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 **Interreg**
Baltic Sea Region



EUROPEAN
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FUND



\ INTERREG BALTIC SEA REGION 2014–2020
FINAL PROGRAMME EVALUATION
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

December 2022

This report was prepared for the Interreg Baltic
Sea Region Managing Authority

Investitionsbank Schleswig-Holstein (IB.SH)

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CIVITTA

During the period of April 2022 to December 2022

CIVITTA

15.12.2022

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 Final Programme Evaluation – Final Evaluation Report

ACRONYMS

BSAP	The Baltic Sea Action Plan
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
EC	European Commission
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organisation
HELCOM	The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission)
MA/JS	Managing Authority/ Joint Secretary
MC	Monitoring Committee
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Policy Area
Programme	Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 Programme
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SO	Specific Objective
TE	Thematic Expert
TBE	Theory Based Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this report is to provide an assessment of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 Programme (the Programme). The main objective of the Programme was to strengthen integrated territorial development and cooperation for a more innovative, better accessible, and sustainable region. Impact in the context of the Programme was defined as the increased institutional capacity of the Programme’s target groups to bring about positive change in the region based on the Programme’s intervention. Therefore, the final evaluation assessed its results and impacts according to the main aim – to increase the institutional capacities of relevant stakeholders, which in turn was expected to lead to improvements to the state of regional development in the Baltic Sea Region. The final evaluation of the Programme was divided into two parts: 1) monitoring and updating result indicator values and 2) evaluating the Programme impact and the ways how projects achieved their aims.

The funding was provided under four priorities, which responded to the transnational key challenges and opportunities in the region. The final evaluation focused on the first three priorities (capacity for innovation, efficient management of natural resources and sustainable transport), which included twelve specific objectives (SO). The fourth priority, not covered by this evaluation, included two other SOs. Overall, the Programme co-financed 194 projects with more than 2,500 partners from the Baltic Sea region countries and beyond. Each project had its own share in making the region more innovative, more sustainable and better connected.

The impact evaluation concept was primarily theory-based and not counterfactual, it gave a greater emphasis on qualitative considerations, though supported by quantitative data analysis and it was performed based on the Theory of Change (ToC) concept. The ToC describes how a desired change was expected to happen, following an intervention, of the reasons that substantiate those expectations and of the context the intervention is supposed to take place. Therefore, each element of the ToC was explored to understand whether theoretically predicted changes occurred as expected or because of other external factors.

Regarding the task of monitoring and updating result indicators, the aim was to identify the regional progress in achieving the expected results (increasing the institutional capacity of the target groups), while providing a final update of the values of the result indicators, in the context of targets assumed at the Programme level. The monitoring of the result indicators was carried out following the same methodology as in 2018 and 2020 as defined by the Baseline Study in 2015¹, which was important for ensuring the continuity and coherence of updating the result indicators. The methodology included an online survey and in-depth interviews, which involved a wide range of thematic experts (TE) from the Baltic Sea region. The analysis of the expert opinions about the qualitative situation of institutional capacities was based on 68 completed surveys and 12 interviews.

Regarding the task of evaluating the Programme impact and the ways how projects achieved their aims, four subtasks and their assigned questions were evaluated and explored – the process of institutional capacity building under priorities 1–3, the influence of the types of territory, the impact of the project platforms and the impacts of the change to online cooperation. The core methodological approach for conducting this task was Theory Based Evaluation (TBE). Using TBE, allowed to assess how the Programme’s interventions increased the institutional capabilities of the target groups. To interrogate the Programme theory, the different methods and techniques were used: desk research and literature review, analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, interviews, survey for beneficiaries, case studies and a focus-group.

The results of the monitoring and updating result indicator values indicated an increasing tendency in the institutional capacities of eight SOs, decreasing values in three SOs and one SO remained stable. Although

¹ Ramboll Management, 2015: “Final Report: Analysis of projects in 2007–2013 and setting baselines and targets for the indicators 2014–2020”

the overall picture of the institutional capacity compared to 2020 shows positive changes, the pace of the increase has been too slow to reach the targeted value set for 2023 in any of the SOs. There were four SOs to reach more than 50% of the target set to 2023. The most significant positive progress in comparison to 2014 baseline can be observed for SO 1.1 (Research and innovation infrastructure), where 78% of the target value has been reached. SO 2.1 (Clear waters) and SO 3.1 (Interoperability of transport modes) both reached 67% of the targets set to 2023 and SO 3.3 (Maritime safety) reached 56% of the target value. No progress (0%) in comparison to the 2014 baseline was made in SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation). This can be explained with great potential seen in earlier years, which remained unfulfilled because many organisations still prefer to invest their knowledge, time and funding rather in technological innovation. Overall, the experts were satisfied with the state of institutional capacity, but further increase in capacities with the continuation of existing support mechanisms will be difficult and require changes in current policies and systems. The potential changes should take into consideration that the challenges differ between specific objectives and countries, therefore different measures or approaches need to be applied.

The process of institutional capacity building was similar across all priorities. Most important factors that contributed to maximising the institutional capacity building process were partners' expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project, partners' diversity, their formal and informal linkages and networks with the target groups and the level of interest and engagement of the target groups. The main hindrances setting challenges to the institutional capacity building process were engaging some target groups (e.g., SME), involving the target groups in the activities and their insufficient capacity of the to internalise the changes/ maintain results. Pilot actions and networking activities were seen as the most successful activities in supporting the learning process to develop into institutional capacities. The evaluation showed that generally the developed pilot actions were relevant for other locations and had a high potential for transferability.

Regarding the type of territory, the Programme areas comprised both metropolitan areas and rural areas. Based on these categories, the territorial distribution of the partners showed that the projects' results were mainly concentrated in predominantly urban areas (46%), followed by intermediate ones (38%). Also, the beneficiaries perceived the involvement of partners from economically weaker rural areas more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas. The insufficient administrative capacity (financial, technical, human) of partners from rural areas to participate in projects, their often-lower expertise and experience in project topics, or their limited formal and informal networks and linkages with the target groups, are among the causes for uneven rural - urban participation. Moreover, there is enough evidence to conclude that the location of the project partners had an influence on the topics and activities in the projects.

The project platforms were a new type of project in the 2014–2020 Programme to capitalise on the results and products of existing projects, with the main scope of increasing the impacts and expanding the effects of Interreg Baltic Sea Region interventions and other EU-funded projects in the Programme area. The capacity building process through the project platforms worked by knowledge synthesis and discussions between different stakeholder groups. Also, the knowledge and expertise sharing were the main added value in bringing together projects from different funding sources (BONUS, Horizon etc.). All project platforms (9) within the Programme were successful in influencing the policy change, as they contributed either to policy change or their recommendations were considered in elaborating new policy documents. The partners did not foresee that their policy work would be adapted to regional policies during the implementation period of the project platform in some cases. The involvement of the PA coordinators and the pan-Baltic organisations in the project platform implementation was one of the success factors for project platforms to succeed in policy building.

As expected, COVID-19-related restrictions stood out as the most important challenge affecting the capacity building process. The shift to online cooperation had a notable negative impact on the development of relations among project partners, negatively influencing the development of networks with other projects, stakeholders, and target audiences. Some types of activities are not suitable for online mode, such as piloting, brainstorming or active topic discussions. On the contrary, it was noted that online communication among partners allowed more flexibility in arranging joint project partners meetings or ad

hoc discussions in smaller working groups. Outreach via online events was much bigger, but the real engagement of target groups was harder in the online mode. Whilst more people were able to participate in online events, many events also made people lose interest quickly. Also, project beneficiaries stated that having online events widened the scope of dissemination and the partners reached wider audiences, for example, by reaching people outside of BSR and Europe. In general, it was seen that a balance between online and in person meetings, activities and events should be kept.

Finally, the recommendations were developed taking the results and findings of the evaluation into account. The recommendations concerned both tasks (monitoring and updating result indicator values and evaluating the Programme impact) and each subtask of the second task. The recommendations addressed several areas. For instance, how the future Programme should further promote the transfer and uptake of results from previous projects and programme periods in given topics to enhance the uptake and transfer of the results of the projects. Moreover, the communication materials of projects should be prepared in different formats considering the peculiarity of different target groups and networking events for project partners should be organised to provide familiarisation with projects and possible partners from other funding sources. Also, territorial expansion of the programme results should be considered, through a wider involvement of actors from economically weaker rural areas, including as associated organisations. The future projects should include a more balanced approach between online and offline activities in all project phases. Lastly, the implementation period of project platforms should have a slight overlap with regular projects, as it would increase the knowledge sharing levels between the partners.

In general, the Programme was seen successful in reaching its objectives with some hindrances, were these unexpected or not. This final evaluation report provides a thorough overview of the Programme progress in terms of reaching the targets set for the result indicator values that capture the institutional capacities of the Programme target groups and offers a meaningful input for the future programmes in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation resulted with twelve recommendations which should be used to improve the future Interreg BSR Programme and ensure the transfer of the gained knowledge and capacities into the future projects and policy areas in the region. The results of the evaluation are further analysed and elaborated in chapters 3 and 4.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
1. TRANSFER AND UPTAKE OF RESULTS TO SUPPORT THE INCREASE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY	
<p>The overall picture of the institutional capacity compared to 2020 shows positive changes, but the pace of the increase has been too slow to reach the targeted value set for 2023 in any of the SOs.</p> <p>Overall, the thematic experts were satisfied with the state of institutional capacity, but further increase in capacities require changes in current policies and systems depending on the topics and situation in countries.</p> <p>Most important factors to increase the institutional capacity were partners' expertise and experience, partners' diversity, their networks with the target groups and the level of engagement of target groups. Pilot actions and networking activities were seen as the most successful activities in supporting the learning process to develop into institutional capacities.</p> <p>The main hindrances setting challenges to the institutional capacity building process were engaging and involving some target groups (e.g., SME) in the activities and their insufficient capacity to internalise the changes/ maintain results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future Programme should further promote the transfer and uptake of results from previous projects and programme periods in a given topic. The knowledge of past partners and the results produced could be better integrated in project development, appraisal, and implementation. • The MA/JS should consider continuing implementation of the extension calls or initiating dedicated calls for further extending the results and the cooperation established during 2014–2020. • Programme authorities should dedicate enough resources and plan the transfer and uptake efforts of projects' results from previous Programme from the onset of the 2021–2027 period. • The Programme should continue providing the tools and methods (e.g., pilots, project platforms) that have already proven the positive effects.
2. CUSTOMISED APPROACH TO REACH TARGET GROUPS AND DISSEMINATE RESULTS	
<p>It was concluded that different target groups require customised approach, to ensure that the results of the project reach the target groups in the most suitable way for them, and the results are relevant to the target groups. This in turn contributes to the more efficient dissemination of results. Working closely with the ones that will actually use the results, will enhance generalisation, uptake and sustainability of the results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More focus should be placed on ensuring the practical usefulness of the outputs and results for the target groups. • Communication materials should be prepared in different formats considering the peculiarity of different target groups (e.g., separately for SMEs, citizens). • The network of the national Baltic Sea Region National Contact Points could be established to support the work of the MA/JS in the programme countries.² National Contact Points could play a key role for connecting the project partners with relevant stakeholders, presenting results

² There are Interreg programmes which have National Contact Points networks to help the Programme authorities: <https://centralbaltic.eu/national-contact-points/>, <https://www.nweurope.eu/contact-us/contact-points/>, <https://northsearegion.eu/about-the-programme/contact/national-contact-points/>

