What does the role of a TSG (and a TSG member) imply?

Thematic Steering Group[1] (TSG) members are appointed by the country participating in the MRS. TSG members represent line ministries and corresponding institutions of the sub-national levels responsible for particular thematic (policy) area, with a clear **purpose to participate in the MRS implementation within a Thematic Area (TA)**. It is essential that a TSG member – both as a national institution and an individual –commit to working for the entire macro-region, in practice bridging the gap between national/subnational thematic agenda, and the MRS policy objectives. Thus, TSGs are instrumental for **alignment of thematic policy throughout the levels**. This is their essential task and unique role within the Strategy, which creates value for both the national and the macro-regional levels.

TSG-work is tightly connected with the work of National Coordinators and Thematic Coordinators. Together with Thematic Coordinators, they develop and implement TA plans (thus working for the macro-regional level). Together with National Coordinators, TSG members aim to integrate the national perspective and implementation in the home country (working for the home country's benefit). Besides, TSG member is also brining national/ subnational discussions and developments to share with the TSG.

TSG Function 1. Macro-regional implementation: scoping and development of a Thematic Area

A TSG is, as the name suggests, a central executive and decision-making body for the TA. With the base in the home country's thematic agenda, the TSG defines a **set of common, macro-regional priorities and scope of implementation**, with the purpose of shaping and creating the TA Action Plan, thereby applying both perspectives – policy and action-on-the ground. The TSG elaborates a shared understanding of the added value of the TA – for the macro-region and for respective home country – and decides on **appropriate formats** to deliver this value, thus developing a TA Action Plan. Subsequently, the TSG adopts a bespoke **monitoring & evaluation system** for the TA, and later carries out monitoring and evaluation activities, with a view of assessing the impact of the TA. The TSG **supports and empowers** Thematic Coordinator in every-day work.

TSG Function 2. National implementation: policy alignment across levels / 'policy loops'

Alignment of thematic policies across the levels - macro-regional, national, sub-national - is a result of coordinated work of the national/subnational TSG members and the NC unit. These two roles are highly interdependent in this task; together, they build the so called 'policy loops' between the MRS and the

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[1] Called also as steering groups, action groups in different MRS

home country. Essentially, these 'policy loops' are *information flows* that connect the home country thematic policy work with policy proposals 'produced' by the TA in the macro-regional space. The TSG member **actively engages thematic stakeholders and their respective policy channels** in the home country (following multi-level governance (MLG) principle), through policy dialogues and consultations. By doing this, the numerous 'policy loops' can be tuned for better alignment across the policy and stakeholder levels, and more stakeholders of the home country get connected to the Strategy's implementation formats. Working in this way also provides natural arenas for **communication of the macro-regional value added**.

Thus, TSG is **to integrate two developmental perspectives** – that of the development of the Thematic Area (through assuming steering responsibility) and that of the enabling of policy alignment across stakeholders and policy levels (through creating and expanding 'policy loops')

The TSG member's role in the light of the Strategy's maturity phase

Each of the stakeholder roles, and the interplay between them, has to be seen in the context of the so called maturity phases of the MRS; there are three phases any Strategy as a whole, and each TA develops through – from its inception to full-scale potential. Detailed information about the overall capacity of the Strategy to tackle common complex challenges in an integrated manner (i.e. through alignment of policy, funding, and actions) can be obtained for reference.

Interdependency of the implementing stakeholders within the Strategy

There are at least three main groups of implementing stakeholders representing various levels of guidance and implementation – National Coordinators, Thematic Coordinators and TSG. In a complex system such as a MRS (where hierarchical relationships are ineffective), each of them serves the others by creating prerequisites for their work or serving their interests in other ways - their efforts are pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Performance of a MRS is possible when the groups of implementing stakeholders realise their **interdependence** and can count on one another to do their part.

Below is the graphic representation of the interdependencies between the three main implementation roles (National Coordinators, Thematic Coordinators and TSG) viewed through the peculiarities of the three development phases. Similar role guidance is being developed for each of the three key MRS implementation roles, aiming to serve background for designing MRS capacity building programmes.

