrete priorities and actions for the macro-region (European Commission, 2014b). The structure of the Action Plan incorporates pillars and, for each of them, identifies a series of coherent specific topics, actions and projects. As briefly explained above (section 2.2), the Communication and the Action Plan identify four pillars that must be addressed by the Strategy, namely: (i) blue growth - driving innovative maritime and marine growth; (ii) connecting the region; (iii) environmental quality - preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment and; (iv) sustainable tourism - increasing regional attractiveness.

Analyzing them separately, blue growth - driving innovative and maritime and marine growth - reflects the main objectives of the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. The idea is to strengthen the ecosystem axis represented by Adriatic and Ionian Seas by promoting common initiatives concerning several topics like blue technologies, fisheries and aquaculture and maritime and marine governance and services (European Commission, 2017). In this perspective, particular attention has been given to boosting blue research by establishing, for example, networks and research platforms for collaboration among the scientific

community, public authorities and private companies. Great importance, on the other hand, is given to the transposition of and implementation of EU *acquis* on fisheries, principally among non-member states.

Similarly to the first pillar, also the second, i.e. connecting the region, reflects the main common and sensitive challenges. The Adriatic and Ionian Seas constitute an important transport route for goods, passengers and energy (EU Commission, 2013). In this respect, great importance has been given at the implementation of the Adriatic Motorway of the Sea in according with the trans-European multimodal transport system and the Trans European Network - Transport (TEN-T). In the same way, the macro-region is influenced by the EU energy infrastructure with the implementation of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and the Ionian Adriatic Pipeline (IAP). The general object of the second strategic pillar is to optimise, improve and enhance connectivity infrastructure in the area, by reducing, minimising and addressing territorial disparities and environmental impacts.

In line with the EU and international declarations, the main objective of pillar number three is environmental quality. In this regard, the strategy seeks to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment by implementing cross-sector dialogue and initiatives aimed at improving the environmental quality of the regional ecosystems and preserving their biodiversity (EU Commission, 2013). In particular, the EUSAIR should guarantee a strong coherence in line with the main directives (e.g. the Water Framework Directive), EU strategies (EU strategy on adaptation to climate change) and other instruments like Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP).

Finally, the fourth pillar, i.e. sustainable tourism, seeks to increase regional attractiveness by promoting diverse and more sustainable tourism practices that can involve coastal regions as well as inner areas according to the communication on blue growth, which clearly identified coastal and maritime tourism as one of the key areas for future jobs and growth from the blue economy (EU Commission, 2013).

For each pillar a series of related topics, that help to better identify and address actions and possible projects to be implemented, have been identified. Table 4 shows the main actions and possible projects by identifying those measures that may have particular spatial implications.

*Table 4: EUSAIR main topics, actions and possible projects*

<i>Pillar</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Main actions</i>	<i>Main possible projects</i>
Blue Growth (Greece-Montenegro)	Blue technologies	R&D&I platforms on green sea mobility, deep sea resources, biosecurity and bio-technologies; macro-regional cluster development; researcher mobility; improving access to finance and promoting start-ups; diversification and profitability of fisheries and aquaculture; governance of maritime space	Sustainable aquaculture site location and management; implementing coordinated Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Coastal Management (ICM).
	Fisheries and aquaculture		
	Maritime and marine governance and services		
Connecting the Region (Italy–Serbia)	Maritime transport	Developing ports, optimising port interfaces, infrastructures and procedures/operations; improving the accessibility of the coastal areas and islands; gas pipelines	Support port multimodal connectivity; promote cooperation between relevant actors to improve maritime connections between neighbouring countries, between islands and with mainland; realising the TAP and its IAP connection
	Intermodal connections to the hinterland		
	Energy networks		
Environmental Quality (Slovenia-	The marine environment	Enhancing the network of Marine Protected Areas; implementing Maritime	Promoting projects, networks and place-based research initiatives

Bosnia & Herzegovina)	Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity	Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Management; development of joint management plans for cross-border habitats and Ecosystems; harmonisation and enforcement of national laws	
Sustainable tourism (Croatia-Albania)	Diversified tourism offer Sustainable and responsible tourism management	Fostering Adriatic-Ionian cultural heritage; improving accessibility for Adriatic-Ionian tourism products and Services	Adriatic-Ionian Museum Network; promoting the Adriatic-Ionian Region as an accessible region

Source 4: Authors' own elaboration of the available information

### 3. 4. Looking for strategic coherence: the role of EUSAIR within the EU transnational strategies and programs in the Adriatic and Ionian Region

The EUSAIR macro-regional strategy is part of wider EU transnational strategies and programmes that are, entirely or partially, involving the Adriatic and Ionian countries. In this sense, it is important to locate the EUSAIR within the architecture of the EU's strategic programmes, since the strategy itself is influenced, economically and strategically, by existing strategies and programmes.