MAIN CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<p>achieved and highlighting their added value for the respective institution/region etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Programme authorities should explore options to increase exposure of projects and project partners to relevant decision makers, at regional and national level, to enable the uptake and generalisation of results.
<h3>3. ENHANCED FOCUS ON RURAL AREAS</h3>	
<p>This recommendation is based both on Task 1 conclusions regarding the limited developments in institutional capacity building across all SOs, and the conclusions of sub-task 2.2. which showed an unequal distribution of projects and results between countries and, especially, between urban and rural areas.</p> <p>These show that for future positive development in institutional capacities in the region to take place, there is a need for interventions to be less concentrated in urban, more developed areas and to focus more on the involvement of actors from rural areas, among which there is still a need for an increase in their institutional capacities. However, not all the topics addressed by the Programme are suited to be addressed in all types of territories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme authorities should consider the territorial expansion of the programme results, through a wider involvement of actors from economically weaker rural areas, including as associated organisations. If the Programme wants to enhance the focus on rural areas the Programme authorities should take into consideration the urban-rural split among project partners in the project selection process. Moreover, the feedback from users for the matchmaking platform should be collected and constantly pursued the improvement of its functionalities during 2021–2027 period, especially with a view to a greater reach of actors in rural areas.
<h3>4. ENGAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN PROJECT PLATFORMS</h3>	
<p>Due to the aim of the project platforms, which was to develop, update, or contribute to various public policies, the role of public authorities was very important. The public authorities had mostly policy-related role, which allowed them to provide valuable inputs to preparation of project platforms' deliverables.</p> <p>Public authorities as project partners were responsible for elaboration of policy recommendations and they organised the discussions with target groups and networking with other stakeholders in the countries.</p> <p>It was concluded that public authorities played in the project platforms bigger role than they usually do in regular projects, their contribution supported the project platform work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public authorities should participate more in platforms for further supporting the results and findings of the project platforms. For example, PACs (Policy Area Coordinator) could have a stronger role in the process, as they possess more capacity to lead such processes. MA/JS should explore the possibility to encourage the public authorities to apply in the upcoming programme. The project platform partners could be from the structures which bring together national/local authorities and regional organizations, for instance, the pan-Baltic organisations, a ministry or even a coordinator of the EUSBSR.
<h3>5. SUPPORT FOR ACCESSING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS</h3>	
<p>One of the main added values of project platforms was that they united several projects from different funding sources. It was concluded that bringing together different funding sources made it possible to approach the problems from a wider angle.</p> <p>However, it was concluded that finding the relevant international partners (e.g., different funding sources) was not the easiest part. It was noted that reaching possible new partners from other funding sources other than Interreg project partners, it requires</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networking events should be organised also in the future to provide support familiarisation with projects and possible partners from other funding sources, develop new ideas for cooperation and to form new partnerships for cooperating within the Programme in the future (e.g., project platform proposals). The networking events could be organised by the Programme or on the project partners' own initiative.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>resources, time and specific knowledge of where and what to look. It was recognized that it was time consuming to reach possible partners online from other funding sources compared to forming partnerships from already known circle.</p>	
<p>6. TIMING OF IMPLEMENTATION THE PROJECT PLATFORMS</p>	
<p>The project platforms are related to regular projects and their success depends on the inputs and success of regular projects. If the project platform starts after the end of the regular projects, it is difficult for the partners to get the necessary information from regular project partners. Therefore, some overlap would enhance the knowledge sharing between all the parties, even with the partners who do not join the project platform.</p> <p>Successful dissemination of results also requires that the results of regular projects are finalised. It was noted that in some cases it was not possible to successfully share project platforms' results because the results of a regular project had not yet become available. As some results came later than planned, the partners would have needed more time to organise dissemination events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation period of project platforms should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ have a slight overlap with regular projects, as it could increase the knowledge sharing levels. That is likely to foster and facilitate the knowledge sharing among different projects participants. ✓ be at least 1-1.5 years long to ensure the sufficient timeframe for implementation activities and dissemination events.
<p>10. KNOWLEDGE GAP ANALYSIS</p>	
<p>The aim of the project platforms was to capitalise on the results and products of existing projects and to get a more holistic view on the topic. Also, the outputs of regular projects were often guidelines or handbooks, which required working through a lot of material from the past as well. Therefore, a proper overview of what has/has not been achieved is necessary for the projects in general.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge gap analysis should be more widely used as a useful and best practice tool in knowledge synthesis. Determining the information gaps would enable projects to plan their activities and project platforms to plan their process of disseminating the results.
<p>11. BALANCE BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE ACTIVITIES</p>	
<p>The pressure to move communication and activities (at least) partly to online resulted mainly from COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.</p> <p>The shift to online cooperation had a strong negative impact on the cooperation among project partners. In general, online cooperation reduced cohesion, limited the possibilities for cooperation and negatively influenced the development of networks with other projects or stakeholders, especially in the case of platforms.</p> <p>From the positive side the online dissemination events helped projects reach new and broader audiences and increased the projects' visibility, it was easier to bring in more people to meetings.</p> <p>In addition, using digital means, such as video tools also helped to have sustainable capacity building, as these materials recorded and then published, were seen as an additional source of exposure and communication of the results in a long-term, as the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future projects should include a more balanced approach between online and offline activities in all project phases. • It would be beneficial and more result oriented for all parties if the first meeting between partners would happen in person to establish trust and get to know each other, while shorter regular meetings can be done online. • Regarding project implementation, also project activities should have a balance between online and offline. Where possible, in-person activities should be a priority. However, dissemination activities (webinars, forums, workshops) proved to be as well beneficial and useful to be held online, as online events offer the possibility to reach a wider audience and delegates from other countries. • Lastly, the balance between online and offline should be seen in order to optimise costs for travelling.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>information was published online and could be re-watched at a later stage.</p>	
<p>12. ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES TO EASE THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN</p>	
<p>The introduction the electronic signature for the reporting and project documents got positive notice from project partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The electronic signature acceptance should be accepted for the reporting and project documents to ease the administrative burden of the beneficiaries.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the report of the final evaluation of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 Programme. This report involves four content chapters. The first chapter describes the basis and the methodology of the final evaluation. It is followed by a chapter dedicated to the overview of the Programme. The third chapter describes the outcomes of the monitoring and updating result indicator values and the fourth chapter is about the evaluation of the Programme impact. Main conclusions and recommendations are summarised at the beginning of the report. The final evaluation report is supplemented with four annexes, which are attached as separate documents. Annex 1 describes thoroughly the methodology of the final evaluation; Annex 2 contains Theory of change for all priorities and specific objectives. Annex 3 has the results of the beneficiaries’ survey and Annex 4 includes the analysis of 15 case studies.

1.1. OBJECTIVE AND BACKGROUND

Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 Programme (the Programme) was one of the 15 transnational Interreg programmes partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the territorial cooperation goal of the European Union (EU). It also integrated financing of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and national funding of the Russian Federation for Russian beneficiaries. Norway also contributed with national financing to enable Norwegian partners to fully participate in the Programme as well. The eligible geographic area in 2014–2020 included EU Member States – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, and northern parts of Germany, as well as the partner countries – Norway and north-western regions of Russia (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: PROGRAMME COOPERATION AREA FOR 2014–2020



Source: Interreg Baltic Sea Region

The Programme was supervised by a Monitoring Committee (MC), composed of representatives of national and regional authorities from the participating countries, and the European Commission (EC) was an observer. The MC also acted as the Evaluation Steering Group.

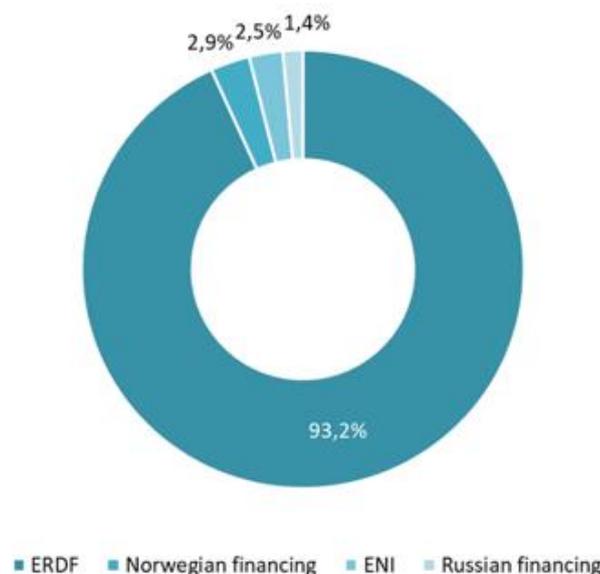
The Programme promoted transnational cooperation and integration in the BSR by projects addressing the common key challenges and opportunities of the region. It responded to opportunities and risks which cannot sufficiently be dealt with by single countries but require a joint response by partners from several countries from the BSR.

The main objective of the Programme was to strengthen integrated territorial development and cooperation for a more innovative, better accessible, and sustainable BSR. Impact in the context of the Programme was defined as the increased institutional capacity of the Programme’s target groups to bring about positive change in the region based on the Programme’s intervention.

To respond to the transnational key challenges and opportunities in this region, four priority axes were defined in the Programme. Three thematic priorities included twelve specific objectives. In addition, the fourth priority, not covered by this evaluation, included two other specific objectives.

The total ERDF allocation to the Programme amounts to 263,8 million EUR. Adding the support from ENI and funding from Norway and Russia, the total Programme budget for 2014–2020 adds up to 277,9 million EUR. The breakdown of this funding can be seen in Figure 2. Additionally, there was a national or project partners’ own contribution to the projects’ budgets, which adds up to 346,5 million EUR altogether.

FIGURE 2: FUNDING SOURCES FOR THE 2014–2020 PROGRAMME



Source: Interreg Baltic Sea Region

The Programme was closely tied with other EU and regional level strategies. Firstly, the main connection was with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). This strategy identifies the challenges and creates awareness about the needs for transnational cooperation in the BSR, thus created an important basis for the thematic priorities of the Programme. Secondly, the Programme contributed to the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth, by providing a strong potential to foster place-based growth. Finally, there were regional development strategies of the partner countries that addressed similar issues highlighted in the Programme and contributed to defining the scope of the thematic priorities (Figure 3).

There was a potential to identify complementarities and create synergies of results from projects financed by other funding sources and programmes in the region. Although, thematically there were similarities between such programmes, projects funded by Interreg Baltic Sea Region substantially differed from projects financed by other funding sources and programmes in the region, as the majority of latter ones had a very limited programme area and often supported projects of only bilateral character.

During the funding period, the Programme had geographic overlaps with the programme areas of 24 cross-border programmes and three transnational cooperation programmes. A bigger overlap was between the two multilateral cross-border programmes across sea borders, i.e., the Interreg South Baltic Programme and the Interreg Central Baltic Programme.

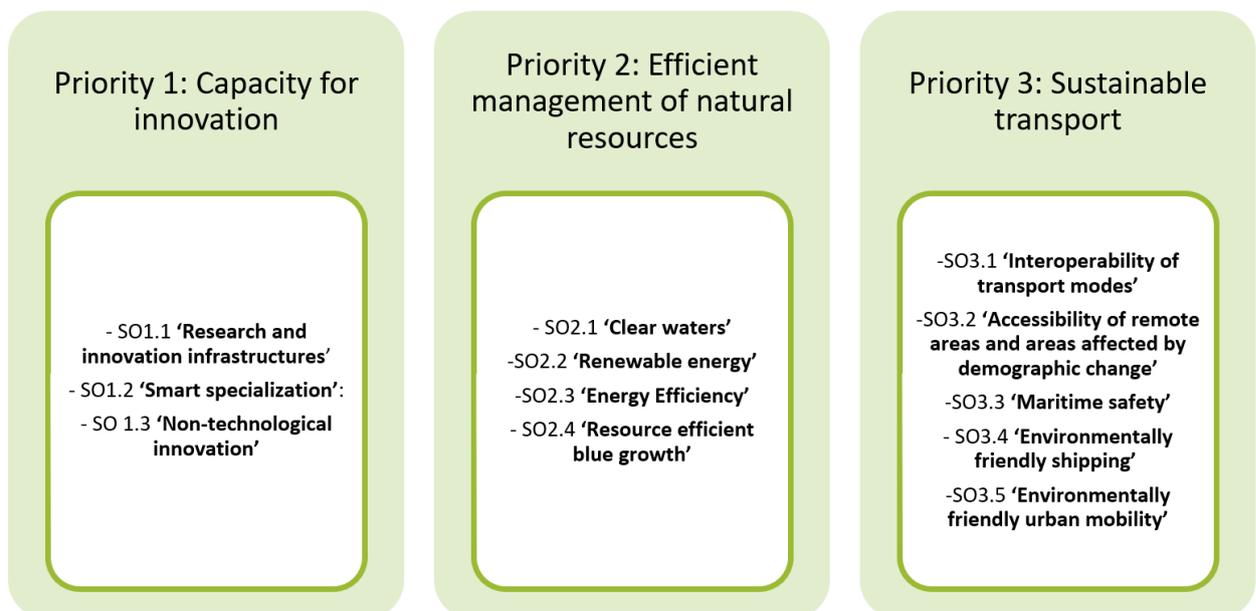
The BSR was characterised by regional differences within the region, as well as in respective countries. At the same time, the countries from this region shared joint challenges, of which the main challenges (addressed in the 2014–2020 Programme) are listed below:

RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION | There were different levels of innovation performance within the region. Existing R&D facilities were not always equally distributed and interconnected. There was also a lack of overall regional coordination and effective mechanisms for knowledge transfer from research to an enterprise.

ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCE EFFICIENCY | Sustainable water management has always been one of the core concerns of the Programme. The Baltic Sea is particularly vulnerable to various negative environmental impacts (e.g., nutrient inflows, discharges of hazardous substances, overfishing, increased shipping etc.) and there is a lack of legally binding commitments and cooperation to mitigate these negative impacts. There were differences in the region regarding overall energy efficiency and, in addition, energy efficiency aspects were poorly integrated into the regional planning and there was a lack of transnational energy planning.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND REMOVING BOTTLENECKS IN KEY NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURES | Specific geographical and socioeconomic aspects make some of the regions less accessible. At the same time, legislative systems and different safety and technical standards of the transport systems in the region were not fully interoperable. On one hand, the Baltic Sea has the potential to improve the capacity of transport systems, but on the other hand, it is still a geographic obstacle to easy transport and logistic flows, requiring solutions combining different modes of transport. Like other regions, BSR cities also must adapt their infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions.

