

“Action Facilitation” – a proposal

To facilitate initiatives and actions
that implement the EU Strategy
for the Baltic Sea Region



Action Facilitation: *Why, What and How*

The Action Facilitation project: a proposal to enhance and support various modes of action and cooperation of importance for the coming EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The proposed *European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region* (below referred to as the *Strategy*) is not merely about creating a new European instrument for coordination of policy in an expanding and hard-to-govern union but in fact it is just as much about creating the potential for Cohesion Policy to do that which we all wish – in real terms to reduce the inequality between the Member States. However, a precondition for the functioning of the last-mentioned is a perception of the differing starting points the Strategy has in the various Member States.

Having such a well-grounded perception and thorough understanding of the actual in-country situation we find to be highly prudent. However just having this perception does not fully mitigate the consequences that the differing starting positions in the various Member States has on the ability to seize opportunities and utilise the available resources within the existing programmes. The Action Facilitation initiative is a proposed “Interreg-style project” designed to help actors and partners from all parts of the Baltic Sea Region to do exactly this, i.e. to make the best possible use of existing opportunities and resources.

Why Action Facilitation?

An early and wise decision was to not include any new, additional funds for the implementation of the *Strategy*. Neither were any new institutions to be created. The objectives in the *Strategy* are instead to be implemented within the framework of the existing programmes and by already existing

actors – often in project form (cf. the *Action Plan* that accompanies the *Strategy*). It is also a fact that many of the activities designed to promote the goals and visions of the *Strategy* do not even need external financing, but rather need meeting places and contact across borders.

Even though we hold the above to be a proper and balanced view of how to go about things it must be acknowledged that currently there are considerable differences among Member States when it comes to preconditions to take advantage of existing programmes and other opportunities. For example, since 2005/2006 Swedish actors have enjoyed the possibility to apply for seed money up to €30.000 to establish cooperation with partners on the other side of the Baltic Sea. Some 100 projects have been initiated in this way annually. The money can also be utilised for feasibility studies for later project applications within the framework of the territorial cooperation programmes. Some of these partnerships which benefited from this support can now be found today in the list of projects in the *Action Plan* accompanying the *Strategy*.

However, to ensure that the knowledge and skills of the region are fully and long-term sustainably exploited it would be desirable to – again within the framework for existing budgets – create possibilities for all actors irrespective of national origin to be able to apply for this type of seed money for project generation in line with the priorities of the *Strategy*. If as well transnational project advisory services for new project actors was made more accessible and appropriate partners could be linked together in a better way without reference to nationality, we could lower the thresholds for both the involvement of new actors and new projects but as well for new ideas and initiatives which need this prerequisite support. This is essential for securing the amount of broad participation required to see to the long-run survival of the objectives of the proposed strategy.

What is Project M?

The Action Facilitation project shall have as its goal to support initiatives in line with the *Strategy* with simple, cost-effective methods. The Project shall appropriately collaborate with the agreed flagship projects by informing and initiating cooperation between relevant new initiatives and ongoing flagship projects. The Project shall support initiatives where there is a demand within the region to develop cooperation focused on strengthening the macro-region. The Project shall support and maintain networks and initiatives that in some cases can be implemented without larger external financing needs plus in those cases where the financing needs will arise further in the future. The Project shall **not** pursue any already approved and assigned activities such as overarching coordination, follow-up within the respective subject areas, studies and

development of financing models or follow-up on the decided flagship projects.

How to do it?

A given point of departure is that each Member State shall contribute with financing, in the form of cash and/or in kind contributions. A precondition for the implementation of the project is that some European Commission structure, potentially the Interact programme will co-finance Member State contributions. Interact is in this period not open for external applications; such an application thus would need to originate from DG Regio.

For a more extensive and complete description of how the project can be implemented, additional budgetary calculations and financing requirement are needed. The proposal below takes its point of departure from an Interreg-like working model, with the exception that the entire project and personnel have a common mission, i.e. not divided and subordinate to each project partner. This puts added demands on internal communication and rational internal management and administration.

Proposed work model [proposal can be scaled down]

Project period: 2010 – 2013

Lead partner: Sida

Project partners: Minimum one from every MS covered by the *Strategy*.

Operational model: The concept is based upon the Sida Baltic Sea Unit's modus operandi, i.e. to be able to grant smaller amounts of seed money, finance feasibility studies, establish networks etc. This would be combined with necessary information, visibility and promotional activities. The current operational model needs to be strengthened with databases, matchmaking functions between actors and above all between countries.

Organisation: In practice Sida will be responsible for the necessary infrastructure and skilled personnel to execute the project concept and operational model, regarding management and coordination. Additionally Sida would provide a minimum of two (2) experienced and operative programme officers to the project. This would in total amount to 4-6 man years. Sida would also be responsible for the introduction and running operational coordination of all project personnel and work.

Other Swedish partners: The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) would be overall responsible to provide transfer of experience through a national liaison and coordination officer, one (1) position.

International partnership: In the other Member States, National Contact Points would be established through project partners. The National Contact Points would have the task of executing national information activities, to be the point of entry to the Action Facilitation project and to transfer experience to relevant national authorities. Estimated personnel requirements: min two (2) persons per MS.

Partnership profile: The project partner in each MS shall alone or in combination with another project partner carry out tasks as an operative partner or as a strategic partner. Operative partners need to have a relevant track record of flexible and rapid organisational capacity. The requirement of a strategic partner is good connections to and knowledge of national decision-making and managing authorities of national and cross-border/transnational EU programmes.

Operations: The day-to-day operations shall be conducted through telephony, electronic media, databases, search functions and of course a functional home page. However the physical exchange between countries and partner offices is very much a present characteristic in the operational model. This can be conducted through 1-6 month planned exchanges between duty stations.

Budget

The indicative budget below for the Action Facilitation project is based on the maximum staffing suggested above, i.e. a total of 19 staff (5 from Sweden and 2 each from each of the other seven Member States); as noted though it may be feasible to scale down the project model somewhat while still retaining the key attributes.

19 persons á average cost incl local travel, etc x 90,000 EUR	1.7 MEUR
External project funds 200 contributions x 30,000 EUR	6 MEUR
Courses, training etc (external)	0.6 MEUR
Other operating costs (IT, equip, intl. travel etc)	0.3 MEUR
Annual sum	8.6 MEUR
Financed by participating MS partners = 1.7 + 1 + 0.3 = 3.0 MEUR Average 35 % of budget financed by participating partners, 65 % by EC	