Currently, it is important to note how the EUSAIR's strategic vision combines several EU societal, economic and spatial needs. The identification and conceptualisation of the four pillars (2.2) shows how close the EUSAIR is to the EU mainstream documents and norms (i.e. EU sectoral legislation, policy and discourse). As illustrated in table 5, the content of each EUSAIR pillar takes inspiration from existing EU legislation, policy and mainstream discourse. More in detail, the blue growth pillar contributes to reinforcing the EU 2020 Strategy and South East European 2020 Strategy, by promoting a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. In this respect, particular attention is paid to the question of cooperation. In line with the existing cooperation initiative, under the umbrella of European Territorial Cooperation, this pillar seeks to enhance cooperation and the sharing of best practices between countries in the Region (as well as outside the Region) (Action Plan, 2014). Concerning the second pillar - connecting the region - alongside the general provisions of EU 2020 Strategy, SEE 2020, South East European 2020 Strategy, the Strategy has been influenced or built on what has been foreseen by Trans-European Networks for transport (TEN-T) and Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E). With regard to transport, the South-East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) is an important reference point for the Strategy concerning the transport infrastructure system in the Balkans. Looking at the environmental quality pillar, instead, the Strategy has been influenced by the series of EU Environmental *acquis* (Marine Strategy Framework, Maritime Spatial Planning, Water Framework and Habitats Directives in particular) as well as by Green Infrastructure Strategy, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the South East Europe 2020 Strategy of the Regional Cooperation Council. Finally, also the fourth pillar - sustainable tourism - combines a series of EU provisions deriving from existing documents and strategies. In this respect, the Strategy reflects some aspects from A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism and EU Tourism Policy (2014), with an emphasis on promoting notions like sustainable tourism and competitiveness, integrated rehabilitation of cultural heritage etc.

The study shows that the Strategy has the ambition to scale and adapt some EU prerogatives by considering contextual needs and priorities taking inspiration from existing documents and strategies. This makes the strategy more understandable by both sides, the EU that sees some its ideas and principles applied, and each country involved.

Table 5: EUISAR pillars and EU mainstream documents and legislation

Pillars	EU sectoral legislation	EU policy	EU discourse
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Blue Growth	Water Framework and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive	EU 2020 Strategy, Maritime Strategy Adriatic and Ionian Seas Barcelona Convention, South East European 2020 Strategy	Sustainability, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, cooperation
Connecting the Region	Transport and Energy sectoral legislation	EU 2020 Strategy, SEE 2020, South East European 2020 Strategy, TEN-T and TEN-E, SEETO	Sustainable transport, integration infrastructure system, energy efficiency
Environmental Quality	EU Environmental acquis, Water Framework Directive, Maritime Spatial Planning Directive	EU Strategy for on Adaptation to climate change Green Infrastructure Strategy, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and SEE 2020	Climate change, adaptation, risk prevention and mitigation, environmental protection
Sustainable Tourism	n.a	A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism EU Tourism Policy	sustainability and competitiveness, integrated rehabilitation of cultural heritage

*Source 5: Authors' own elaboration of the available information*

#### **4. Analytical approach: potential impact of EUSAIR upon territorial governance and spatial planning systems**

The paper will now present the methodological approach in order to analyze the impact of EUSAIR on the domestic spatial planning systems of Albania and Italy. The next section (section 5) will then apply the methodology to the two case studies, showing the first empirical findings that are emerging from the research. In order to analyze the potential impact of the macro-region on territorial governance and spatial planning, three specific levels of interpretation are taken into consideration: territorial governance, sectoral policies and spatial planning. Before looking at the methodological approach, it is useful to frame and define these three dimensions and to collocate them in their respective research areas.