FIGURE 3: PROGRAMME PRIORITIES INCLUDED IN THE EVALUATION



Source: Interreg Baltic Sea Region

2021–2027 Programme addresses similar issues for the region, but the emphasis is also placed on other aspects as well, such as reorientation of the economy from linear to a circular model, the resilience of BSR economies and communities, innovation potential of public services.

1.2. EVALUATION SCOPE

The main objective of the impact evaluation of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region was to provide a thorough evaluation of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 Programme results and impacts. Due to the geopolitical situation the European Commission suspended cooperation with Russia in the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014–2020 and the Programme 2021–2027. Belarus never signed a Financing Agreement to the Programme and was not eligible for financial support. Therefore, stakeholders, projects and the Programme’s activities related to Russia and Belarus were not evaluated in the impact evaluation.

The evaluation of the Programme focused on the first three priorities of the Programme – capacity for innovation, efficient management of natural resources and sustainable transport. The priorities addressed shared regional challenges which the projects aimed to develop and improve.

The final evaluation of the Programme was divided into two tasks: 1) monitoring and updating result indicator values and 2) evaluating the Programme impact and the ways how projects achieved their aims.

Regarding the task of monitoring and updating result indicators, the main aim of this task was to examine:

- Whether target values for result indicators were achieved.
- If certain target values were not achieved – why?

Regarding the task of evaluating (evaluation questions, EQ) the Programme impact and the ways how projects achieved their aims, the following topics and their assigned questions were evaluated and explored:

- The process of institutional capacity building:
 - EQ 1: Which were **the success factors** maximising the institutional capacity building process within the project partner organisations and among target groups outside the project partnership? Which were the **hindrances** setting challenges to the institutional capacity building process? Which type/s of activities supported the learning process to develop into institutional capacities?
 - EQ 2: **How** were the results of **pilot activities** in specific locations generalised and transferred? How did the transfer and uptake work in locations other than the one where pilot activities were implemented?
 - EQ 3: Did **different types of organisations** have **different roles** in the capacity building process and in the generalisation and transfer of results from pilot activities?
 - EQ 4: Can any possible **unintended effect** be detected among interventions under priorities 1–3 (in the capacity building process)? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?
 - EQ 5: What are the main **aspects to be improved**, considering the experience of implementing the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are **the best practices** in increasing institutional capacity, that could be used in the 2021–2027 Programme?
- The influence of the type of territory on projects
 - EQ 6: What was the **share of project partners located** in rather economically stronger metropolitan and other **central areas**, and what was the share of project partners located in economically weaker **rural areas**? Were there **white spots**, meaning territories which are not involved or targeted in projects? What could have been the **reasons for eventual uneven participation** from different types of territories?
 - EQ 7: Did territoriality (location of project partners) **impact on the topics** and activities in projects?
 - EQ 8: Which were the **success factors** in involving economically weaker rural areas in the projects?

- EQ 9: Can any possible **territorial unintended effect** be detected among interventions under priorities 1–3? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?
- EQ 10: What are the **main aspects to be improved**, considering the experience of implementing the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the **best practices** for a fair territorial impact, that could be used in the 2021–2027 Programme?
- The impact of project platforms
 - EQ 11: **How** did the **capacity building process** work through the platforms? Did project platforms help to reach further organisations beyond the ones of the single projects involved in the project platform? How did project platforms reach beyond the organisations of the **partnerships**?
 - EQ 12: **What** was the **role of public authorities** in project platforms’ implementation? How could their role be strengthened?
 - EQ 13: **How successful** were project platforms in **influencing policy changes** (e.g. new/amended policy documents, strategies, initiated new legislation, changes in the procedures) e.g. with reference to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region?
 - EQ 14: What was the added value of project platforms in bringing together projects from different funding sources (e.g. Interreg programmes, BONUS, Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon Programme)?
 - EQ 15: Can any possible unintended effect be detected among **project platforms** under priorities 1–3? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?
 - EQ 16: What are the main aspects to be improved, considering the experience of implementing platform projects within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the best **practices that could be further used** in implementing this mechanism in the 2021–2027 Programme?
- The impact of the change to online cooperation in the projects
 - EQ 17: What was the impact of the shift to digital tools and online mode of **cooperation on the** cooperation among project partners? How did the online cooperation within the partnership work? What were the core impacts, challenges, but also advantages for the project partnership?
 - EQ 18: What was the impact of the “online-shift” on the **capacity building process**, including the piloting activities in the projects? Can some recurrent pattern of impacts be identified?
 - EQ 19: Which changes due to the “online-shift” turned out as successful, **advantageous for projects and could be considered as good practices to keep in the future**?
 - EQ 20: Can any possible **unintended effect** be detected among interventions under priorities 1–3 regarding the “online-shift”? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?
 - EQ 21: What are the main aspects to be improved, considering the change to online cooperation in the projects within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the best practices that could be used in the 2021–2027 Programme?

The evaluation focused on three main points. **First**, the evaluation focused on how projects achieved their aims and their established impact. The main aim of the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Programme was to assess its results and impacts according to the main aim – to increase the institutional capacities of relevant stakeholders, which in turn was expected to lead to improvements to the state of regional development in the BSR. **Second**, the evaluation focused on the lessons learned and best practices of the Programme and thus both complemented the existing Programme and the upcoming 2021–2027

Programme. Here also impact and results of the newly established platforms were explored to draw useful conclusions for the upcoming Programme. **Third**, the evaluation provides evidence to the EC when planning future policies for European territorial cooperation. The 2021–2027 Programme has already been established, however conclusions from 2014–2020 can be drawn to improve the future Programme activities.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

To better structure the evaluation activities and ensure the triangulation the evaluation was carried out in two separate tasks: 1) Monitoring and updating result indicator values and 2) Evaluating the Programme impact and how projects achieved their aims. Furthermore, the impact evaluation concept was primarily theory-based and not counterfactual, therefore giving greater emphasis on qualitative considerations, though supported by quantitative data analysis and it was performed based on the Theory of Change (ToC) concept. The ToC is a description of how a desired change was expected to happen, following an intervention, of the reasons that substantiate those expectations and of the context the intervention was supposed to take place. Therefore, each element of the ToC was explored to understand whether theoretically predicted changes occurred as expected or because of other external factors.

The methodologies of both tasks and ToC are explained more thoroughly in Annex 1 (Methodology report) and separate ToCs for all Priorities are in Annex 2 (Theory of change). In general, the evaluation was based on a well-tailored mix of quantitative and qualitative methods and tools. By document analysis, interviews with representatives of Programme bodies, survey for beneficiaries (results in Annex 3 Programme beneficiaries survey) and case studies (results in Annex 4 Case studies), the assumptions were tested. Thus, valuable information in respect to the Programme implementation mechanisms and the factors which influenced its performance were collected. This methodological approach was selected to ensure a participative approach to evaluation.

1.3.1. METHODOLOGY OF MONITORING AND UPDATING RESULTS INDICATOR VALUES

The first task of the evaluation was **to monitor and update the values of the result indicators**. This process was initiated before the other tasks. The aim was to identify the regional progress in achieving the expected results (increasing the institutional capacity of the target groups), while providing a final update of the values of the result indicators, in the context of targets assumed at the Programme level.

Thus, the results obtained from this task provided key findings for the evaluation of the Programme impact (the second core section of the evaluation). As provided in Terms of Reference, the scope was to:

- Identify if the target values for result indicators were achieved, and
- If certain target values were not achieved, explain why this happened.

The monitoring of the result indicators was carried out following the same methodology as in 2018 and 2020 as defined by the Baseline Study in 2015³, which was important for ensuring the continuity and coherence of updating the result indicators.

The methodology included an **online survey** and **in-depth interviews**, which involved a wide range of thematic experts (TE) from the Baltic Sea region. The two tools were used to collect complementary and edifying data on the progress of result indicators. Indicator values were analysed at the level of each SO for obtaining the final values. The experts nominated by the MC were familiar with the target group(s) in their country and active in the area of a respective specific objective. The experts represented various public and non-governmental institutions as well as national and regional level organisations from the eight EU-Member States as well as the partner country Norway.

³ Ramboll Management, 2015: “Final Report: Analysis of projects in 2007–2013 and setting baselines and targets for the indicators 2014–2020”

Part of the first task of the evaluation was an online survey with the thematic experts in the participating countries in the Programme. The thematic experts corresponded to each SO of the Programme and covered all the participant states. Their scope was to collect the values of the result indicators, to perform a final update.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, interviews were conducted with the thematic experts. The interviews supplemented the survey for the experts, aiming to fill the remaining gaps and to clarify or validate any inconclusive results. The validation interviews were structured around the survey questions and were used to obtain detailed and qualitative information regarding the survey results. The interviews also helped in identifying whether the target values for result indicators were achieved or not. If the targets of some indicators were not met, the interviews with the experts were used to identify the causes. These tools were supplemented with desk research, literature review and additional interviews with thematic experts and MA/JS.

1.3.2. METHODOLOGY OF EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME IMPACT

The core methodological approach for conducting the second task was Theory Based Evaluation (TBE). Using TBE, allowed to assess how the Programme's interventions increased the institutional capabilities of the target groups, which was one of the main purposes of the Interreg BSR 2014–2020 final evaluation. To this end, the Programme theory was reconstructed and tested, considering the wider context of the implementation. The elements of the intervention logic were analysed (inputs, activities, outputs, and results) and try to reconstruct the causal links between them (*outcome pathways*), to showcase how each step of the intervention lead to the next. It was also sought to identify the critical assumptions underlying the implementation. Then, the external factors have been identified which might have influenced the implementation and results delivery. Based on all these, a series of hypotheses were formulated, to test the theory, to look for (critical) assumptions that have not hold true either partially or entirely, and for outcome pathways that have not unfolded as expected.

Reconstructing the ToC was done based on the Ray Rist⁴Theory of Change Model and was performed based on information included in the Programme and related documents, as defined at the time of programming. The reconstruction of the ToC started from the intervention logic, for each SO. It involved identifying and analysing the causal links underlying the interventions supported under the Programme (by reconstructing the logical model of ToC), highlighting the problems, the needs of the target group, expected results and activities planned for their achievement.

Starting from the Reconstructed Programme Theory, a series of hypotheses was formulated, as a way of testing how the Programme delivered its results. ToC reconstruction and assumption testing are supporting the process of identifying mechanisms that have helped producing the effects. To interrogate the Programme theory, the following methods and techniques were used:

- **Desk research and literature review** – to identify and reconstruct the Programme theory and to identify the context of the Programme actions, the main effects and how projects achieved their aims, in relation to the Programme's priorities and SOs.
- **Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data** - on the effects of interventions and their territorial representation, against the backdrop of underlying socio-economic and environmental developments.
- **Interviews** – primary data collection instruments used to provide an in-depth approach to the Programme's results and impacts, as well as a comprehensive exploration of the mechanisms and factors that stood behind them. Semi-structured interviews were used for engaging the Programme's management bodies, multipliers of projects results and representatives of different initiatives and strategies within BSR. In-depth interviews were used with beneficiaries of projects selected as case study.

⁴ Linda G. Morra Imas, Ray C. Rist: "The Road to Results" - Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations

- **Online beneficiary survey** – to collect quantitative data from all the partners on the project’s outputs and their effects. Its purpose was to obtain data on the Programme’s net effect, the influence of territoriality on projects, as well as the impact of platform projects and the change to online cooperation (see Annex 3 Programme beneficiaries survey).
- **Case studies** – 15 case studies were used for ensuring a detailed understanding of implementation mechanisms that delivered the identified impacts, of the main factors influencing the success of interventions in each area, and for identifying good practices or lessons learned (see Annex 4 Case studies).
- **Focus-group** – was used to explore and triangulate the findings that emerged from desk research, interviews, and surveys, to gather new perspectives, and, to validate findings and test reactions to certain conclusions and recommendations.

The Programme Theory Interrogation activities were performed for each analysed priority to identify how the actions implemented under the funded projects have contributed to an improved level of the outcomes. This evaluation exercise follow-up on the findings of the mid-term evaluation.

The methodology involved a mix of methods and tools, common to several evaluation questions. The evaluation instruments used combined qualitative and quantitative elements. All evaluation questions were analysed by applying several instruments so that the results obtained could be triangulated. The use of quantitative and qualitative techniques allowed both to evaluate practices and to improve the understanding of processes, their effects, and causal factors.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

The 2014–2020 Interreg Baltic Sea Region was a transnational Interreg Programme partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), under the territorial cooperation goal of the European Union. The programme also integrated financing of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), Norway and Russian Federation also contributing with national financing to support Norwegian partners to participate in the programme.

