

Baltic TRAM Story of Europe in My Region

Baltic TRAM Goes Beyond the Buzzwords of the European Cooperation



Zane Šime presenting Baltic TRAM findings of the policy mapping during the Baltic TRAM Mid-Term Conference hosted by the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm on 25 October 2017.

Photo credit: CBSS Secretariat.

The Baltic TRAM project has been a great learning experience for experts interested in the European governance, macro-regional collaboration and smart specialisation. For **Zane Šime**, Communication & Research Coordinator at the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Secretariat, and the Baltic TRAM Work Package 3 Leader, it has been an opportunity to explore the transnational traits of a myriad of smart specialisation related processes. However, it has not been just a continuous juggling of reports and Working Papers with a constant exploration of burgeoning ecosystem of expert-level terms, such as “capitalisation”, “synergies” and “activation processes”. More importantly, Baltic TRAM allowed obtaining a more thorough insight what practical developments unfold in the attempts to translate certain EU conceptual thinking and policy frameworks into practical support measures and science-business cooperation examples. Besides remarks dedicated to smart specialisation this concise article also explains other Zane’s take-aways from the Baltic TRAM implementation beyond the mere project management practices and delivery of the planned project outputs.



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN
REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
FUND



It is time for more testing of smart specialisation

The solutions provided to the EU-based small- and medium-sized enterprises during the implementation of Baltic TRAM three open calls offered some insight where the transnational smart specialisation potentials are located in the Baltic Sea Region and what partnerships might potentially be developed on a more long-term basis between analytical research facilities and businesses. Consequently, Baltic TRAM was implemented at a time when action-oriented spirit was placed in the limelight by Clingendael's Adriaan Schout and Hussein Kassim as: "Juncker shifted tracks by avoiding discussions about visions and emphasised instead pragmatic solutions and a Europe that 'delivers'. As a senior Commission official explained in 2015: "no philosophies please; action is needed."" (Schout & Kassim, 2018, p. 55) Baltic TRAM is an embodiment of very concrete actions.

Baltic TRAM instils a transnationally coordinated turn away from prestige projects characterised by a sole focus on the high-tech field. In such a manner, Baltic TRAM has followed the advice to adopt a more "applied, plausibly market-oriented perspective" (Kroll, Böke, Schiller, & Stahlecker, 2016, p. 1461) and embrace the business demand for a full spectrum of (low-, medium-, high-) technology solutions. Project's results shed some light how the theoretical models and assumptions presented by McCann & Ortega-Argilés unfold or do not unfold in practice, especially in terms of testing a "network-development programme linking specialists in different regions" (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2011, p. 8). The reference to the scholarly thinking on networks suggests that there are various aspects concerning the Baltic TRAM consortium and its delivered results which remain to be explored in a greater detail and placed in a broader context of the CBSS long-term priority "Sustainable and Prosperous Region" and the flagship Baltic Science Link of the Policy Area Innovation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Baltic TRAM results have been recently reviewed bearing in mind an additional layer of the existing scholarly findings of the smart specialisation and its implementation particularities elaborated by Kroll (Kroll, 2015, 2019), as well as McCann and Ortega-Agilés (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2011, 2013). Furthermore, the results testify that the interregional ties remain to be fully realised. The incremental experimentation and exploratory process through such forms as "learning by doing, learning by using and learning by interacting" is on-going (Muller et al., 2017, p. 687). The still unexplored collaborative options are not only characterised by the efforts to develop stronger ties between the core and peripheral regions of the Baltic Sea Region and actors based in these geographic entities. Baltic TRAM results paint a more complex picture, where many non-central regions do not necessarily need more connection to specific central cores, instead multilateral combinations of both central and peripheral actors help to understand better the specialisation potentials in a multi-tiered structure of issue specific networks. Moreover, some of the Baltic TRAM most versatile actors, such as Kainuu Region (Chaniotou & Šime, 2018), are implementing a multi-network exploratory process, where Baltic TRAM is only one of the components in the evolutionary process launched to explore new growth paths (Crespo, Balland, Boschma, & Rigby, 2017, p. 8) or feasibility of a certain path renewal (Trippel, Asheim, & Miörner, 2014, p. 10).