For Berg (2016: 4), governance “has become a term used for describing the institutional arrangements affecting organizations and nations”. As Huftly (2011: 405) argues, governance includes “the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms and institutions”. The recent Study on Macroeconomic Strategies and their links with Cohesion Policy (2017: 121) points out that governance “refers to the way the rules, norms and actions are structured, sustained, regulated and held accountable”. Bevir (2013) explains that the process of governance in a certain territory is undertaken “through laws, norms, power or language”. The ESPON TANGO (Territorial Approaches to New Governance) 2011-2014 project provides a working definition of territorial governance as the “formulation and implementation of public policies, programmes and projects for the development of a place/territory by: coordinating actions of actors and institutions; integrating policy sectors; mobilising stakeholder participation; being adaptive to changing contexts; realising place based/territorial specificities and impacts” (ESPON & Nordregio 2013: 8). Recent research has led to the creation of various indicators in order to understand the quality and effectiveness of governance, such as the World Bank’s broader Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). The Study on Macroeconomic Strategies and their links with Cohesion policy (2017: 118-122) has applied two of the WGI governance indicators (regulatory quality and governance effectiveness) to analyze the quality of governance and the institutional capacity of the EUSAIR macro-region. The analysis shows a low quality of governance in all the countries of the macro-region: the best scores can be found in Slovenia and Italy, followed by Croatia and Greece. The scores for these countries show a decrease in the scores in 2015 compared to 2008,

because in this period the regulatory quality and government effectiveness has worsened. The lowest scores are found in Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Even though the values are generally low for all countries, they are still higher in the EU Member States than in the non-EU member countries. However, since 2008 all the countries (apart from Bosnia-Herzegovina) seem to have made considerable improvements, especially in regulatory quality. In fact, the candidate countries are approaching the EU governance standards (only Bosnia-Herzegovina is still far below the standard).

Since macro-regional strategies are implemented through specific sectoral pillars and policies (see section 2), which might influence the territorial governance and spatial planning system of a country, the analysis takes into great consideration the dimension of sectoral policies. Sectoral policies can be defined as strategic policies which deal with specific sectors (e.g. environment, tourism, research and innovation, energy, transport, etc.). As regards territorial governance and spatial planning, a variety of strategies and objectives are implemented through sectoral policies, plans and programmes.

Spatial planning is described as the ensemble of methods used largely by the public sector to influence the future distribution of activities in space, with the “aim to create a more rational territorial organization of land uses and the linkages between them, to balance demands for development with the need to protect the environment, and to achieve social and economic objectives” (CEC, 1997: 25-27). In any case, there is a considerable overlap between territorial governance and spatial planning (COMPASS 2016), which would certainly deserve further clarification.

As can be seen in table 6, some key factors on territorial governance, spatial planning and sectoral policies emerge.

As regards the territorial governance dimension, rules, actors and norms seem to be relevant factors when applying the methodological approach. In particular, formal and informal rules, actors and norms are important since they can enhance good territorial governance and be relevant for “specific categories of stakeholders active in territorial governance, namely (i) practitioners, (ii) policy-makers and (iii) decision-makers” (Cotella et al., 2016: 248). In order to better understand the role of sectoral policies and their relationship with the macro-regional’s sectoral strategies and policies, important factors to look at are the funds, strategies and policy-making processes.

As regards spatial planning, principles, procedures, plans and projects are important elements to look at. For example, principles such as public participation and accountability are relevant in order to ensure that in spatial planning processes, citizens’ interests are well represented and that the procedures are visible and open to the public.

*Table 6: Three levels of interpretation*

<i>Three levels of interpretation</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Key factors</i>
Territorial governance	The institutional arrangements affecting a specific territory.	The changes taking place in territorial governance.	territorial eligibility, level of responsibility, actors, budget and funds
Sectoral policies	The strategic policies dealing with specific sectors (e.g. environment, tourism, research, energy).	The spatial changes which derive from the implementation of sectoral policies, plans and programmes.	actors, strategies adopted, level of policy dialogue
Spatial planning	The ensemble of methods used by the public sector to influence the spatial distribution of activities.	The changes taking place in the spatial planning systems.	principles, procedures, plans and projects

*Source 6: Authors’ own elaboration of the available information*

As can be seen in figure 2, these three dimensions of interpretation (territorial governance, sectoral policies and spatial planning) are highly interconnected and share some direct and indirect influences between them.

For example, the EUSAIR strategy seems to have direct influences on both territorial governance and sectoral policies, but indirect influences on spatial planning. In turn, spatial planning does not seem to have a direct uploading influence on the EUSAIR strategy. Nevertheless, territorial governance programmes and sectoral policies seem to be mutually influencing themselves. These hypotheses will be examined in more depth in the next section.