Roles and interdependencies of implementing stakeholders of the macro-regional strategies

	Phase I Clarity of Mission and Setting up for Success (Scoping and Planning)	Phase II Systematic Productivity and Accountability (Operations)	Phase III Sustainability and Legitimacy (Policy impact)
Focus in Phase	The Strategy gets clarity on its nature and mission and sets up for delivery along the lines of efficiency, sustainability and legitimacy. The Strategy defines and scopes macro-regional policy-action processes/ strategic projects.	The Strategy is implementing its Action Plan through agreed sets of macro-regional policy-action processes/ strategic projects and delivering outcomes and policy effects at relevant levels.	The Strategy has embraced and operationalised complexity of cooperation across various governance levels and sectors. The MRS work becomes: -efficient due to internal coherence, -sustainable in terms of funding, -legitimate in the eyes of citizens.
Roles in Phase			
Thematic Coordinators ('Chief engineers')	Focus: Macro-regional "Setting up Thematic Area and Steering Group"	Focus: Macro-regional "Implementation of the Thematic Area within"	Focus: Macro-regional "Cross-Thematic Area integration and delivery" "Aggregating macro-regional policy impact"
Steering Groups / members ('Policy aligners')	Double focus: Macro-regional (1) "Members: Personal and institutional commitment to macro-regional work" National (2) "Work for national commitment"	Double focus: National (1) "Work with national policy loops" Macro-regional (2) "Broadening stakeholder engagement"	Focus: National AND Macro-regional/EU (equal prio) "Expanding and aligning national and EU policy loops (thematic and cross-thematic)"
National Coordinators ('Systems guardians')	Double focus: National (1) "Plan for national implementation" Macro-regional (2) "Work for alignment of national and macro-regional agendas"	Focus: National "Coordination and support of national implementation" "Setting up and driving national financial dialogue with ESIF Mas"	Focus: National AND Macro-regional/EU (NC Group function as a board for the MRS) "Maintaining EU policy dialogues in connection with the macro-region's development" "Supporting financial dialogue between EU and the macro-region(s)"

Thematic Steering Group / Steering Group members (roles, tasks, interdependencies, work formats))

Generic roles and tasks of the TSG member/group can look like this:

Generally:

Work for the entire macro-region **bridging the gap** between the national/sub-national thematic agenda and the MRS policy objectives, by building and **implementing 'policy loops'.** Ensure **performance and health of the Thematic Area**, empowering the TA Coordinator.

At the macro-regional level (focus: performance and health of the TA)

- Fully understand (if needed, participate in the elaboration of) the value that the Strategy and the TA bring to the macro-region and the home country, i.e. **the value of macro-regional approaches** to solving the chosen issues as opposed to purely national solutions.

- For the TA, define **a set of common, macro-regional priorities** that will be implemented by the TA in medium-to-long term (e.g. called strategic actions in the Action Plans accompanying each MRS), and **define the macro-regional value added** for each of them.

- Participate in designing appropriate **delivery formats** for each of the Strategic Actions, with consideration taken to the Strategy's maturity phase (e.g. policy-action processes, flagships, collaboratives). Agree on what types of **stakeholders** are to be engaged for each of them, i.e. perform a stakeholder analysis from the MLG perspective.

- Investigate **funding options** for each Strategic Action and their formats (e.g. flagships) and other components, exploring possibilities for **alignment of funding** that is available at various stakeholder levels.

- Adopt (if needed, participate in / commission the development of) a bespoke **monitoring and evaluation system** for the TA (possibly also at the level of strategic action), that includes indicators and targets, both thematic and TA-process-related.

- Put together a **TA action plan**, that connects the value added, chosen priorities and Actions, implementation formats and their outcomes, related indicators and targets, and if wherever possible, funding prospects.

Thematic Steering Group / Steering Group members (roles, tasks, interdependencies, work formats))

At the national/sub-national level (focus: implementation through 'policy loops')

- Understand the value that the Strategy and the TA bring to the macro-region, the **home country and its institutions** at various governance levels.

- As a TSG member, **ensure the commitment of the home institution** to the macro-regional work and participation in the TSG group work, by presenting the TSG work as an important arena for alignment of thematic work (policy and action) between the country/region and the EU/macro-region, and the benefits of it for the institution.

- In the home country, build, maintain and expand **a network of institutions and organisations of various levels**, that are engaged in thematic policy work, or other complementary perspectives that can forward the TA progress (e.g. funding institutions, civil society organisations, triple-helix partnerships, international organisations); **communicate the TSG work** as adding value to the efforts of the institutions and organisations, engage in creative discussions about policy and action needed from the perspective of these institutions.

- Initiate and participate in thematic **multi-stakeholder policy dialogues and consultations**, bringing in the macro-regional perspective as adding value to the national efforts; **actively engage** interested stakeholders in the TA Actions and formats.

- Build the so-called **'policy loops'** (information flows) between the TSG work and thematic (policy and action) work in the home country. Essentially, the TSG member becomes **the point of exchange of information and outcomes** between thematic work on the national level and that in the TSG /TA (e.g. policy recommendations developed within the TA will be channelled to the national/sub-national policy actors, and vice versa – relevant national policy-action initiatives will be brought into the TSG/TA work).