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN
REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
FUND



Thus, Baltic TRAM should be praised for departing from visioning and focusing on explaining how specific limited hands-on activities implemented in a close collaboration between more than a dozen project partners can help to acquire a better understanding about the impact of smart specialisation thinking. Baltic TRAM has been one of the steps in the overall transition towards a more connected European market of innovative solutions and strengthened competitiveness of certain businesses.

Mastering the Art of Consensus and Potential of Joint Actions

Baltic TRAM was a useful period for broadening the expertise not only in terms of finding out what the Baltic Sea Region science-business cooperation is all about. It was also an inspiring learning experience about the potential of joint commitment acquired through an exploration of various scales of collaborative actions. Within the scope of Baltic TRAM, three years' long joint discussions culminated in a **Memorandum of Understanding For Viable Macro-Regional Cooperation of Research Infrastructures After the Closure of the Baltic TRAM Project**. Thus, the consortium, or in more precise terms, a majority of its initial members has confirmed a long-term orientation towards a more sustainable collaboration beyond the [Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme's funded project](#) time frame.

Likewise, Interreg supported partnerships are the best environments where to tap into a great diversity of expertise. Working from a standpoint of a support body of an intergovernmental forum is exciting in terms of constant exploration of the lessons learnt of eleven Member States, the European Union, as well as certain strategic partners of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). However, working together with curiosity driven and highly responsive actors who are regularly bringing to the table an institutional expertise from diverse regional, national and transnational entities makes the overall work even more exciting, especially to someone who is used to a purely intergovernmental setting. Baltic TRAM shows how Interreg is playing a role of an intrinsic binder of a forward-looking Europe.

Once dwelling into the intricacies of Baltic TRAM being a learning period induced by various outstanding initiatives, some examples might render this argument more easily understandable. One of the meetings of Baltic TRAM took place at the [construction site of the European Spallation Source](#) – the prospective “[world's most powerful neutron source](#)” – an associated organisation of the project. Instead of being overwhelmed with yet another presentation of colourful slides filled with nuanced tables and impressively inverted charts about the estimated and expected potential of a future major European scientific landmark, Baltic TRAM project partners were simply exposed to a construction site of a considerable size and hosted in a rather compact and comfortable container room. Such a simple approach and a much-appreciated hospitality from the hosting team of the construction site was a far more effective way how to generate interest about the European Spallation Source than any lengthy myriads of slides.

There is another reason why the European Spallation Source remains one of the most memorable places visited during the project. The construction site has shown with very specific large-scale efforts not only the European aspirations towards more unity in the continuous efforts of securing



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN
REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
FUND



an internationally competitive and excelling scientific potential, but also a concrete process which already embodies this spirit. The European Spallation Source is one of those great examples how a rather abstract motto “United in Diversity” is supported with concrete, distinctively tangible and forward-looking multilateral plans and corresponding actions.

Similarly, the presentation given by **Jean Moulin** on the thinking of the [Working Group on Innovation of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures \(ESFRI\) on ties to the industrial users](#) given during the [Baltic TRAM Mid-Term Conference](#) hosted at the **Royal Institute of Technology** in Stockholm allowed the transnational consortium not to get carried away. In other words, Jean Moulin’s remarks helped to keep Baltic TRAM within a certain healthy proximity to the realities in terms of fully acknowledging how limited but not less important (in terms of qualitative project delivery) the Baltic TRAM milestones are within the broader landscape of the European research infrastructures and innovation governance.

