

Highlighting the added value and the impact of Interreg cooperation

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Overview

Around 48 Interreg programme representatives discussed a possible process to explore and showcase the added value of Interreg cooperation. It is an open invitation to join forces in developing evaluation approaches for important topics. This comprehensive reflection process is to support the launch of impact evaluations and facilitate the exchange on evaluation perspectives and methods. The ultimate outcome of this exercise is to contribute to shaping the future.

Methodology

This pilot exercise is meant as a **bottom-up approach** in which participating Interreg programmes collaboratively decide on topics for exchanges & reflections, the methodology and the main findings/messages to be communicated. This means, that the pilot exercises are designed to **target the specific needs**, relevance considerations, and interests of the participating programmes. Based on the expressed interest, several pilots with different topics will run in parallel. We recommend that a minimum of **four to five programmes collaborate on each selected topic**.

Interact will facilitate the exchange with the pilot groups. At a later stage in the process **external expertise** will be hired by Interact to support **the development of methodologies** and check the planned approaches for consistency, understanding and practical feasibility.

In the different pilots Interreg programmes will agree on

- **common aim/objective/outcome**, reach a common understanding of the aim, objectives and the outcome of the pilot exercise.
- **common evaluation questions**, define and agree on common evaluation questions, impact pathways and core messages which can be communicated to stakeholders and policy makers.
- **common evaluation methodology**, elaborate a method together and agree on which data needs to be collected therefore.

Key discussion points of the session

Why joining forces in evaluation?

What are examples from the past, especially focusing on the evaluation added value of cooperation in previous impact evaluations?

What is added value?

How should the process be implemented?
Which topics could be covered?

Reasons for joining forces:

- **Enhanced cooperation and synergy:** Undertaking a cross-programme exercise fosters closer collaboration among Interreg programmes, allowing for the identification of shared challenges, exchange of best practices, and the creation of synergies. This cooperative approach promotes a more comprehensive understanding of regional issues and strengthens the overall impact of Interreg cooperation.
- **Optimised evaluation process:** Coordinating evaluations across multiple Interreg programmes facilitates the optimisation of the evaluation process. By collectively assessing common topics, programmes can streamline data collection, share evaluation methodologies, and align their efforts. This not only enhances the efficiency of individual evaluations but also contributes valuable insights for upcoming ex-post evaluations.
- **Influential contribution to the future of Interreg:** Collaborative reflection and evaluation provide a robust foundation for shaping the future of Interreg. By engaging in a comprehensive activity that explores the added value of cooperation, governance improvements, and impact pathways, Interreg programmes contribute collectively to shaping the direction and priorities for the future. This shared perspective strengthens the influence of Interreg in shaping policies and strategies for the years to come.

The example of added value

The concept of added value takes on **diverse interpretations** within the impact evaluation of Interreg programmes from 2014- 2020, e.g. such as enhancing partnership maturity, promote CBC/TN, problem-solving, boosting capacity building, facilitating knowledge exchange, fostering CBC/TN innovation, stimulating regional growth, encouraging sustainable development, spurring economic synergies and strengthening CBC/TN ties

Various approaches exist for defining the added value, presenting a wide range of **methods to assess and quantify its significance**.

Various findings emerge in relation to added value, showing the multifaceted contributions of programmes during 2014-2020.

It becomes clear that such diverse views on the added value might be of limited use when it comes to the ex-post evaluation for all Interreg programmes. From a distance it may show diversity but obviously it does not allow to establish a coherent narrative across a significant number of programmes.

John Walsh made a clear statement that the European added value is inherent to Interreg. It is a unique instrument. There are hardly any national actions having significant scope working in the field of cooperation across borders. Hence the narrative for the added value

could be taken one step further. Future evaluations of Interreg's added value should focus more on looking into effectiveness and efficiency and convincing narratives on the content of cooperation actions.

Following the financial allocations in Interreg in the period 2021-27 it is important to establish good evidence and narratives on Specific Objectives (SOs) 4.6 (Tourism and culture) and SO 2.4 (Climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention).

Quest for topics for the pilot exercises

We had brought a couple of initial proposals for topics and participants have come up with further topics.

Exemplary topics: (complete list see google sheet)

- Harmonised approach to capture & highlight the added value of Interreg
- Evaluation spotlight on sustainable tourism as very popular topic in many programmes (SO 4.6 as a financial heavy weight in Interreg)
- Evaluation spotlight on cooperation actions promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience (SO 2.4 as a financial heavy weight in Interreg)
- Mediterranean area: 7 programmes looking into some topics together related the area
- 4 TN programmes on territories of MRS: How are the programmes adding value to the MRS and vice versa?
- IPA programmes: Cornerstones for a shared approach to evaluating the contribution to the accession dimension(s)
- TN programmes and their three common messages: Finding the right questions to harvest convincing narratives
- ISO1: Key points to evaluate governance achievements taking a more holistic perspective (going beyond sector perspectives)
- SPF as an instrument
- The role of investments in cooperation

Regulations and articles of particular significance

Common Provisions Regulation

Interreg Regulation: Article 35 "Evaluation during the programming period"

Conclusions, plans for followed up

The meeting gave an overview of possible topics where Interreg programmes could join forces to show their added value in their upcoming impact evaluations. That could be done among programmes sharing the same thematic focus, the same territory, the same strategy, etc.

Next steps:

- **March-15 April: Selection of topics (agree on pilots)**
List of topics to be tackled: until 15 April Interreg programmes can propose and sign up for different topics [in the google sheet](#). A topic will be selected and implemented in case there is a critical mass of 4-5 Interreg programmes). Interact will select 4-5 topics and communicate the result to the programmes
- **15 April to December: Kick of first pilots: Online meetings** 2-3 discussion rounds (per topic) to agree on evaluation questions, methodology, main messages to be communicated and the elements of the ToR (if agreed by the Interreg programmes a pilot could also kick off later during the year or only at the beginning of 2025)
- **From 2025: Online meetings** 2-3 discussion rounds to collect feedback, discuss findings and agree on common messages to be communicated.

Session leader: Daniela Minichberger

Delivery team: Besiana Ninka, Bernhard Schausberger

Report drafted by: Daniela Minichberger, Besiana Ninka and Bernhard Schausberger