



Cross Border Institution Building – CBIB+4
The IPA Multi-beneficiary Programme



This is a project
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Interact



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Exploring synergies among Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA CBC

23/05/2024

Online, 9:30 – 12:30 CET

Meeting summary

Introduction

Interact and CBIB+4 (the EU-funded multi-beneficiary project 'Cross-border Institution Building – CBIB+ Phase IV'), organised a joint online workshop that gathered 41 participants representing joint secretariats/joint technical secretariats, national authorities/NIPAC offices, different services of the European Commission, managing authorities and other institutions or organisations such as associations, controllers and national contact points.

The workshop was built on a first hybrid meeting held in Tirana in May 2022, facilitated by Interact in collaboration with CBIB+3 and with support from DG REGIO and DG NEAR. The kick off meeting brought together numerous representatives from Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA CBC programmes financed by the 2021-2027 Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) for the first time and aimed to raise awareness about these programmes and facilitate an open exchange to identify areas to join forces and scale up capacity building efforts.

As a continuation of the first meeting, the workshop of May 2024 sought, from a technical perspective:

- to discuss cross-cutting themes to identify opportunities for collaboration and potential synergies among the programmes; and
- to exchange insights on implementation challenges among Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA CBC programmes to foster mutual learning.

Interact and CBIB+4 provided a short introduction of the services and tools developed to address the needs of Interreg and IPA-IPA programmes respectively.

The presentation then continued with an overview of the thematic areas with the highest potential for synergies based on the mapping exercise of the priorities selected by Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA programmes for the 2021-2027 period. The priorities showing the greatest potential for both Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA programmes are as follows:

- Sustainable, nature-and-cultural tourism, cultural heritage;
- Valorisation, protection, and preservation of environmental resources;
- Resilience to natural and manmade disasters and climate change challenges;
- Business support, circular economy; and
- Health related topics.

The foregoing areas mostly matched those that the participants singled out when registering for the workshop. Following a plenary discussion, the participants agreed that future discussions would basically revolve around the first three priorities areas, namely:

- Sustainable, nature-and-cultural tourism, cultural heritage;
- Valorisation, protection, and preservation of environmental resources;
- Resilience to natural and manmade disasters and climate change challenges.

Three cluster of cross-cutting themes of collaboration were presented paired on the input highlighted by the participants during the registration process.

- 1) **Capacity building**, including cooperation between local administrations; capacity building of beneficiaries on how to transfer plans, strategies, and local/regional challenges into CBC projects; enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities overseeing programme management and implementation.
- 2) **Methods to achieve synergies**, including their identification and discussion; the potential multiplayer effect of good practices; connecting applicants and initiatives across programmes.
- 3) **Cross-border cooperation** perspectives to achieve sustainable development; resilience; broader stakeholder engagement at all stages of programme/project design and implementation.

After the presentation the floor was opened to a lively discussion with many different interventions from the participants.

Key discussion points and main takeaways:

- The Delegations of the European Union should receive more pertinent information regarding the Interreg IPA projects funded within their respective territories. It is crucial that all stakeholders are informed about the initiatives in progress in each specific geographic area;
- Successful operations encompassing, as part of their activities, cooperation with initiatives funded under other programmes should be identified as reference of cross-programme fertilisation;
- The existence of multi-programme JTSs (e.g.: RS-BA, RS-ME and RS-MK) and common premises to manage different programmes (e.g.: CBC House in Pristina) has resulted in a substantial improvement in information sharing. This could be further explored to support beneficiaries, especially local governments;
- Multi-programme cooperation could be advanced with working groups of diverse beneficiaries active in the same geographic area and/or focused on the same thematic topics;