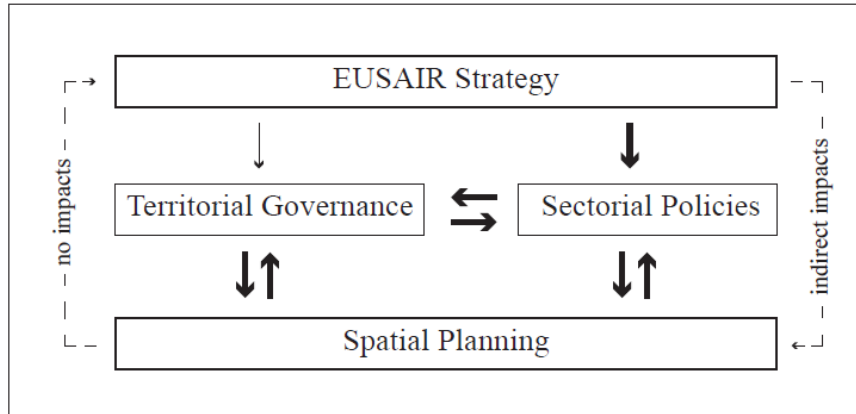


Figure 2: The interconnections (source: authors' own)

## 5. First empirical evidence from Italy and Albania

As mentioned in the previous chapter, EUSAIR may have some potential impacts concerning territorial governance and spatial planning in the Adriatic-Ionian region. Even if it is too early to provide detailed empirical evidence, since the impacts on territorial governance and spatial planning systems require time to produce appreciable effects, some preliminary observations show initial but significant EUSAIR impacts in the context of Italy and Albania. Following the aim of this paper, the collected data and information will be seen/evaluated through the lens of territorial governance, sectoral policies and spatial planning.

### 5.1. Territorial governance

Analyzing the question of territorial governance allows the way in which Italy and Albania are participating and hence contributing to EUSAIR to be illustrated, by highlighting the question of funds and eligible areas. Based on the definition of territorial governance given above (section four), what is important in this case is to understand if the implementation of the Strategy is having some kind of impacts in terms of the changing of rules, norms, actors' involvement and so on. Looking at the participation path, it should be noted that both countries have been contributing to EUSAIR since its establishment in 2014. Italy, in particular, has been at the forefront in developing the idea and asking the EU to establish a macro-region for the Adriatic Ionian area (Grandi & Sacco, 2018).

That said, it should also be noted that each country organizes how to respond to the EUSAIR macro-region needs for the implementation of the Strategy. To compare the cases of Italy and Albania, four aspects have been investigated (see section four), namely:

- Territorial eligibility – which part of the country is interested by the Strategy
- Level of responsibility – where decisions are taken (national, regional or local level)
- Actors – who is in charge of doing what
- Budget and funds – who should pay and how

By taking them separately, it can be seen that, on the one hand, Italy is participating in the EUSAIR only with some regions<sup>5</sup> (those that have somehow a direct relation with the Adriatic and Ionian seas). On the other hand, Albania is participating with its entire territory. The territorial eligibility influences, in one way or another, also the way in which the Strategy is addressed. Specifically, looking at the level of responsibility, hence where decisions are taken, one should note that Italy's participation involves a series of central and regional authorities. In Italy, the national steering committee sees at the top the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, with the Department of European Policy and the Department for Cohesion Policy, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which also participates on the EUSAIR's Governing Board. At the regional level, instead, the Italian Regions' EUSAIR Group that represents all the regions involved has been created, while the Marche Region has been entitled to represent Italy at the Facility Point Project. The Albanian participation is restricted only at the national level by attributing all responsibility to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the national coordinator is the Director of the Region and Neighbouring Countries) and the Ministry of European Integration (in particular, the Director for EU Funds in quality of EU funds National Coordinator and the Deputy EU funds as a National Coordinator). Another discriminating factor is certainly the definition of budget. In this regard, it should be noted that while Italy takes part as an EU Member State, Albania, instead, is participating in the position of EU candidate country, hence as a non-member. This makes an important difference concerning the use of funds and the formulation of budget. More in detail, as an IPA country, Albania participates through co-financing 15% of the budget with national funds as an additional fund to what is already foreseen by IPA II system (Solly et. al., 2018). In this sense, all transnational EU initiatives like EUSAIR require a national budget contribution besides the majority of funds derived from ESIF and ERDF (for member countries) and IPA II (for non-EU members).