According to the Programme document, the main objective of the Programme was to support integrated territorial development and cooperation for a more innovative, better accessible, and sustainable Baltic Sea region. Impact in the context of the Programme was defined as increased institutional capacity of the Programme’s target groups to bring about positive change in the region based on the Programme’s intervention.

In this context, the programme supported a total of 194 projects⁵, divided across four priorities (Table 1).

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PROJECTS IN EACH PRIORITY

PRIORITY 1 – CAPACITY FOR INNOVATION	PRIORITY 2 – EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES	PRIORITY 3 – SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT	PRIORITY 4 – INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR MACRO-REGIONAL COOPERATION
SO 1.1. Research and innovation infrastructures No. of projects - 12	SO 2.1. Clear waters No. of projects - 16	SO 3.1. Interoperability of transport modes No. of projects - 4	SO 4.1. Seed Money No. of projects - 60
SO 1.2 Smart specialisation No. of projects - 10	SO 2.2. Renewable energy No. of projects - 4	SO 3.2. Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change No. of projects - 3	SO 4.2. Coordination of macro-regional cooperation No. of projects - 29
SO 1.3. Non-technological innovation No. of projects - 24	SO 2.3. Energy efficiency No. of projects - 7	SO 3.3. Maritime safety No. of projects - 5	
	SO 2.4. Resource-efficient blue growth No. of projects - 7	SO 3.4. Environmentally friendly shipping No. of projects - 5	
		SO 3.5. Environmentally friendly urban mobility No. of projects - 8	
TOTAL – 46 projects	TOTAL – 34 projects	TOTAL – 25 projects	TOTAL – 89 projects

Source: Calculations based on Interreg BSR data provided by the MA/JS.

Out of all the above-mentioned priorities, the present evaluation focused only on Priorities 1, 2 and 3 and their respective specific objectives. Therefore, it is important to note however, that the Programme financed also seed money projects as well as macro-regional governance within Priority 4, which nonetheless were not included in the scope of the present evaluation.

⁵ According to BAMOS database. Only contracted and finalised projects were considered.

The Programme gave rise to projects spanning across all first three priorities and their respective specific objectives, 46 projects for Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” and its three specific objectives, 34 projects for Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” and its four specific objectives and 25 projects for Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” and its five specific objectives.

Moreover, the Programme provided three different types of projects. The main type of projects were regular projects, considering that most of the Programme co-financing is devoted to these projects (105 regular projects were contracted and finalised in Priorities 1-3). In addition, with the aim of consolidating the outcomes and results, the Programme offered two additional project types:

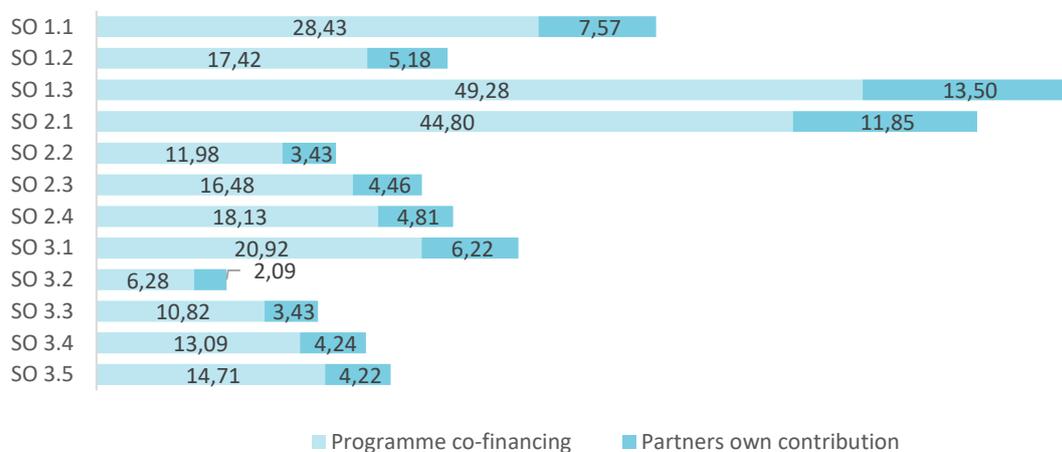
- Extension stage projects – projects whose timeframe was expanded, designed to verify the results of the finalised projects in practical application and/or to realise investments (26 extension stage projects contracted and finalised in Priorities 1–3).
- Project platforms – supporting the further use of the outcomes of the on-going projects and increasing their visibility (9 project platforms contracted and finalised in Priorities 1–3).

Altogether, the projects benefitted from the overall Programme funding of 248 EUR million ERDF⁶ as well as 8.1 million EUR ENI/RU funds (before suspension of Russian Federation). Also, Norwegian funding for projects amounted to 4.5 million EUR.

Across all 12 SOs within Priorities 1–3, the project budgets generally ranged from 1.5 million to 4.5 million EUR. Moreover, the 105 projects in Priorities 1-3, were of approximately equal size and volume, with SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) attracting the largest funding, while SO 3.2 (Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change) the smallest (Figure 4).

Within the first three Priorities, the project budgets are directly correlated with the number of partners per project. Accordingly, SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) and its respective non-technical innovation projects attracted the largest number of project partners, while SO 3.2 (Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change) and its projects related to the interoperability of transport modes registered the lowest number of partners (Figure 5). As such, the average number of the Programme beneficiaries throughout all SOs recorded a sum of 12.4 partners per project. In this context, the data does not account for associated organisations due to their limited roles and because they have no budget allocation in the project.

FIGURE 4: THE BUDGET (MILLION EURO) OF PROJECTS CO-FUNDED FROM THE PROGRAMME, BY SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

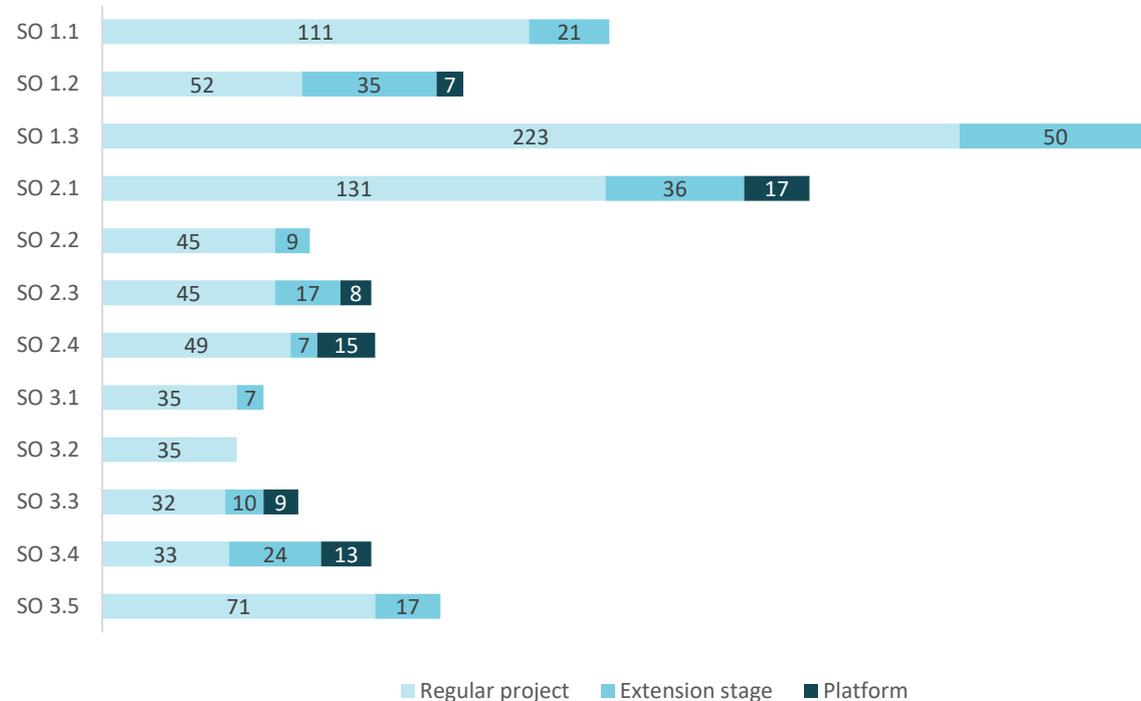


Source: Calculations based on Interreg BSR data provided by the MA/JS

⁶ Technical assistance deducted.

As mentioned before, Priorities 1–3 of the Programme encompassed three types of projects, namely regular projects, extension stage projects, and project platforms. As illustrated in Figure 5, the regular projects attracted the largest number of entities participating in the Programme, followed by the extension projects. As such, available data illustrates that the platform projects encompassed the smallest number of Interreg BSR partners, compared to regular and extension stage projects.

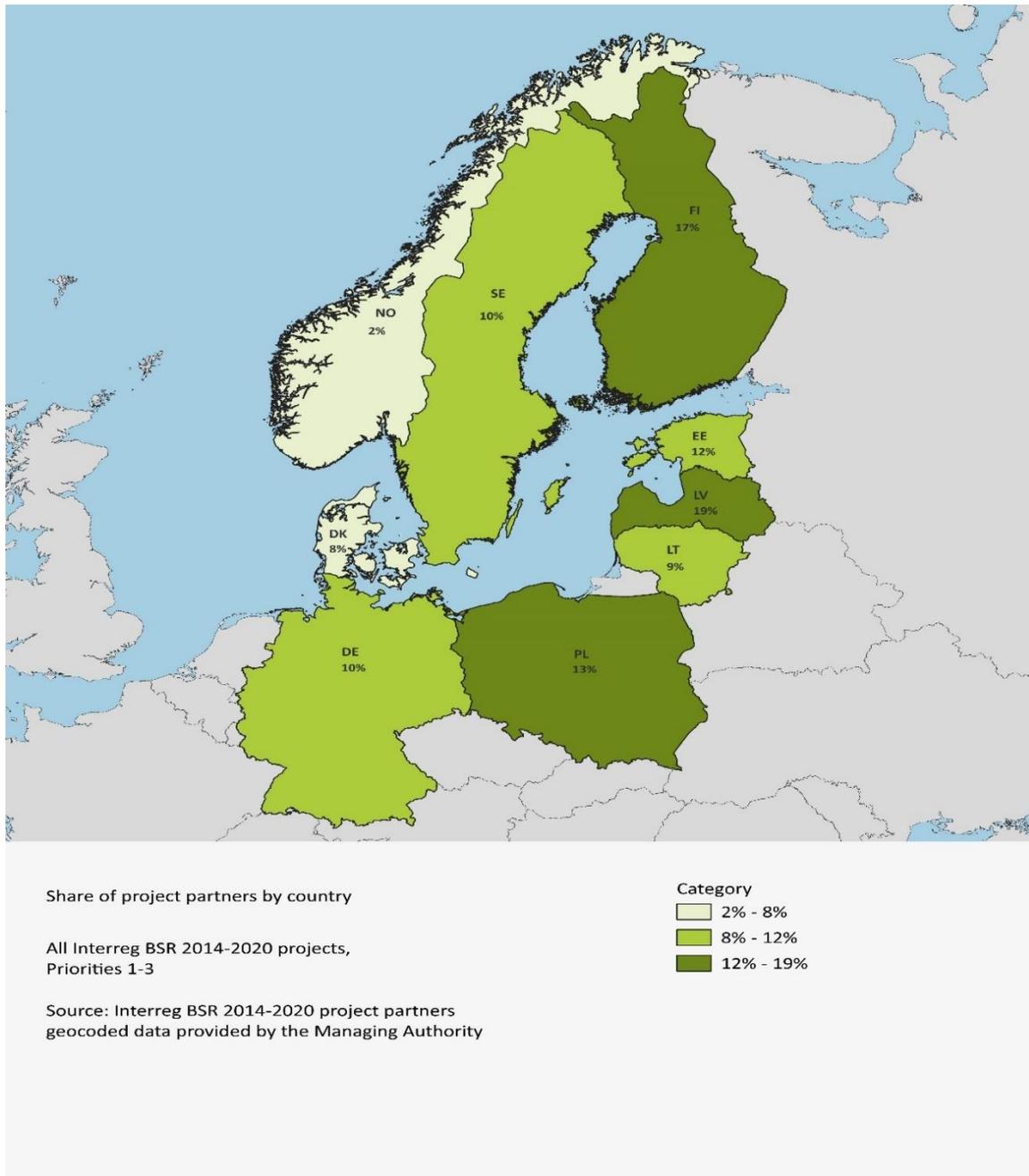
FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF INTERREG BSR PARTNERS PER TYPE OF PROJECTS



Source: Calculations based on Interreg BSR data provided by the MA/JS

The Programme included a number of 1288 project partners of various types and sectors, spanning from business support organisations, educational centres, civil society representatives, public sector stakeholders, as well as small and medium size enterprises (Table 2). The diversity of project partners attained throughout the programme is further reflected in the regional distribution of the projects. From a territorial perspective and the number of project entities Latvia is the country with the largest number of entities, having 237 partners participating in projects, followed by Finland (213), Poland (167), Germany (152), Estonia (150), Sweden (129), Lithuania (110) and Denmark (99). The only country with a significantly lower number of participating organisations is Norway due to its 31 partners participating in projects. Map 1 illustrates the share of project partners by country, related to the total number of partners within Priorities 1-3.