- The establishment of an online hub as a virtual place to hold important information and know-how to support exchange and learning across programmes as well as supporting community building across the management structures. The hub could also contain a database of the best CBC examples;
- There is a need for dedicated spaces, communities, or working groups for programme bodies to exchange ideas and address common challenges such as project assessment and capacity building;
- The keep.eu database is seen as a rich source of inspiring ideas for new operations;
- The Interact Academy is also considered a relevant tool for IPA-IPA programmes on those topics where the different legal frameworks of the programmes would not be an obstacle for learning usefulness. Interact, upon request and proof of high interest, can open the Academy's services also to IPA-IPA programmes' representatives;
- The collaboration between Interact and CBIB+ in the domain of visibility and communication over the last two years has been much appreciated. Outreach and joint events in this or other domains should take place on a regular basis;
- Greater emphasis should be placed on leveraging existing synergies among operations when assessing applications for calls for proposals. For instance, within the IPA-IPA CBC programmes, the external services model application package includes a question in the assessment grid of concept notes (question 1.2). To maximise scores, management structures should encourage applicants to explore cooperation with past and current Interreg IPA operations;
- Joining forces in evaluation by collectively assessing common topics, streamline data collection, share evaluation methodologies and align the efforts. This not only enhances the efficiency of individual evaluations but also contributes valuable insights for upcoming ex-post evaluations. IPA programmes can join forces for a shared approach to evaluating the contribution to the accession dimension(s);
- Cooperation between Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA programmes ensures a better information flows and better awareness of projects implemented in the area helping to avoid double financing;
- Measures such as mapping of project results; participation as observers in some programme events; access to INDEX (i.e., an automated data exchange platform developed by Interact); joint communication/capitalisation, studies and evaluations; and participation in study visits and/or thematic workshops, coordinated outreach activities could also further the building of synergies.

The capitalisation exercise of IPA-IPA CBC programmes was presented by CBIB+4.

Other core aspects addressed during the meeting were the implementation challenges faced by Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA CBC programmes.

These challenges were identified during the registration process and during the meeting the participants were asked to rank the three most crucial implementation challenges. The result is as follows:

- Quality of projects;
- Sustainability; and
- Project implementation challenges.

The discussion was focused on the “Quality of projects” aspect and was guided by the following questions:

- What are the most significant obstacles you have encountered so far?
- Can you share any successful strategies or approaches put in place to overcome this implementation challenge in your programme?
- What can be some feasible options or new ideas for addressing this challenge more effectively in the future?

Participants engaged in discussion that took place in three separate groups. Afterwards the groups highlighted in the plenary the following **challenges** related to the quality of projects:

- Poor skills and competences in proposal development, lack of target groups and final beneficiaries’ involvement leading to lower relevance of the operation to these groups.
- Consultant driven applications with little ownership from the formal applicant’s side.
- Lack of institutional capacity and frequent staff changes in the applicant institutions.
- Poor skills and competences in contract management, hindering the efficient consumption of budget expenditure.
- Discouragingly long and non-transparent assessment of project proposals.
- Insufficient support of the JTS/JS to potential applicants.
- Building partnerships in haste without considering the cross-border aspect or the real need of the territory.
- Heavily formalised rules, complex procedures and administration in project application and contract implementation with very little or no flexibility (particularly applicable for IPA-IPA CBC programmes).
- Recycling of project ideas and little room for new and innovative ones.
- The assessment of applications is not sufficiently substantiated in the assessment grids due to the poor performance of assessors.

In terms of successful **strategies or approaches** to overcome the challenges, the participants underscored:

- Allowing access to JTS of IPA-IPA CBC programmes to access to the assessment grids of unsuccessful applicants to implement meaningful tailored support measures benefiting future applicants;
- Setting clearer rules in the calls for proposals that would ensure a more restrictive participation of applicants;
- Giving more importance to the proved quality of cooperation, to the point of making it a decisive 'yes' or 'no' to retain an application;
- Institutionalise training, e.g.: support to assessors, especially external ones;
- Project drafting should be preceded by many group discussions to define the objectives, results and most suitable activities;
- Favouring innovation and the presence of new applicants;
- Forming groups of potential applicants to support the development of good quality applications;
- Creating area or thematic hubs for the establishment of suitable partnerships beyond the standard partner search forums;
- Favouring the two-step application process (i.e.: concept notes and then full applications), allowing room for capacity building provision between application phases.

Next steps

This event served as a continuation of the kick-off event organised in Tirana in May 2022. Interact and CBIB+4, paired on the feedback received by the participants and by collecting further input, will follow-up and plan additional workshops to further discuss the identified common implementation challenges and eventually cross-cutting themes.