The MASON Approach
Place-based Action Planning for Lifelong Learning

MASON — Mainstream SocioCultural Dynamics to enhance NLLLS

Universität der Bundeswehr München

Place-based Action Planning for Lifelong Learning

The MASON project suggests that the regional and local diversity in EU Member States across dimensions such as demographics, geography, economy, governance, culture and education requires going beyond 'onesize-fits-all' lifelong learning policies towards integrated, place-based approaches. This strengthens the coherence and comprehensiveness of national LLL strategies, because of the focus on specific regional and local community challenges and the promotion of partnerships and policy ownership with regional and local authorities, economic actors, social partners and the civil society.

MASON stresses the importance of an understanding of the capacities, challenges and dynamics of regional and local lifelong learning systems as a means to empower public authorities at all levels to promote place-based policies. MASON developed mapping tools based on composite indicators to facilitate an integrated understanding of position and dynamics at regional level, and blended methodologies to construct context specific socio-culturally relevant Action Plans.

Learning traditions and culture of learning are rather intangible aspects. The MASON project therefore developed an indicator based approach for analyzing the socio-cultural dynamics on a statistically sound basis. Existing Eurostat indicators (single indicators) were clustered into four composite indicators:

Education, Information Society, Socioeconomics, Science & Technology.

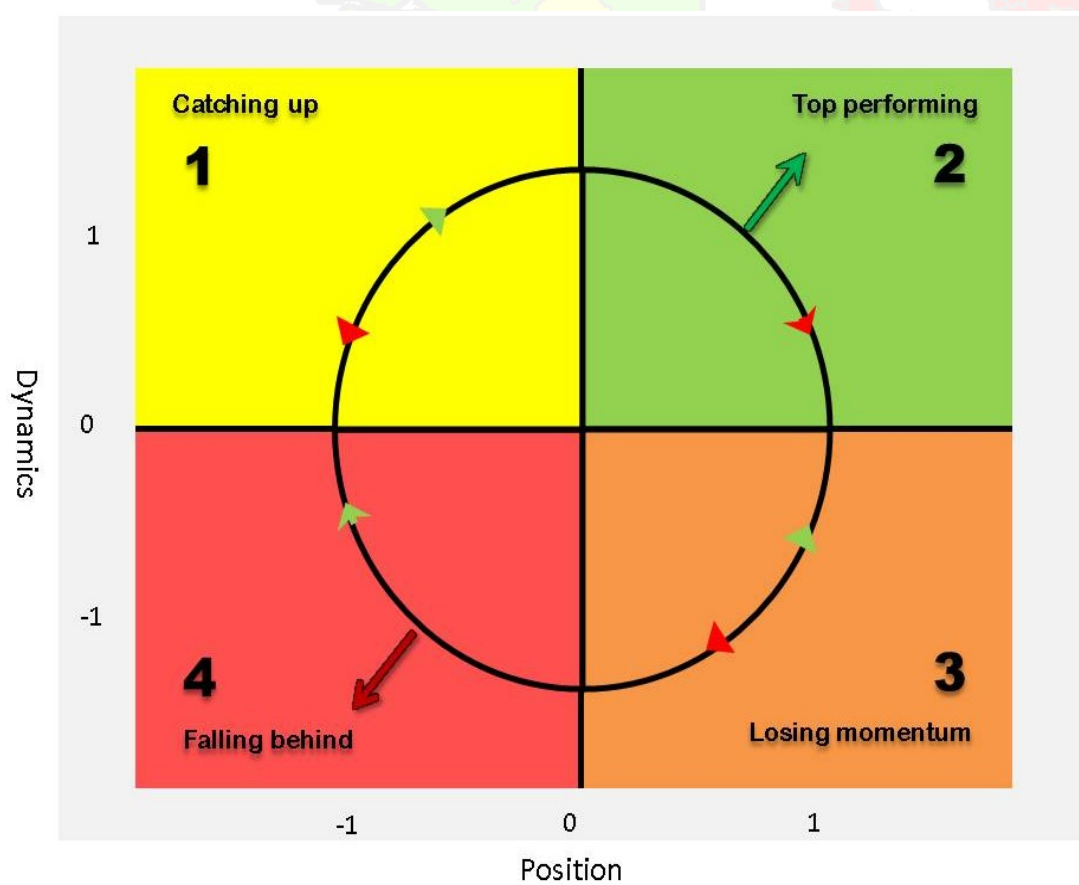The material allowed for the identification of two main aspects:

- **Individual aspect**
  = the composite indicators Education and Information Society
- **Structural aspect**
  = the composite indicators Socioeconomics and Science & Technology.

These aspects form the basis for the mapping approach of European countries, and MASON countries specifically, on different NUTS levels. Through geographical mapping a visual representation of the results allows for direct comparison of good and weak performance and status, with regard to each single indicator and the four composite indicators.