MAP 1: SHARE OF PROJECT PARTNERS BY COUNTRY



Source: Interreg BSR 2014 – 2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS

With regards to the number of participating entities, the data illustrates the number of times each entity participated in a project. Accordingly, while most entities participated once or twice in a Programme project, there are entities that received funding for 8 to 15 projects. However, it is important to note that across the entire Programme, there are 854 individual entities which altogether received funding for their participation in multiple projects, leading to a total number of 1288 partners.

The overall distribution of partners by country is not necessarily linked to the distribution of funding. In general, Finland accounted for the largest programme co-financing (around 46 EUR million), followed by Germany in close position. However, these countries are only the second respectively the fourth when it

comes to the number of beneficiaries. At the same time, the largest number of partners came from Lithuania, which benefited from the lowest programme co-financing after Norway.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES AND ERDF CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE INTERREG BSR AREA

COUNTRY	PROJECT PARTNERS	TOTAL PROGRAMME CO-FINANCING – ERDF/ENI (EUR)	TOTAL OWN CONTRIBUTION (EUR)
Norway	31	4,146,392	4,146,392
Denmark	99	20,233,248	6,744,416
Latvia	110	20,903,555	3,688,863
Sweden	129	35,696,855	11,898,952
Estonia	150	25,556,396	4,509,953
Germany	152	44,436,695	14,812,232
Poland	167	29,186,047	5,150,479
Finland	213	46,143,653	15,381,218
Lithuania	237	17,833,063	3,147,011
Total	1,288	244,135,904	69,479,516

Source: Calculations based on Interreg BSR data provided by the MA/JS

By looking at the Baltic Sea region, it can be said that the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme is one of the largest cooperation Programme implemented during 2014–2020. In comparison to programmes that cover a similar region, and a similar investment priority, Interreg BSR covers 204 projects, while the Interreg North Sea 2014–2020 funds 73 projects⁷ and the Interreg Central Baltics 2014–2020⁸ covering 137 projects. In this regard, compared to other similar programmes partly overlapping its territory, Interreg Baltic Sea is the largest cooperation programme in the area.

⁷ Overlapping the Interreg BSR Programme in Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Sweden.

⁸ Overlapping the Interreg BSR Programme in Finland (including Åland), Estonia, Latvia, and Sweden.

3. MONITORING AND UPDATING RESULT INDICATOR VALUES

The main objective of the 2014–2020 Programme was to strengthen integrated territorial development and cooperation for a more innovative, better accessible, and sustainable BSR. Impact in the context of the Programme was defined as the increased institutional capacity of the Programme’s target groups to bring about positive change in the region based on the Programme’s intervention.

In order to monitor the state of institutional capacity in the region throughout the Programme period, qualitative baselines for 2014 and target values for 2023 were set for indicators of the Programme results.

A monitoring was already carried out in 2018, with the mid-term Programme evaluation, another monitoring was completed in 2020. The values of the result indicators collected in the context of this final evaluation in order to conclude on the achievement of the Programme’s targets. The aim was to identify the regional progress in achieving the expected results (increasing the institutional capacity of the target groups), while providing a final update of the values of the result indicators, in the context of targets assumed at the Programme level. The monitoring and updating result indicator values based on the results of the survey and interviews views thematic experts (see the methodology at Chapter 1.3.1 and Annex 1).

The overall positive development of the institutional capacities measured in 2018 could not be continued in 2020, when half of the SOs showed a minor decrease in institutional capacity, five SOs showed increasing values and one remained stable. The 2022 final assessment indicated an increasing tendency in the institutional capacities of eight SOs, decreasing values in three SOs and one SO remained stable (Table 3).

Although the overall picture of the institutional capacity compared to 2020 shows positive changes, the pace of the increase has been too slow to reach the targeted value set for 2023 in any of the SOs (Figure 6).

TABLE 3: OVERALL UPDATE OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BASELINES BY SO’S

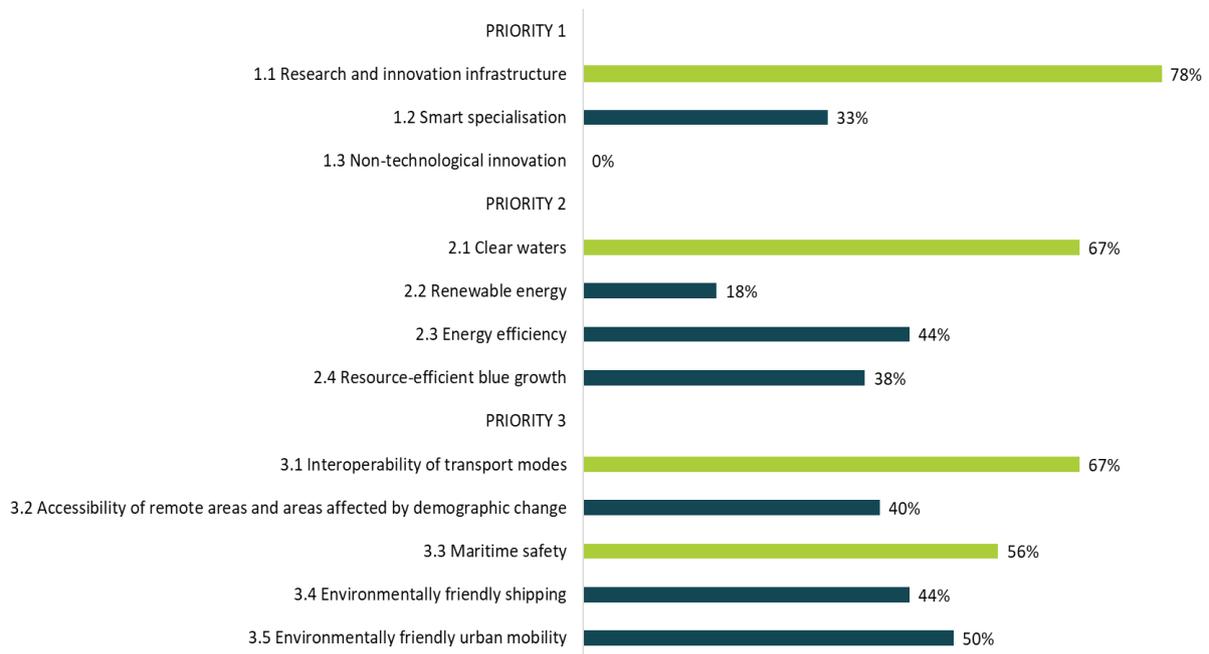
CAPACITIES PER SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	BASELINE VALUE (2014)	MILESTONE (2018)	MILESTONE (2020)	FINAL UPDATE (2022)	TARGET VALUE (2023)	COMMENTS
1.1 Research and innovation infrastructure	2.7	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.6	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value
1.2 Smart specialisation	2.9	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.8	Constant, slight decrease since 2018
1.3 non-technological innovation	2.9	3.2	2.8	2.9	3.7	Minor increase, value at baseline level

CAPACITIES PER SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	BASELINE VALUE (2014)	MILESTONE (2018)	MILESTONE (2020)	FINAL UPDATE (2022)	TARGET VALUE (2023)	COMMENTS
2.1 Clear waters	2.7	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.6	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value
2.2 Renewable energy	2.4	2.8	2.7	2.6	3.5	Minor decrease, higher than the baseline
2.3 Energy efficiency	2.6	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.5	Minor decrease, higher than the baseline
2.4 Resource-efficient blue growth	2.8	2.9	2.8	3.1	3.6	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value
3.1 Interoperability of transport modes	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.9	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value
3.2 Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.2	3.8	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value
3.3 Maritime safety	2.5	2.8	2.7	3.0	3.4	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value
3.4 Environmentally friendly shipping	2.9	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.8	Minor increase, positive trend towards target value

CAPACITIES PER SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	BASELINE VALUE (2014)	MILESTONE (2018)	MILESTONE (2020)	FINAL UPDATE (2022)	TARGET VALUE (2023)	COMMENTS
3.5 Environmentally friendly urban mobility	2.7	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.5	Minor decrease since 2018, higher than baseline value

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

FIGURE 6: PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE BY SO, 2022 FINAL UPDATE



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

There were four SOs to reach more than 50% of the target set to 2023. The most significant positive progress in comparison to 2014 baseline can be observed for SO 1.1 (Research and innovation infrastructure), where 78% of the target value has been reached.

SO 2.1 (Clear waters) and SO 3.1 (Interoperability of transport modes) both reached 67% of the targets set to 2023 and SO 3.3 (Maritime safety) reached 56% of the target value.

No progress (0%) in comparison to the 2014 baseline was made in SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation).

The progress of the rest of the SOs (8 out of 12) towards reaching the goal remained within 18–50%.

VARIABILITY OF DATA

Standard deviation is one of the tools that helps to assess the variability of the gathered data.

The standard deviation provides an indication of how far the responses of the experts to each question are spread above and below the mean value. Low standard deviation means the responses are concentrated around the mean; high standard deviation indicates that responses were more polarised. In the current circumstances, deviation has no connection to the reliability of data, but indicates the variability in the opinions of the experts.

The comparison of standard deviations shows that the overall spread of survey responses has slightly increased in contrast to 2018. The mean standard deviation reported for 2018 was 0.9 and maximum deviation was at 1.4.

In 2022 the mean deviation has decreased to 0.8, which means that there is a high degree of consistency among the responses. At the same time the maximum deviation has increased to 1.7 reflecting large differences between countries or the opinions of the experts. This observation is confirmed by qualitative statements in the survey and the expert interviews.

The following chapters present the detailed analysis per SO per each dimension of the institutional capacity. The details of survey results per each question is presented below (Table 4).

TABLE 4: SURVEY RESULTS PER SO AND PER DIMENSION AND CHARACTERISTIC OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES (UPDATE 2022)

Dimension Specific objective	Dimension 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence						Dimension 2: Improved governance structures and organizational set-up				Dimension 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources				Dimension 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources				Dimension 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment						Overall				
	Availability of knowledge		Availability of mechanisms for knowledge transfer		Utilization of knowledge		Availability of organizational structures		Utilization of organizational structures		Utilization of human resources		Utilisation of technical resources		Application of time-and/or resource-saving measures		Ability to attract external private financial resources		Ability to attract external public financial resources		Available competences to work transnationally		Frequency of transnational contacts				Intensity of transnational collaboration		
	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG	DEV	AVG
1.1	3,7	0,5	3,0	0,8	3,0	0,8	4,0	0,6	3,3	0,8	3,4	0,8	3,4	1,0	3,0	0,0	3,0	0,8	3,3	1,0	4,1	0,4	4,0	0,0	3,3	0,5	3,4	0,7	
1.2	3,6	0,8	3,0	0,6	2,6	0,5	3,9	0,7	2,9	0,9	3,3	0,5	3,6	1,0	2,6	0,5	2,6	0,8	3,3	0,8	3,9	0,4	3,7	1,0	3,1	0,7	3,2	0,8	
1.3	3,2	1,0	2,7	0,5	2,5	0,5	3,2	0,8	2,8	0,4	3,2	0,8	3,5	0,8	3,2	0,8	2,0	0,0	2,7	0,5	3,5	0,5	3,0	0,9	2,8	0,8	2,9	0,8	
2.1	3,8	0,8	3,0	0,6	2,8	0,8	3,5	0,8	2,8	0,8	3,5	0,5	3,3	0,5	3,2	0,4	2,0	0,9	2,7	0,5	4,0	0,9	4,0	0,9	3,7	0,8	3,3	0,9	
2.2	3,3	1,5	2,8	1,3	2,0	0,8	2,5	1,0	2,3	1,0	2,8	0,5	2,3	1,0	2,3	0,5	2,5	0,6	3,0	0,8	3,0	0,8	2,5	1,0	2,8	0,5	2,6	0,9	
2.3	3,4	0,5	3,1	0,4	2,9	0,7	3,3	0,5	2,9	0,7	3,0	0,0	2,7	0,8	3,1	0,7	2,6	0,5	3,3	0,5	3,6	0,8	3,0	0,8	2,6	0,5	3,0	0,6	
2.4	3,2	0,4	2,8	0,4	2,6	0,5	3,2	0,4	3,0	0,7	3,2	0,8	2,8	1,3	2,6	0,9	2,4	0,5	3,2	0,4	4,0	0,7	3,6	0,9	3,4	0,5	3,1	0,8	
3.1	3,0	0,7	2,6	1,1	2,8	0,8	2,8	0,8	2,6	1,1	2,8	0,8	3,2	0,4	2,6	0,5	1,4	0,5	2,4	0,5	3,4	0,9	3,2	1,1	2,6	0,5	2,7	0,9	
3.2	3,0	1,2	2,6	0,5	3,4	0,9	3,4	0,9	3,2	1,1	3,2	0,8	3,6	1,7	3,4	1,5	2,0	0,6	3,2	0,7	3,8	0,4	3,4	0,5	2,8	1,2	3,2	1,0	
3.3	3,4	0,9	3,0	1,4	3,0	0,7	2,6	0,9	2,4	1,1	2,8	1,1	3,2	1,6	3,4	0,9	2,4	0,5	2,8	0,4	3,2	1,3	3,2	0,8	3,0	0,7	3,0	1,0	
3.4	3,6	0,5	3,6	0,5	3,4	0,9	3,4	0,9	2,8	0,8	3,2	1,3	3,4	0,9	3,2	0,8	2,6	0,9	3,2	0,4	3,8	0,4	3,6	0,5	3,2	0,8	3,3	0,8	
3.5	3,3	1,0	2,8	1,0	3,0	0,9	3,5	1,0	3,3	0,5	3,8	1,0	3,2	0,8	3,0	0,0	2,8	1,0	2,8	0,4	2,8	0,8	2,8	0,8	2,8	0,8	3,1	0,8	
AVG	3,4	0,8	2,9	0,8	2,8	0,7	3,3	0,8	2,9	0,8	3,2	0,7	3,2	1,0	3,0	0,6	2,4	0,6	3,0	0,6	3,6	0,7	3,3	0,8	3,0	0,7	3,1	0,8	