*Table 7: The EUSAIR countries' governance in Italy and Albania*

<i>Countries</i>	<i>National governance – key factors</i>			
	<i>Territorial eligibility</i>	<i>Level of responsibility</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Budget and funds</i>
Italy	Regions	National	Department of European Policy; Department for Cohesion Policy; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; Line Ministries	ESIF/ERDF
		Regional	Italian Regions' EUSAIR Group; Marche Region as EUSAIR Facility Point; Regions involved	
Albania	Country as a whole	National	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of European Integration, Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and SME	IPA + Co-financing

*Source 7: Authors' own elaboration of the available information*

## *5. 2. Sectoral policies*

As presented in chapter 4, sectoral policies are certainly subject to EUSAIR's external influences. As shown in the literature and in particular by the previously mentioned Study on Macroregional strategies (European Commission, 2017), even if the EUSAIR promotes an integrated approach, some sectoral policies are often more influenced than others. This is a direct consequence of how the Strategy has been conceptualised (structured in four pillars) and implemented (two countries develop one pillar). Even if there are some cross-cutting development areas such as blue growth, tourism, innovations etc., the main affected

<sup>5</sup> More in detail, the Italian regions that are eligible for the EUSAIR are 12 regions and 2 provinces: Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicilia, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Marche.

potential sectors seem to be the transport, energy and environment sectors. In this sense, the Strategy should be seen as part of the wider process of Europeanisation that each country is undergoing.

Looking at how the Strategy's pillars are interfering with each domestic context, and in particular with each sectoral policy, three key factors (see section four) are listed as follows:

- Actors involved - who is participating and responsible for each pillar
- Strategies adopted – which kind of strategies have been adopted in relation to the EUSAIR
- Level of policy dialogue – how and if the EUSAIR is facilitating the institutional dialogue

As mentioned, Italy participates at the national and regional level simultaneously. For each pillar, indeed, both national authorities like line ministries and the regional actors themselves are involved. As illustrated in table 7 the responsibility for the first pillar - blue growth - is under the charge, at the national level, of the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (in Italian MIUR), the former Ministry of Agriculture Food and Forestry Policies (in Italian MIPAAF) now substituted by the Ministry of Agriculture Food, Forestry and Tourism Policies (in Italian MIPAAFT), while, at the regional level, the Veneto and Molise regions are in charge. A similar distribution of responsibility has been taken place also for the rest of pillar where both national and regional level are represented. When it comes to the Albanian case, due to the reorganization of ministries it is hard to find information on how the country is managing the EUSAIR at the national level. Moving from actors to strategies adopted (table 8), it is interesting to note that in some sectors (tourism above all) important progress is being made. In this regard, Italy has produced its Strategic Plan for Development of Tourism that recalls some elements from the EUSAIR by implementing them at the national level. Similar things are happening in Albania which is promoting some national and international forums on sustainable tourism that are facilitating networking among NGOs (European Commission, 2017). On the other hand, other strategies like this adopted by Albania in the field of transport do not mention EUSAIR at all. However, as has been affirmed that the macro-region strategy process facilitates synergies between policies and helps to better understand the big picture at the policy level (European Commission, 2017).

*Table 8: EUSAIR impacts on sectoral policies*

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Pillars</i>	<i>Sectoral policies – key factors</i>		
		<i>Actors involved</i>	<i>Strategies adopted</i>	<i>Level of policy dialogue</i>
Italy	Blue growth	MIUR- former MIPAAF and Veneto/Molise Region	n.a.	Macro-region Strategy process facilitates synergies between policies and helps better understand the big picture at the policy level (European Commission, 2017)
	Connecting the region	MIT-MISE and Friuli Venezia Giulia/Abruzzo	n.a.	
	Environmental quality	MATTM and Emilia Romagna and Umbria	n.a.	
	Sustainable tourism	Former MIBACT and Puglia and Sicilia	The Strategic Plan for Development of Tourism (with reference to the EUSAIR)	
Albania	Blue growth		n.a.	
	Connecting the region		Sectorial Strategy of Transport & Action Plan 2016 – 2020	
	Environmental quality	n.a.	n.a.	
	Sustainable tourism		National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development 2018-2020 (draft)	

*Source 8: Authors' own elaboration of the available information*



### 5. 3. *Spatial planning*

At present, there is no evidence that spatial planning in the two countries is influenced by the EUSAIR. There may be two different reasons for this. First, according to our methodology, influences in spatial planning seems to be filtered, hence mediated, by changes in territorial governance and sectoral policies. In this sense, hypothetical innovations due to the EUSAIR may be contextualized without clear spatial impacts. Second, it is too early to appreciate and analyze the spatial effects of EUSAIR. This means that spatial planning can be more path-dependent than the other two categories. It requires, indeed, change in terms of legislation, instruments and planning culture before producing appraisable evidence.