Baltic TRAM Brings the Whole Europe to My Region

All in all, Baltic TRAM is one of those multi-faceted endeavours which in several locations on specific occasions has brought together merely the whole Europe, thus also exposing locally based audiences to a notable diversity of scientific cooperation traits characterising the European Union. It did so during the conference “[The Baltic Sea Region – A Science Powerhouse](#)” held in Brussels with a splendid diversity of expertise and geographical coverage represented by the institutions assembled in various panels. **Caterina Biscari**, Director of ALBA Synchrotron located in Barcelona should be mentioned as one of the speakers geographically positioned outside of the Baltic Sea Region.

The final public discussions on Baltic TRAM during the [CBSS Baltic Sea Science Day 2019](#) hosted by the University of Latvia in Riga were enriched by an introduction to the European XFEL, a remarkable analytical research facility located in Hamburg, which has come true thanks to a partnership of 12 countries. **Nicole Elleuche**, Managing and Administrative Director of European XFEL shared her insights about the world’s most powerful X-ray source with the attendants of the CBSS Baltic Sea Science Day 2019.

As earlier indicated and often echoed during the previous presentations of Baltic TRAM, it is a project which is deeply embedded in various longitudinal initiatives. Thus, even when Baltic TRAM is explained by employing trendy policy buzzwords, it is done with full awareness that this narrative is not superficial or short-lived. Instead the earlier reflections and findings will be kept in mind in the consecutive development stages of the CBSS long-term priority “Sustainable and Prosperous Region” and the Policy Area Innovation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Bibliography

Chaniotou, N., & Šime, Z. (2018). Baltic Sea Region-wide Research-Business Cooperation: What Benefits For Sparsely Populated Areas and Smart Specialisation? *European Structural and Investment Funds Journal*, 6(3), 241–252. Retrieved from <https://estif.lexxion.eu/article/ESTIF/2018/3/7>



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN
REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
FUND



- Crespo, J., Balland, P.-A., Boschma, R. A., & Rigby, D. (2017). *Regional Diversification Opportunities and Smart Specialization Strategies*. Luxembourg. <https://doi.org/10.2777/133737>
- Kroll, H. (2015). Efforts to Implement Smart Specialization in Practice—Leading Unlike Horses to the Water. *European Planning Studies*, 23(10), 2079–2098. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2014.1003036>
- Kroll, H. (2019). Eye to eye with the innovation paradox: why smart specialization is no simple solution to policy design. *European Planning Studies*, 27(5), 932–951. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1577363>
- Kroll, H., Böke, I., Schiller, D., & Stahlecker, T. (2016). Bringing owls to Athens? The transformative potential of RIS3 for innovation policy in Germany's Federal States. *European Planning Studies*, 24(8), 1459–1477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2016.1159666>
- McCann, P., & Ortega-Argilés, R. (2011). *Smart Specialisation, Regional Growth and Applications to EU Cohesion Policy* (Economic Geography Working Paper No. 2011). Retrieved from https://danube-inco.net/object/document/1517/attach/s3_mccann_ortega.pdf
- McCann, P., & Ortega-Argilés, R. (2013). Redesigning and Reforming European Regional Policy: The Reasons, the Logic, and the Outcomes. *International Regional Science Review*, 36(3), 424–445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160017612463234>
- Muller, E., Zenker, A., Hufnagl, M., Héraud, J.-A., Schnabl, E., Makkonen, T., & Kroll, H. (2017). Smart specialisation strategies and cross-border integration of regional innovation systems: Policy dynamics and challenges for the Upper Rhine. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 35(4), 684–702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263774x16688472>
- Schout, A., & Kassim, H. (2018). From European narrative to managing European expectations. In *Clingendael State of the Union 2018: Towards Better European Integration* (Clingendael, pp. 54–59). The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.
- Tripl, M., Asheim, B., & Miörner, J. (2014). Regions with Less Developed Research and Innovation Systems, 1–22. Retrieved from https://orca.cf.ac.uk/78223/1/Identification_of_regions_with_less_developed_research_and_innovation_systems.pdf

Disclaimer: The information and views set out in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The responsibility for the contents of the article, lies with the Baltic TRAM Work Package 3 Leader Zane Šime. The Council of the Baltic Sea States cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.