3.1. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1.1: RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
1.1. Research and innovation infrastructure	2.7	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.6	78%

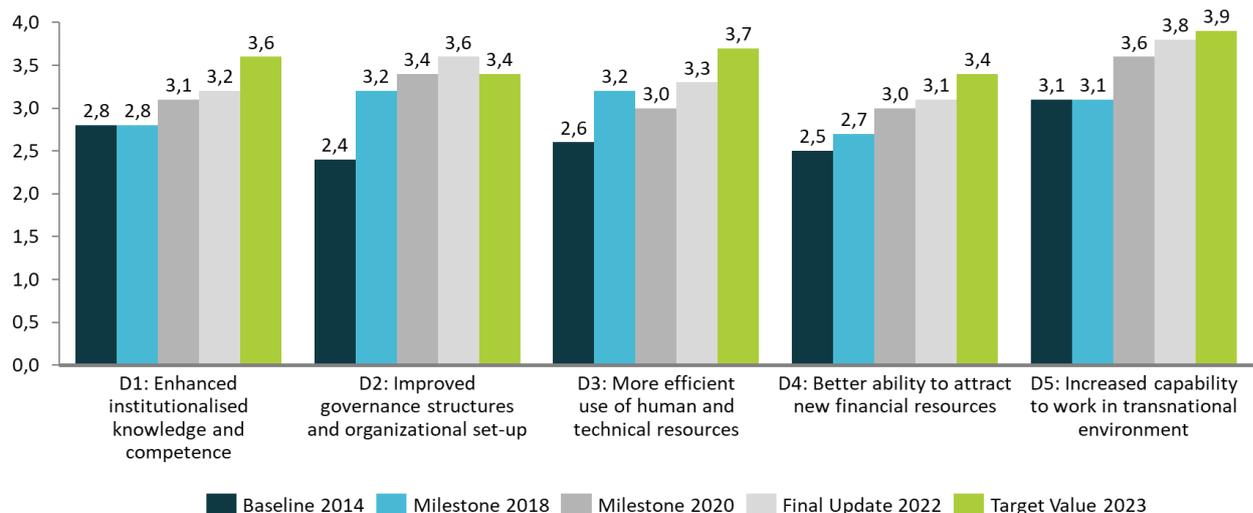
Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The survey for SO 1.1 (Research and innovation infrastructure) was answered by seven experts from seven different countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

The final update shows that there have been a steady progress estimating the institutional capacities in the region, thus, reaching 78% of the target value.

Progress has been made in all dimensions, especially in Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set up) as it was exceeding the target value, reaching 120% progress. Least progress has been made in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence), reaching 50% of the target value. Additionally, the most significant change (+10%) among all dimensions comparing 2020 and 2022 indicator values has been achieved in Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human resources and technical resources), where experts highlighted the switch to online tools that let to continue the established connections.

FIGURE 7: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 1.1 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INFRASTRUCTURE



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 5: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 1.1 (RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INFRASTRUCTURE) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	3.1	
	Final Update 2022	3.2	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 50%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	3.4	
	Final Update 2022	3.6	Change 6%
	Target 2023	3.4	Progress 120%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.6	
	Milestone 2018	3.1	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 10%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 63%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.5	
	Milestone 2018	2.7	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.4	Progress 67%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	3.1	
	Milestone 2018	3.1	
	Milestone 2020	3.6	
	Final Update 2022	3.8	Change 6%
	Target 2023	3.9	Progress 88%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

The availability of knowledge and competence according to the survey results was satisfactory in the BSR. The overall progress towards target value was 50%.

The availability of knowledge in the BSR was rated slightly better (average rating 3.7) than availability of mechanisms for knowledge transfer and utilisation of knowledge (average rating for both 3.0). Overall experts expressed that knowledge on research and innovation infrastructures was good, e.g., some

countries have established supporting networks for new researchers, however, some of the experts highlights that connections somehow are more remote from SMEs and tend to be vertically limited.

The expert added that on average the knowledge has become more accessible due to online availability, it was also easier to find potential partners in the projects, therefore more collaborations are happening, and it was opening new possibilities on utilisation of knowledge. However, there was a difference between those who are in innovation field for a longer time and „newcomers“, thus it was easier to transfer the knowledge inside the already build up networks and it was more difficult for „newcomers“ to become a part of them. Therefore, it is important to provide a necessary support for new researchers, new clusters, new investors to collaborate and utilise the knowledge.

Additionally, the mechanisms for knowledge transfer currently due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are more online. On one hand, it saves time resources, if the partners can make match making, meetings, conferences online. But it is not so efficient for „newcomers“, as in this field the physical contact is still important to build up new collaborations to sufficiently utilise the existing knowledge in the region.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

The governance structures and organisational set-up has improved the most, achieving 120% progress.

Experts evaluate the availability of organisational structures as good, however, there is some small gap to utilise them efficiently enough. Experts highlighted that in some countries there already are established good organisational structures and in other countries the necessary changes are happening in order to secure well organising structures in the innovation field:

“Recently an Innovation Agency established by the Ministry has been launched. The agency is responsible for the innovation ecosystem and the promotion of innovation at all stages of business development – from developing ideas to delivering products to end-users, so there are available organisational structures to secure a well-organised and efficient work routine.” (an expert)

Expert added that overall situation has improved due to successful and long-term collaboration. However, the structures differ among the countries, thus they are more similar in matter of culture, language and work ethics in some of the regions, e.g., Baltic countries, Nordic countries, therefore it was easier to collaborate within these structures. Additionally, it also may affect the overall view of the region. Expert stressed out that currently there is a lack of joint vision of the BSR, lack of political “push” to collaborate within the BSR, therefore the stakeholders start to question what the actual benefit of collaboration within the BSR is.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The use of human and technical resources in the BSR was evaluated as satisfactory, however, the made progress was 63%.

Utilisation of both human and technical resources on average was seen as satisfactory. Expert highlighted that potential benefit in order to improve the use of human and technical resources could be to have an overview of existing tests in BSR, to see the opportunities within the region, there may be situation where countries do research not for excellence but just to not stay behind. Additionally, the current issue not only within the BSR but overall in the field, was the lack of specialists. Therefore the mobility of workforce in the region could be potentially improved. However, some positive activities are happening, e.g., there are more opportunities for students and PHD’s to study abroad and to gain broaden knowledge, as well as the encouragement for young girls and young women to join research and innovation was improving the availability of human resources in the field.

Regarding the application of time and/or resource saving measures overall experts are satisfied, however, in innovation field there are some issues regarding sharing ideas and information:

“Consistent process management would have to replace the silo mentality that still exists in some areas, possibly set incentives to change the administrative structures accordingly.” (an expert)

Expert expressed that the field needs new knowledge, and this new knowledge has to come to market faster, therefore it is important to have a dialogue with universities on how to better utilise the knowledge, how to help researchers to become more efficient. Expert highlights:

“The carrier benchmark for researchers goes into the research publications, and not so much how they have engaged in companies, are they doing any patents and so on.” (an expert)

Therefore, in order to make the research and innovation infrastructures more efficient, it is important to encourage and intensify the collaboration between the researchers and investors and entrepreneurs.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The ability to attract financial resources was rated as satisfactory, making 67% progress, towards target value. Ability to attract public resources was seen as somehow better than the ability to attract private financial resources.

The experts expressed the opinion that private financial resources are more recognized among the larger companies and institutions, as they can better see the benefits in investing in innovation. Additionally, more and more companies see the benefits in investing in innovation, thus, for them it also has become more important to involve not only in the commercialisation stage, but earlier in the project, to be a part of the whole process. However, the expert also admits that cooperation between researchers and investors / entrepreneurs still is a challenge as both groups have different mindsets and even vocabulary, therefore clusters are playing an important role in order to make the collaboration happen.

The ability to attract public financial resources was satisfactory, especially the availability of the European Regional Development Fund addressed to SMEs and RDI. However, experts expressed that the partners do not always have enough financial resources to co-fund the projects, thus the public funding was very much needed in these cases.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The capability to work in a transnational environment according to survey results was close to good, making 88% progress.

Aspects as available competencies to work transnationally and frequency of transnational contacts are rated as good and frequent. Experts express that the transnational collaboration in research and innovation infrastructures has become the daily routine, also highlighting the importance of language skills which already exists in the BSR and allows stakeholders to get involved in the discussions. However, the intensity of contacts may differ in different levels, thus, it was more frequent in national level however weaker in other levels, such as regional level and municipal level. Expert added that overall, the transnational collaboration in research and innovation infrastructures has well developed during the years, in the region there is high level knowledge which was used in frequent meetings. However, it is more challenging for new specialists to get involved in these already existing networks. Therefore, additional support and guidance should be allocated to involve new specialists through conferences, meetings, and match-making events, preferably if they would happen in face-to-face contact.

3.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1.2: SMART SPECIALISATION

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
1.2 Smart Specialisation	2.9	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.8	33%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

Results for SO 1.2 (Smart specialisation) are based on responses from seven experts in six different countries. One interview was conducted for the respective SO.

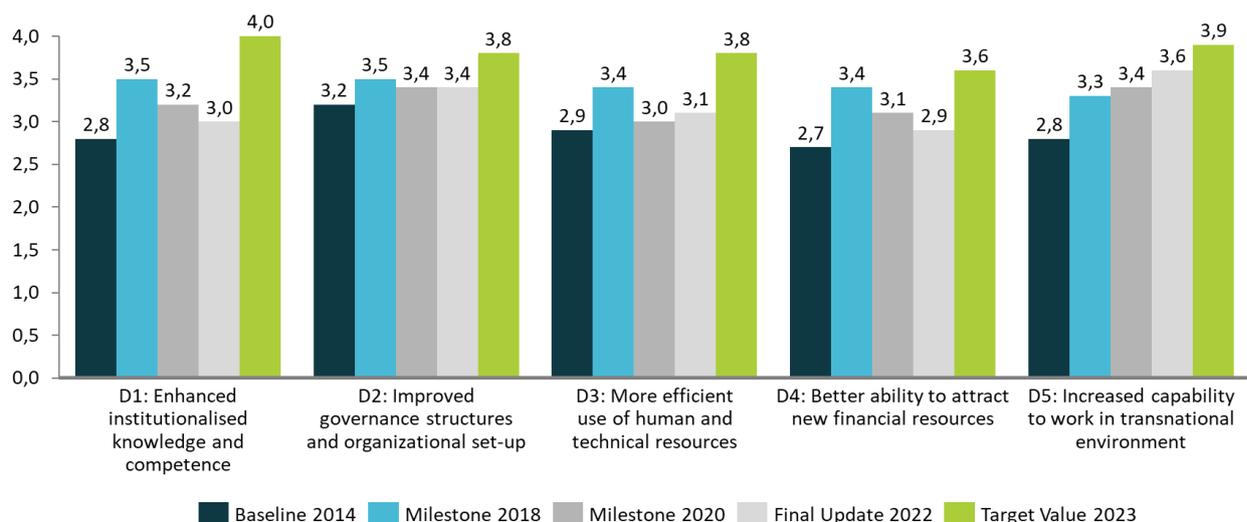
There has been no change since the 2020 milestone, and the made progress towards the target value was reached only by 33%.

