

EUSAIR, Cross-Border Initiatives Strengthening the Connectivity of the Region

An Interview with Pierluigi Coppola

Andrea Ballarin

EU project manager, freelance

Pier Paolo Pentucci

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Abstract This short interview with Mr. Pierluigi Coppola, the Italian Coordinator of the Pillar 2 of EUSAIR, provides an overview of the upcoming joint priority efforts to be developed for a sustainable transport planning in the area. The discussion framework focuses on cross-border maritime transport through 5 questions conceived in parallel with the ongoing implementation of the MIMOSA Project.

Keywords EUSAIR. Maritime transport. Cross-border transport and mobility. European Territorial Cooperation. Transport policies and planning.

Discussion Framework

This interview with Mr Pierluigi Coppola¹ is an insight conceived in parallel with the ongoing implementation of the MIMOSA strategic project, financed by the Interreg V-A CBC Italy-Croatia 2014-20.

1 Pierluigi Coppola is the Italian Coordinator for the Pillar 2 (*Connecting the Region*) of the EUSAIR (Adriatic-Ionian) macro-regional strategy and coordinates the Thematic Steering Committee no. 2, together with colleagues from Serbia and North Macedonia.

The project is focused on maritime and multimodal sustainable passenger transport solutions and services, involving 17 partners and several associated institutions from the whole Programme Area. It thus jointly tackles the common challenge of increasing multimodality and reducing the impact of transport on the environment.

The goal of the conversation is to identify some relevant links bridging between the specificity of cross-border transport topics (e.g., bottlenecks, missing links, etc.) and the working framework on mobility and transport currently faced within Pillar 2 of EUSAIR.

Interview

[QUESTION] Mr Coppola, the official launch of the EUSAIR Strategy took place in 2014 and the focus of Pillar 2 *Connecting the Region* concentrates efforts and initiatives on mobility and the transport system between the Member States and the non-EU countries included in the Adriatic-Ionian region (e.g., the Western Balkans). Eight years after its launch, what is your overall assessment of the Pillar 2 initiatives?

[ANSWER] The EUSAIR Action Plan [SWD(2014)191 final] is focused on two priorities (Priority Actions): 1) the maritime transport dimension in the macro-region; 2) the inter-modal connections between ports and railways, particularly for freight transport. The implementation of the Strategy has led to the identification of projects of macro-regional relevance with a specific focus on implementing technological and digital solutions for improving connections between ports in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, and for better connections sea-to-land (and vice versa), i.e., links between port and the rail networks.

This concept has been described and fully transferred into a specific chapter (on inter-modality) of the EUSAIR Transport Masterplan for the Adriatic-Ionian region which is - together with the identification of projects of macro-regional relevance (i.e., EUSAIR-‘labelled’) - one of the main lines of action we are working on. Within the EUSAIR Masterplan - which is still in progress - the ongoing projects included in the national transport plans of each single Countries (such as, in the Italian case, the PNRR ones) were examined;² besides, the needs for the implementation of a transnational transportation network in the macro-region have been identified in light of the opportunities of the TEN-T extension to South-East Europe.

² PNRR, *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*, i.e., the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (<https://www.mef.gov.it/en/focus/The-National-Recovery-and-Resilience-Plan-NRRP/>).

The EUSAIR Action Plan is now being revised also based on the analysis and the results of the Interreg projects on transport, such as the MIMOSA Project (that got the EUSAIR label in 2020) and other projects within the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Programmes that are supporting the main objectives of the Strategy. More specifically, we are going to propose some additional targeted topics such as urban transport and connections between the major cities of the macro-region.

[Q] If we switch the focus to the cross-border dimension and to the several EU cross-border funding programmes insisting in the EUSAIR area (e.g., Italy-Croatia, Slovenia-Croatia, Italy-Greece, etc.), what is the relevance of the cross-border issue within the EUSAIR Strategy and how do you evaluate the achievements in mobility and transport, both in terms of concrete results and as for their integration within the same macro-regional strategy?

[A] Concerning the cross-border dimension, TSG2 of EUSAIR mainly worked on freight transport, where relevant issues emerged in terms of crossing time through internal and external borders of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. In fact, the procedure needed for the customs clearance of goods still represents a bottleneck, especially between EU Member States and non-EU countries.

In this sense, during the COVID-19 emergency, an EC-tailored initiative was developed and revealed as a best practice to be capitalised also beyond the emergency: we're talking about the use of the so-called 'green lanes' (EC, DG for Mobility and Transport 2020), which have proven their effectiveness, allowing more efficient border crossings. There are also European Territorial Cooperation projects presenting interesting results achieved and successful pilot actions: as an example, we can mention ADRIPASS (Interreg ADRION 2014-20) aiming at integrating multimodal connections in the Adriatic-Ionian region that has tested how cross-border freight transport procedures can be optimised through the development of technological platforms.

Other ETC-funded projects have demonstrated strong potential in capitalising and transferring best practices to enrich the supply of transport services in the Region also for passenger transport. From my point of view, cross-border connections could benefit from the creation of new rail passenger services - see, for instance, the CROSSMOBY Project (Interreg V-A Italy Slovenia 2014-20) between Italy and Slovenia - and from the improvement of the existing maritime connections between the two shores of the Adriatic Sea.

Further analysis ought to identify the potential markets for new passenger services, overcoming the geographic difficulties and bureaucratic barriers in order to increase cross-border rail and maritime connectivity. The contribution of ETC projects, such as MI-

MOSA, is essential in proving successful pilot experimentations and demonstrating innovative solutions, producing context and market analyses, up to feasibility studies.