Performance of a region

According to a region's performance in the individual or structural composite indicators, it can be placed in one of the four quadrants.
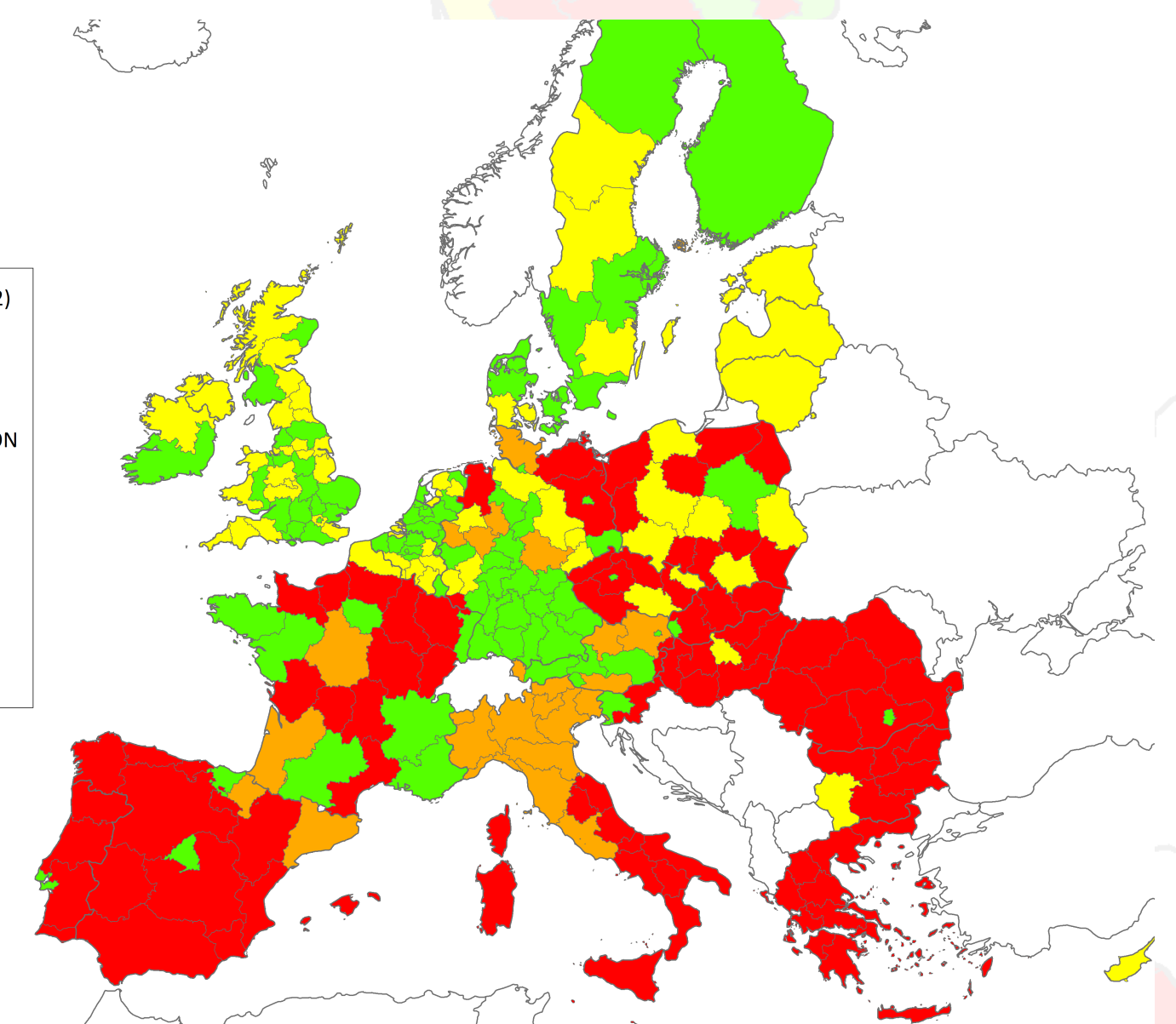The location in one of the four quadrants is not at random. It is determined by a region's **position** (=current indicator value) and its **dynamics** (= development of the indicator value over time).

Movement between quadrants is based on a circular process, since positive dynamic development is a key factor for development of position results above average

Status chart— individual an structural position

Cartography: MASON project (2012)
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MASON Composite Indicator
INDIVIDUAL/STRUCTURAL - POSITION

SCALE: 1:15 000 000

- Catching up (Quadrant 1)
- Top performer (Quadrant 2)
- Loosing momentum (Quadrant 3)
- Falling behind (Quadrant 4)

Quadrant Approach

Quadrant 1—Catching up Individual aspect above average, structural aspect below average: Regions can move from quadrant 1 to quadrant 2 by improving their position. Their above average dynamics development provides a sound basis for this movement. However, if the regions do not keep up the policies and programmes that supported positive development, their dynamics might decrease, causing the region to move to quadrant 4

Quadrant 2—Top performer Individual and structural aspect above average: Reaching quadrant 2 is the aim of any region. Regions located here need to keep up their positive development in policies and programmes. Otherwise, decreasing dynamics would move them to quadrant 3; and it would only be a matter of time until they would also lose their current good position. Regions in quadrant 2 can improve even further, if they venture into new terrain and follow innovative ideas.

Quadrant 3—Losing momentum Structural aspect above average, individual aspect below average: Regions located in quadrant 3 need to refocus their programmes and policies. Their current above average position indicates that they once were following appropriate measures, but have lost momentum recently. Changing needs of society and economics might be the reason. A timely reaction can prevent the region from moving to quadrant 4, and even propel it into quadrant 2.

Quadrant 4—Falling behind Individual and structural aspect above average: Regions can move from quadrant 4 to quadrant 1 through positive dynamic development. It is a pre-requisite for improvement of the position in this circular process. If policies and programmes do not support the dynamic development, the regions are at risk of falling even further behind and the gap to the better performing regions would increase more and more

Performance chart—position & dynamics of a region

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