Although all the dimensions have made some progress comparing the baseline value in 2014, most of them have experienced significant setback comparing to indicator values reached in 2018. The only exception was Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment) in which a stable progress has been made, reaching 73% towards target value.

Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence) and Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) has faced 6% and 7% setback comparing to indicator values in 2020. Additionally, no change since 2020 has happened in Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set-up).

Nevertheless, some slight 20% progress can be seen in Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources), however still not reaching its peak value as it was in 2018.

FIGURE 8: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 1.2 SMART SPECIALISATION



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 6: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 1.2 (SMART SPECIALISATION) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	3.5	
	Milestone 2020	3.2	
	Final Update 2022	3.0	Change -6%
	Target 2023	4.0	Progress 17%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	3.2	
	Milestone 2018	3.5	
	Milestone 2020	3.4	
	Final Update 2022	3.4	Change 0%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 33%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.4	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.9	Progress 20%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.7	
	Milestone 2018	3.4	
	Milestone 2020	3.1	
	Final Update 2022	2.9	Change -7%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 22%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	3.3	
	Milestone 2020	3.4	
	Final Update 2022	3.6	Change 6%
	Target 2023	3.9	Progress 73%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

Regarding the capacity for institutionalised knowledge, rather small progress has been made for about 17%.

Although, experts see that there is a good knowledge available in BSR, highlighting that the research on smart specialisation is conducted, however, experts have different opinions regarding the knowledge transfer. On one hand, some experts express that there is a constrained and limited view of knowledge and technical transfer, as there can be seen some unwillingness to use the whole potential of the

knowledge on smart specialisation. On the other hand, experts see a positive progress towards the knowledge transfer through local level collaborations:

“Interesting developments are happening at the local level where practical innovation projects are helping to bring together many key stakeholders. Such local-level collaboration has improved knowledge transfer and matches with the place-based logic of smart specialisation.” (an expert)

Thus, there still is a challenge to transfer the knowledge in different levels, e.g., state and municipality levels. Additionally, expert confirmed, that although there is a good knowledge available in the BSR, universities are conducting research, local communities, and municipalities do collect opinions of stakeholders, however, the longitudinal transfer is not working that well. Municipalities do not have strong connections with majority of research institutions except the local ones, therefore the knowledge is accumulated in certain level and not spread further.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

The results of Dimension 2 have not changed comparing with the 2020 result, and the made progress towards target value was 33%.

Currently available organisational structures are good, thus, there can be seen some differences among the BSR countries. In some the existing governance structures are well established and developed, and others are still developing, nevertheless making a significant progress, e.g., more efficient bureaucracy, united strategy for different state institutions etc., that makes the approach of smart specialisation clearer.

However, experts are more critical about utilisation of these structures, e.g., one of the experts expressed that full potential of local governments has not been used yet, therefore the contribution could be better. Expert also expressed that although different countries have different organisational structures in most times partners do find ways how to cooperate within the national laws of each country.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The indicator value of efficient use of human and technical resources has slightly progressed since 2014, reaching 20% progress.

The experts in this dimension are slightly more satisfied of utilisation of technical resources (average rating 3.6) and little less satisfied with utilisation of human resources (average rating 3.3). Expert expressed that the issues in use of human and technical resources can be explained with the mismatch of demand and labour supply in some regions. The existing resources might be wrongly allocated or have not spread on the same level across the country. However, experts are even more critical on the application of time and/or resource saving measures, explaining that in recent years no specific changes can be seen.

In another interview expert expressed that the issue about the smart specialisation and efficient use of resources is that in some countries the smart specialisation is regional and sometimes it is not seen in national level, and in many cases, it is duplicating parallel regions. Therefore, there may appear situations where regions in one country have the same smart specialisation and they compete not only with each other but as well as for resources.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The ability to attract new financial resources has experienced a minor setback comparing to indicator value in 2020, though the made progress towards target value is 22%.

Most challenging in smart specialisation is to attract external private resources. It is very dependable on the sectors, e.g., in ICT sector it is easier to attract private financial resources than in other sectors, therefore experts see high potential in this matter. Expert added that entrepreneurs, especially small ones, have limited venture capital available, that decreases their own abilities to involve in different kind of projects.

Additionally, in other interview the expert highlighted that the decrease since 2018 could also be explained with the competition within different regions, as mentioned before. Many of them have the same smart

specialisation. Therefore, it could have become more difficult to attract private financial resources. Another issue is that smart specialisation is becoming more global, therefore also many companies are interested to test their products in more global markets than regional ones.

In terms of attracting external public financial resources, experts rate it as satisfactory, expressing that it has become much easier and successful to attract EU funding, such as Horizon 2020.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The institutional capability to work in transnational environment has made the most progress from all other dimensions, reaching 73% progress.

Regarding the expert opinion the available competences to work transnationally are good and frequent. Most stakeholders do have good English language skills to communicate, although knowledge and use of different languages, such as German, French is reduced. Additionally partners tend to keep in contact if the collaboration has been successful. However, one expert expressed that there still is a potential to involve more rural areas, thus the issue could be a language barrier:

“Based on my personal experience, well-working consortia try to continue working with new projects. There is a lot of unused potential in more rural areas. However, language barrier can be an issue in these areas.” (an expert)

Expert added that overall people understand that in this field the international cooperation is a must, and it helps to solve problems, gain new knowledge by seeing how people in other regions deal with different issues.

3.3. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1.3: NON-TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
1.3. Non-technological innovation	2.9	3.2	2.8	2.9	3.7	0%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

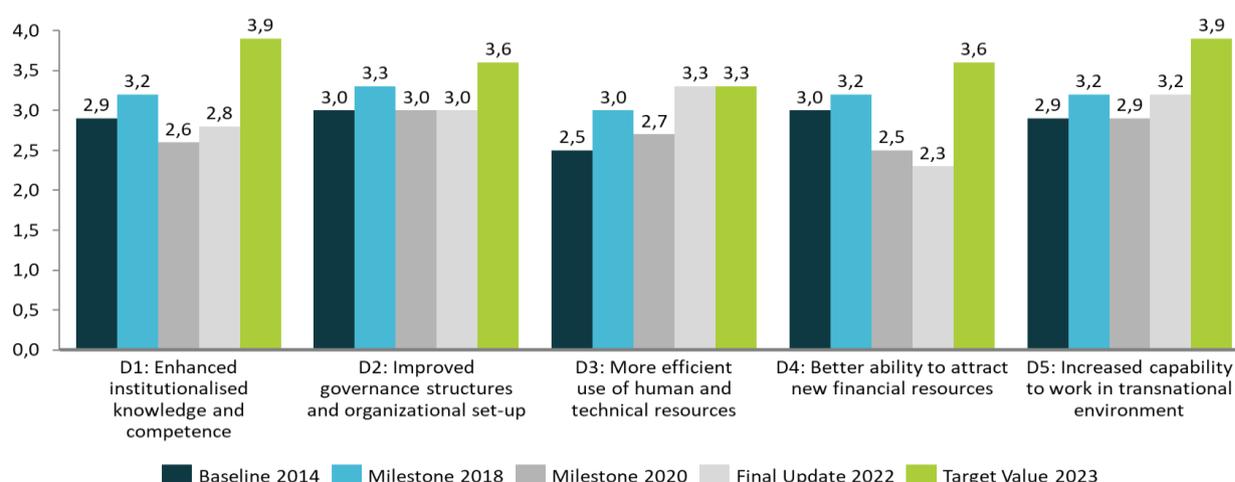
The results for SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) are based on responses from six experts from five different countries. Two interviews were conducted with two different experts for the respective SO.

The overall score for SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) in 2022 showed 0% progress made since 2014, as the institutional capacities in both 2014 and 2022 are rated as satisfactory, however, minor increase has been reached comparing 2020 results.

Significant setback can be seen in Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources), in 2022 reaching lower value than in 2014 and making 117% setback. Also, the final update in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence) shows setback for about 33%. Additionally, no progress has been made in Dimensions 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set-up).

As for contrast the indicator values of Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources) has had not only significant 22% increase since 2020, moreover, it has reached the target value making 100% progress. Similarly the results in Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment) have increased by 10% since 2020, reaching the same indicator value as it was for 2018 and making slight 30% progress.

FIGURE 9: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 1.3 NON-TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 7: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 1.3 (NON-TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change 8%
	Target 2023	3.9	Setback 33%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	3.0	
	Milestone 2018	3.3	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.0	Change 0%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 0%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.5	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	2.7	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 22%
	Target 2023	3.3	Progress 100%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	3.0	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	2.5	

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
	Final Update 2022	2.3	Change -8%
	Target 2023	3.6	Setback 117%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	3.2	Change 10%
	Target 2023	3.9	Progress 30%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

The availability of knowledge and competence in SO 1.3 (Non-technical innovation) overall is rated as satisfactory. although a slight setback can be seen comparing to the baseline value in 2014, however, minor positive improvement can be seen comparing with 2020 results.

Overall experts rate the availability of knowledge in BSR as satisfactory (average rating 3.2), however, stressing out that non-technological innovation is constantly growing area, therefore, there still is a need to improve the knowledge:

„There are still topics that need to be addressed by projects, especially in last years where new trends and challenges took place.“ (an expert)

Slightly more critical experts are about availability of mechanisms for knowledge transfer (average rating 2.7) and for utilisation of knowledge (average rating 2.5). Experts expressed that even though there is a lot of information available online, it is not always recognized or known, additionally some outputs are narrow and applicable regionally. Expert added that for non-technological innovation important factor for knowledge transfer and utilisation is person-to-person knowledge, and due to COVID-19 pandemic restriction it was affected significantly.

Another challenge in utilisation and transfer of the existing knowledge expressed by other expert is limited support and recognition of non-technological innovations in the current policy perspective in some of the BSR countries:

“[...] for example, when you are writing project you do not really get financing, non-technical innovation is not treated as a real innovation. There is no niche where to use this knowledge.” (an expert)

Although, the level of knowledge and competences are well spread throughout the BSR, however, there still can be seen some differences in application of them in different countries with different experience in non-technical innovation field, e.g., when discussing about social entrepreneurship some countries still struggle to cooperate among different public bodies and sectors, hence affecting the overall development and further spread of knowledge.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Although, the governance structures and organisational set-up among the experts is assessed as satisfactory, there has been no progress made since 2014.

Overall experts expressed that availability of organisational structures is satisfactory, however, several experts agreed that they are less functioning in the regional levels:

“There is no structural support to exchange project outputs on regional level, just irregular occasional meetings, contacts between organisation based on people personal relations.” (an expert)

The expert added that currently there are many structures available in the BSR, however, some of them have similar functions, therefore it may be confusing for stakeholders to differentiate them. Thus, other expert added that in some BSR countries the non-technological innovation field is still developing, and it can also be seen in these structures, as they still need some more time to grow, to gain knowledge and competence, to fully use the potential of them.

Additionally, experts are more critical about utilisation of these structures, expressing that there is an imbalance between national and transnational structures, where the national ones are used more often, another expert highlights the specifics of non-technological innovation as here still may be some topics in the field that are lost in these structures:

“The networks are probably regularly used, but not all topics are covered by the networks, especially in the non-technological fields.” (an expert)

Also, the expert added, that the issue with these structures is not only the missed content but also the sustainability of created networks. Most of the networks start to disappear after the end of the projects, although they can be found on the internet, the involved organisations do not really continue to work within them, therefore more focus should be put on the sustainability of the created networks.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

A significant improvement can be seen in development of more efficient use of human and technical resources, making 100% progress. Overall the experts agree that the efficiency in use of these resources is satisfactory.

Although, the utilisation of both human and technical resources overall is in satisfactory level, there still are some aspects which can be improved in the non-technological innovation. Experts stresses out that currently the field is experiencing certain degree of structural unemployment, and some countries in the BSR still face the “brain drain”, therefore it may be difficult to find new people in the innovation sector and stakeholders must think on ways how to attract people to this field:

“[...] it is important to find the motivation for people to involve, to “hit the right needs” then the utilisation of human resources becomes easier and more efficient.” (an expert)

Additionally, in some countries the non-technological innovation field was developed out of the NGO side and the activities and mindset are related to the charity approach, therefore there is a lack of different perspectives in the field, e.g., business / public-oriented resources, technical resources etc.

Regarding the utilisation of technological resources in the non-technological innovation, all experts agree that it is utilised well, there is high level of ICT usage in the field, and many technologies are available in the region. However, the struggle is to find a common ground to use these technologies among different countries, as they have different preferences and even some restrictions in legislation to use some of them.