[Q] The thematic steering group 2 (TSG 2) is working on the EU-SAIR transport masterplan. Could you give us some insight into the topics of the work-in-progress and the future enhancements planned both within the master plan and in the EUSAIR Strategy/Action Plan as a whole?

[A] The environmental sustainability of transport in the Adriatic-Ionian region is one of our priorities, together with cohesion and accessibility to internal areas. This is definitely a priority provided that in some countries physical infrastructure and links are completely missing. Connectivity is a need not only for transport of goods (e.g., new maritime services between ports) but also for improving passenger mobility and boosting some economic sectors (e.g. tourism). We need to bridge up the territorial gaps in road safety standards, cross-border control procedures and, last but not least, the need to update the railway network, having a significant impact on the whole multi-modal transport system.

The importance of a transport masterplan for the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region is proved by the need of coping with the disparities in the transport systems of Member States and non-EU states, and by the specific actions needed to achieve the targets of the new TEN-T corridors in the area.

Besides, it would be important to strongly support the introduction of the EU instrument of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) [EC COM(2013)913 final], considering positive results it is producing at European level. Developing urban nodes in a EU-SAIR perspective, considering the presence of many ports and the relevant maritime dimension, means developing and shaping the concept of 'city ports', firmly linked to the paradigm of sustainable mobility. In fact, ports included in urban contexts, inevitably contributes with an additional and relevant pollution burden for the city (e.g., ships stationing at dock) and at the same time generates negative externalities, such as crossing traffic and the consequent congestion problems. Thus, it is necessary to safeguard both the port as a city asset for income and economic development, on the one hand, and the environmental sustainability of ports and maritime related activities, on the other hand. Considering this framework, 'city-ports' could be considered as a perspective for change. This topic would be also proposed by TSG-2 in the review process of the EUSAIR Action Plan.

[Q] In order to make transport in maritime and coastal areas more efficient and sustainable, cross-border planning models must be considered. What do you think is the most effective governance model in cross-border maritime transport planning?

[A] The issue of governance certainly represents a key point both in relation to the topic of transport planning and management in the macro-region and more generally in the overall EUSAIR strategy implementation. Being part of the EUSAIR governing board as Pillar Coordinator, I was able to participate in the implementation of the 'multi-level governance' model related to day-by-day process management of the strategy and the action plan within a complex institutional context, such as the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, achieving some good results despite the fact that EUSAIR has not any direct funds to manage. This is the case of the so-called 'embedding' process, i.e., the introduction of some priority line of action in the ETC and mainstream programmes, and other initiatives to foster the dialogue with other stakeholders (e.g., financial institutions, the chamber of commerce etc.) in the Region.

[Q] To conclude, when considering transport priorities, within the EUSAIR perspective, which ones do you consider crucial and still to be tackled or that need further efforts to be developed?

[A] Surely, it should be kept in mind that the work of EUSAIR has been conditioned, like any other process and activity, by the two years of global pandemic emergency. Despite the difficulties, the development of the strategy and action plan, including TSG-2 activities, has move ahead. In the future, the work done on the two priorities identified from the outset, a) maritime transport (new services and synergies) and b) the development of intermodal systems and solutions able to connect even the most inland regions, has to be continued. This should be matched in parallel by a process of harmonisation and optimisation on a macro-regional scale, involving all countries, also through compensation measures aimed at bridging some territorial gaps, as not to leave anyone behind.

It is at the same time essential to identify new priorities and focuses, both in terms of freight and passenger mobility, within the current revision process of the EUSAIR Action Plan in order to give greater strength to the strategy implementation and outreach (e.g., city ports, connection with TEN-T networks, implementation of SUMP on a macro-regional scale, management and sustainability of tourist flows, etc.).

Moreover, considering the launch and recent activation of the new European 2021-27 programming period by the EC, a new boost should be given both to the synergy/coordination between the EUSAIR Strategy and the Interreg ADRION programme, and to the

processes of capitalisation of the most interesting results emerging from the implementation of identified project initiatives financed by European Territorial Cooperation and other mainstream programmes in the field of mobility and transport.

Finally, the Transport Masterplan for the Adriatic-Ionian region is certainly a crucial working tool and represents a key element for the TSG-2 initiatives. It should be implemented in the subsequent development phases and it should be able of incorporating updates and new policy guidelines, and it must be shared as much as possible by all the macro-region's players. This is even more possible if the stakeholder engagement process - involving, in the last years, many transport operators, mobility experts, local and regional administrators, enterprises and public institutions from all countries - will be continued and further strengthened.

Bibliography

- ADRIPASS Project - Integrating multimodal connections in the Adriatic-Ionian region. Financed by Interreg ADRIION 2014-20. <https://adripass.adrioninterreg.eu>.
- CROSSMOBY Project - Mobility planning and intermodal, sustainable and cross-border passenger transport services. Financed by Interreg V-A Italy-Slovenija 2014-20. <https://www.ita-slo.eu/en/crossmoby>.
- EC COM(2013)913 final. *Urban Mobility Package. Mobility and Transport*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:82155e82-67ca-11e3-a7e4-01aa75ed71a1.0011.02/DOC_3&format=PDF.
- EC COM(2014)357 final. *European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region*.
- EC, DG for Mobility and Transport (2020). *Coronavirus: Commission presents practical guidance to ensure continuous flow of goods across EU via green lanes*. News Article, 7 April 2020. https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/coronavirus-commission-presents-practical-guidance-ensure-continuous-flow-goods-across-eu-green-2020-04-07_en.
- EC, SWD(2014)191 final. *Action Plan, accompanying the document COM (2014)357 final*. <https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/EUSAIR-ACTION-PLAN-17-June-2014.pdf>.
- EU Council. *Council decision (EU) 2019/392 on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Treaty establishing the Transport Community*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019D0392&from=GA>.