Thematic Steering Group / Steering Group members (roles, tasks, interdependencies, work formats))

Capacity needed to perform the role and achieve the purpose of the TSG

A TSG is to be seen as both an institution and an individual, and attention is to be given to the capacity development of both. Some TAs are built on existing institutions with established international / macro-regional cooperation practice and even EU-level regulations/international agreements. Others have no such prerequisites, and a basic institutional collaboration structure and strategic priorities have to be built before such a TA can deliver on policy impact and on changed action on the ground.

A crucial capacity for a TSG is the ability to **bring together perspectives of various-level stakeholders and strive to work towards agreed MRS value added in addressing shared challenges.** The principle of MLG should be guiding the composition and the practical work of the TSG.

To be able to steer a TA, the TSG needs to see the MRS as a complex, interconnected, evolving system, and become aware of **the value added** that the TA in question brings to the implementation and the stakeholders. It is therefore crucial that the TA is 'properly set' in its Phase I – objectives/goals are set, roles committed to, formats agreed, target and indicators set. Only then can the TSG focus on monitoring TA operational actions, results and outcomes.

The TSG-role is complex, and the individuals-in-role should have a certain **underlying capacity in terms of knowledge and capabilities** that arise from those. This strategic role also comes with a certain **mindset and leadership qualities**. Detailed despcription of these capacities, as well as suggestions on how they might be developed, is available upon request and can be used for designing role-specific capacity building initiatives.

Thematic Steering Group member: Possible Modus Operandi / Actions / Activities

For policy alignment across levels / 'policy loops'

- Stakeholder seminars in the home country, thematic and cross-thematic (purpose: mobilise for macro-regional collaboration around common challenges)
- Policy consultations in connection with projects and processes initiated by the TA (purpose: connect action and policy in working formats)
- Open policy dialogues, cross-level and cross-thematic (purpose: assess systemic policy impact, align policy directions and actions) steering national discussion
- Starting / supporting multi-stakeholder policy-making groups (purpose: writing policy briefs and policy recommendations)

Thematic Steering Group / Steering Group members (roles, tasks, interdependencies, work formats))

For developing the Thematic Area (internal work)

- Regular TSG meetings (physical and/or online) – with clear agenda, 'homework' and expected output (prerequisite: personal commitment and accountability)
- Facilitated meetings for generating new policy-action processes as ways to implement the Action Plan
- Monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing processes within the TA, with aim to analyse gaps and maybe attract missing stakeholders
- Strategic reflection meetings, assuming the 'bird-eye view' of the TA, its place in the Strategy, its relevance to thematic progress as well as the quality of cooperation, its MLG-based composition and outreach etc, and overall - its **efficiency**, **productivity**, **sustainability**, and **legitimacy** in the macro-region.

Resources and prerequisites for successful work of TSGs

Composition: quality over quantity

- The composition of the group should mirror the country/region composition of the Strategy in question
- Real decision-makers (management position over expert position)
- Sufficient backing from line ministries (and corresponding sub-national institutions) in terms of mandate for macro-regional work
- Formalised appointment of TSG members by the national authorities
- Continuity of participation in TSG builds up and strengthens capacity of the TSG as such
- MLG-principle should guide the composition, and in particular:
    - Participation of the EC services (increased support from all relevant DGs)
    - Participation of selected representatives of relevant international organisations (e.g. the Alpine Convention in the EUSALP)
    - Participation of sectors/industries affected by envisaged policy work

Financial resources

- Sufficient financial resources for implementing work of TSG and of its member (e.g. funding for meetings, travels, trainings, other arrangements (particularly, for non-EU Member States))
- Prerequisites for embedding MRS in funding programmes and instruments

Thematic Steering Group / Steering Group members (roles, tasks, interdependencies, work formats))

Quality of meetings

- SG meetings organised as appealingly as possible, including interesting and relevant topics
- If possible, expand the scope of meetings (combine purposes)
- Pre-meeting factors seriously considered (frequency of meeting, location, agenda formulation and preparation)
- Agenda: define goals and expectations beforehand
- Meetings: time schedule
- Chair or facilitator to steer / allow for questions and discussion / overview discussions
- Nominate person to take notes and make minutes of the meeting, send follow-up in time (possibly, rotate the function)

Management and Leadership

- Help the TSG members to understand and 'own' their actual role and place in the MRS as a system (arrive at clear functions, responsibilities, implications)
- Step-by-step empower the TSGs – show their work matters and that they are a strategic recourse to be invested in
- Recognition of TSG member's and TSG work
- Encourage decision-making, individually and collectively
- Work to simplify or reduce administration for coordination and to invest more in the management of implementation
- Work for stronger encouragement of line ministries to participate, integrate into their ordinary activity ->support, resource, and control; Ensure MLG participation
- Communicate, exchange, and share experiences with another TA within and across MRS