That said, it is still possible to advance some potential changes that spatial planning will face in the future. Even if the EU in general and the EUSAIR in particular has no competence in the field of spatial planning, as has been widely recognized in the literature, unintended, indirect or secondary effects can shape spatial planning in the two countries. Accordingly, it has to be remembered that there are some aspects of spatial planning that are more sensitive to change than others. In particular, one should keep in mind that the major changes that spatial planning will have concern the introduction of new principles and procedures that will influence the way in which plans and projects will be conceptualized.

## 6. **Conclusions and recommendations**

Macro-regions are relatively recent multi-level governance entities within the EU. Indeed, only in the last decade has the need to adopt trans-governmental strategies referring to specific geographical and functional regions been discussed and recognized. This is justified since for some issues the EU has not undertaken the optimum level of intervention, being in some cases too large or in others too small, as affirmed by Majone (2014) referring to the issue of the environment, for example. In this sense, the implementation of macro-strategies is one of the biggest challenges of the EU, in general and, for the countries interested, in particular. As shown in this study, the impacts of these kinds of macro-regional strategies are largely unknown and often underestimated, since they are still considered relatively new territorial governance entities.

The aim of this paper is, instead, to open-up the discussion on if and how EU macro-regions are or will make an impact on the way in which territorial governance, sectoral policies and spatial planning are implemented domestically.

In general, one can conclude affirming that the Strategy is itself a European governance experiment that has different distinctiveness compared to existing EU practices. The well-known motto of the macro-regions strategy - no funds, no institution and no legislation - is contributing to optimize the existing economic and institutional resources, on the one hand, and to avoid the overlapping of strategies and institutions, on the other. In the same way, the Strategy and the Action Plan themselves are the outcome of a compromise between EU perspective and regional needs and priorities. This is clear when it comes to analyze the content and principles of those documents where a combination of existing EU policies, norms and strategies have been incorporated. Moving to the level of implementation, by considering our case studies, EUSAIR may have at least two different territorial governance effects. The first regards the potential differentiation of impacts. This is particularly important for Italy when it comes to consider territorial impacts of the Strategy since some regions may be interested by its impacts (a high level of impact for those included by the Strategy, while for the others that are excluded the impact may be less). The second refers to the implementation of the Strategy and the relative impacts. In this sense, while in Italy regions (those interested by the Strategy) can be very active in addressing common issues deriving from the Strategy and hence bringing economic and political advantages, in Albania the participation of the local level (i.e. districts and municipalities) is very marginal because the responsibility for addressing the Strategy is at the central level, with a highly top-down approach.

The same differential influence mechanism can be registered also concerning sectoral policies. As has been underlined by other studies, the implementation of the Strategy is very different from one sector to another. In fact, sectors may be interested by different levels of influence (some sectors are more influenced while other less). This may depend on how domestic contexts are managing the question of EUSAIR and which kind of institutional relations may exist (i.e. level of coordination, collaboration, transparency etc.). As affirmed above, it seems that the strategy is often a channel of influence which channels the logic and principles of other EU strategies and policies, as well as regulations and norms. What seems to be important to affirm is that, in any case, it is too early to have common regional approaches on specific sectors, denoting lack of coordination among countries and within each country.

The fact that the Strategy is recently established compromises also the analytical capacity of this paper to have find out real impacts on spatial planning. What is expected, however, is that also the issue of spatial planning will be interested by the Strategy as well. The Strategy will impact by using different indirect cross-fertilization channels (i.e. territorial governance and sectoral policies, in particular).

Finally, this paper has presented evidence, even though it has observed and kept in mind that a clear separation of impacts is not easy to demonstrate. Accordingly, future research should focus more on how to overcome the limitations presented by this analytical dimension. The application of case studies on certain projects or programmes might help the future analysis. In fact, it might be easier to understand in more depth if there are changes happening in spatial planning processes and procedures and to be able to separate the possible impacts.

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