The application of time and/or resource saving measures is also rated as satisfactory. Experts express that communication in the field works well, however, one of the experts additionally addressed the issue that although there are different kind of tools and instruments developed within the Interreg projects to save resources, not always they are known and used enough:

“A lot of projects create different platforms, different IT tools, but they are not much used when the projects are finished. The organisations in which I am involved knew about them but did not use them. Therefore, it is still a bit problem how to use created platforms or IT tools for the organisations which were not involved in the project activities. Maybe others would benefit from these created tools.” (an expert)

Although most of the experts agreed that in non-technological innovation field stakeholders are aware of the time and resources saving measures. Additionally, also COVID-19 pandemic introduced different kind

of time and resources saving measures, e.g., a good example can be considered online tools and online meetings, which are valuable for simple meetings and small talks, however not completely applicable for non-innovation field. An expert expressed that an important factor in non-technological innovation is the face-to-face communication, therefore not always online alternatives provide necessary value.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The ability to attract new financial resources experts have evaluated as rather low, moreover, this dimension has experienced a significant 117% setback comparing to the result in 2014.

The most critical opinion experts have about the ability to attract external private resources. The expert explained that there could be several reasons for this kind of setback. In 2014/2015 in some countries the non-technological innovation was a huge topic and there was seen a significant potential in it, however, it turned out that there is a lack of skilled workforce that in some countries has been caused by “brain drain”. Another issue in the non-technological innovation is that the results can be seen in a longer time period. Although companies do understand the potential in the non-technological innovation, e.g., process improvement, investment in human resources, they are more interested to see the result faster. Therefore, most of the companies tend to invest in technological innovations than non-technological ones. Another challenge for private sector was the uncertainty what COVID-19 pandemic restrictions brought, therefore most of the companies in the field, including banks, become more careful to invest.

Regarding the ability to attract public financial resources experts evaluated it slightly more positive. Although the funding for overall innovation sector is available and utilised, there is a lack of allocated funding specifically for non-technological innovation, as the technological innovations are over prioritised to non-technological ones

“The organisations are usually using their own resources and that sometimes limits their possibilities” (an expert)

Experts agreed that although the funding is available, however, more often it goes to public partner and not the private one, as public sector is seen more stable, therefore more reliable in ensuring allocation of the co-financing, and if experts compare the funding opportunities for technological and non-technological innovations, there is greater possibilities for the technological ones as they have more recognition in public sector as well.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Regarding capability to work in transnational environment experts evaluate it as satisfactory, even though in 2020 the indicator value decreased to 2014 baseline value, in the final evaluation it experienced some positive change, reaching 30% progress.

The competences to work transnationally in BSR are good, most experts highlight the good level of language knowledge in the BSR that lets stakeholders communicate in common way, additionally, one expert also expressed the Programmes’ role to increase these competencies:

“The projects help to possess the competences and work in transnational teams.” (an expert)

However, slightly more critical experts rate the frequency and intensity of transnational contacts. The communication is more frequent and intense during project implementation, however, after the end of the project it slowly disappears.

Additionally, experts agreed that there is no problem about the competences in the BSR, however, there can be seen different motivation to participate in transnational projects among countries which are considered as innovation leaders and followers:

“[...] in general I think through different associations, activities they (stakeholders) are getting contacts and they are willing to get these contacts. There are other countries where they do not see so much need when they think that the sector is developed or working well, and they do not see the need for international cooperations. But in here they see a lot of added value in this

transnational cooperation, and they are eager and curious to learn how other countries are doing, what they can learn from them, what kind of practices they can implement.” (an expert)

The other expert confirmed that there can be seen the change in motivation to cooperate. 15 years ago, the motivation to cooperate was much higher, stakeholders were more interested to network, to travel etc., nowadays it is seen more like an additional work, therefore, as said before, it is very important to implement projects that hits the needs of the target groups.

3.4. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2.1: CLEAR WATERS

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
2.1. Clear waters	2.7	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.6	67%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

Results for SO 2.1 (Clear waters) are based on responses from six experts in five countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

Although the overall score for SO 2.1 (Clear waters) has shown continuous improvement in institutional capacity, the pace of growth has been too slow to arrive at the expected level, nevertheless 67% of the target has been reached according to the current update.

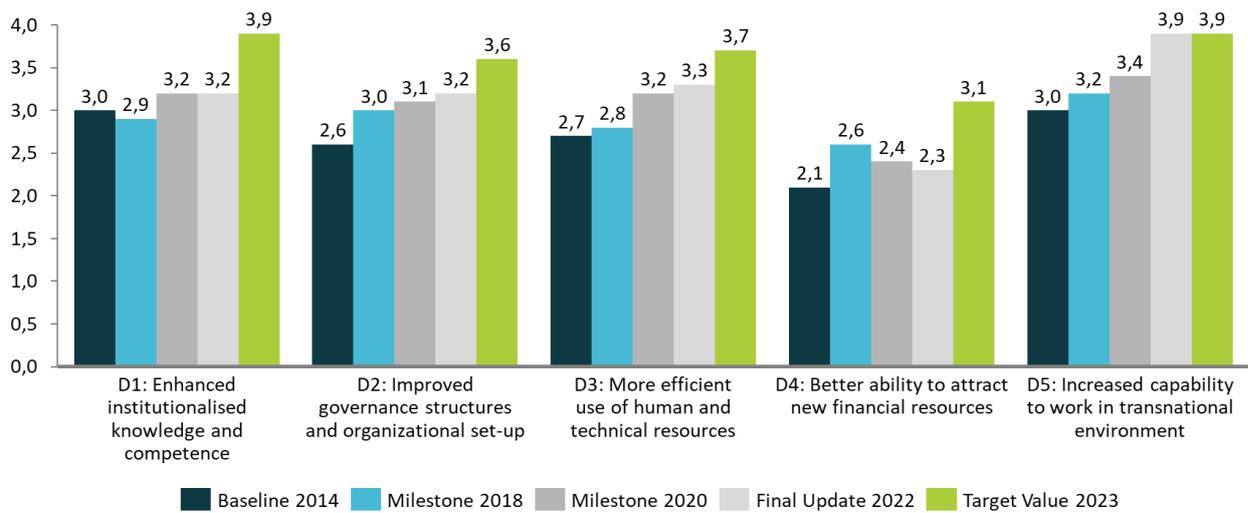
There has been steady positive development since 2014 in Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set-up) and in Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources), which have both reached 60% of the target value.

Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment) has made substantial progress since 2018 and was the only dimension of the institutional capacity of SO 2.1 (Clear waters), which has reached 100% of the target value.

In contrast to 2018, when the score of Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence) deteriorated below the 2014 baseline value, there have been no changes since 2020 and by 2022 only 25% of the target has been reached in that dimension.

Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) was the only dimension with steady negative developments already since 2018 and the overall level of progress by 2020 was only 20% of the expected result.

FIGURE 10: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 2.1 CLEAR WATERS



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 8: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 2.1 (CLEAR WATERS) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	3.0	
	Milestone 2018	2.9	
	Milestone 2020	3.2	
	Final Update 2022	3.2	Change 0%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 25%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.6	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	3.1	
	Final Update 2022	3.2	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 60%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.7	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	3.2	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 60%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.1	
	Milestone 2018	2.6	
	Milestone 2020	2.4	

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
	Final Update 2022	2.3	Change -4%
	Target 2023	3.1	Progress 20%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	3.0	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	3.4	
	Final Update 2022	3.9	Change 15%
	Target 2023	3.9	Progress 100%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

According to the survey and interviewees, availability of knowledge and competence was at a satisfactory level and the situation was moving towards improvement.

The knowledge base was constantly being built on, but according to an expert's opinion, it was not mainstreamed yet and knowledge relating to the sea and the BSR is still to develop past the current base.

According to another expert, the new knowledge was produced thanks to HELCOM reports and continuous monitoring. There was good knowledge on the state of waters, sources of pollutants and also solutions to tackle them but this might not be in a suitable format, language or otherwise easily accessed or localised for practitioners in their investment planning or daily operations. The Programme has produced valuable input to these obstacles.

Some critical aspects highlighted by survey respondents include missing knowledge concerning soft aspects:

“Like social justice related to clean waters. We should have better knowledge on emotional aspects related to clean waters, engagement and exclusion of stakeholders, distribution of costs and benefits of actions taken by public authorities.” (an expert)

Knowledge transfer exists and overall the situation has improved during the period of 2014–2020. However, it may vary across different countries, as mentioned by one expert, there are no good tools and platforms for knowledge transfer available yet in his country.

Mechanisms are available mostly through numerous conferences or platform types of Interreg projects. The problem was that the entities participating in all these activities are the same, so extending outreach beyond typical suspects was important.

Effective application of knowledge generated by the numerous projects was hampered by the lack of centralisation of knowledge, which makes new knowledge hardly detectable:

“As the projects are so many, it's hard to follow up on every of them. There are many tools and reports created to increase the knowledge in certain problem solving, but, in spite of that, it is really hard to find everything published.” (an expert)

According to experts the utilisation of knowledge was also hindered by political and financial barriers. Additionally, there was a language barrier - most knowledge was built and dispersed in English, information in other languages has to expand to transfer knowledge more prominently.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Regarding the improvement of governance structures and organisational set-up in the field of “Clear waters”, most experts assess the overall situation as satisfactory in the BSR. However, as stated also in previous reports, experts still note the lack of cooperation routine in the region:

„I don't see a proper collaboration between institutions, main stakeholders. Nothing much is changed since many years.“ (an expert)

Platforms are available and Interreg projects act as additional platforms. Stakeholders participating in Interreg BSR interactions maintain a regular organisational structure as also supported by the Interreg BSR even outside the projects. The only issue was that some organisational structures are limited to project duration periods, which takes away the continuity of the set-up.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

There has not occurred great improvement in the development of more efficient use of human and technical resources compared to 2020.

According to some experts, human resources have been developed thanks to Interreg BSR together with technical support. The Interreg BSR project logistics allow for each person participating to apply their specific knowledge and skills to successful implementation, which also rationalises the use of time.

As regards the use of technical resources, it could be more proactive, especially in terms of engaging unknown and more innovative resources. Another limitation according to the experts' assessment was that there was missing knowledge of how to access and use existing technical resources.

As to the application of time- and/or resource-saving measures, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development and use of these methods. But also the ability to engage people and organisations with Interreg BSR for the long-term (continuing cooperations and participation over the years) gives the opportunity to organically organise time and resources appropriately. Though, as stated by one expert, new perspective may better allow for maximum efficiency in this regard.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The experts have evaluated the capacity to attract new financial resources rather low as the score of this dimension has suffered from steady deterioration since 2018.

Continuing the trend in opinions expressed also during previous assessment in 2020, the situation regarding the ability to attract private funding was slightly worse compared to the ability to attract public funding. It was stated also by one of the experts, that this has been one of the key drawbacks and therefore participation of private companies in "Clear waters" projects was still very low.

There are several reasons why motivating private investments to contribute to improving the situation in this field remains one of the biggest challenges. According to several experts, the main difficulty lies in the inability to provide detailed, precise estimates that would inform private stakeholders of concrete benefits to them. Without this, it was difficult to engage them. Another critical aspect lies in the fact that public authorities, practitioners, and researchers do not have good connections to private businesses and are not able to identify areas of common interest. This was far from ideal, as recognized by one expert.

As to the situation regarding public funding, it was convenient to use existing network links in the public sector from previous cooperations to attract resources. But nevertheless, according to some experts, public authorities, practitioners, and researchers are not highly able to attract public financial resources. This was more matter of applications and legislation issues for the proper collaboration.

Also, in some countries, although ability to engage external public funding exists, public funds are not so easy to be used for transnational co-operation and for actions not directly related to satisfaction of basic needs of the society due to budgetary constraint and high inflation.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Although there was always room for improvement, there was evidently high level of capability to work in transnational environment in SO 2.1 (Clear waters), which was confirmed also by the indicator reaching the ambitious target value by 2022.

“Public authorities, practitioners and researchers are able to communicate in a common language, are geographically mobile and have a profound knowledge of the institutional landscape and cultural characteristics of other countries.” (an expert)

According to the opinion of some experts, there exist different level of competences in different types of organisations:

“Research and education organisations have advanced competences, but municipalities, enterprises and other practitioners only satisfactory competences and probably also timely and financial restrictions.” (an expert)

There are also some hindering factors to broader cooperation, language barrier being one of such:

“There are no barriers among stakeholders we have cooperated with within Interreg BSR, despite this there are many local level stakeholders who still experience barriers, especially language barriers.” (an expert)

Contacts are very frequent among researchers and pan-Baltic organisations like VASAB mainly due to COVID-19 pandemic that forced to develop e-skills. In some cases the intensity of such contacts might become even too high:

„Due to development of e-contacts (at least for me) this intensity is even too high. Too many meetings.” (an expert)

Relevant contact persons are known and can directly be approached. According to an expert, the key is the right personnel and their competences.

3.5. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2.2: RENEWABLE ENERGY

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
2.2. Renewable energy	2.4	2.8	2.7	2.6	3.5	18%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

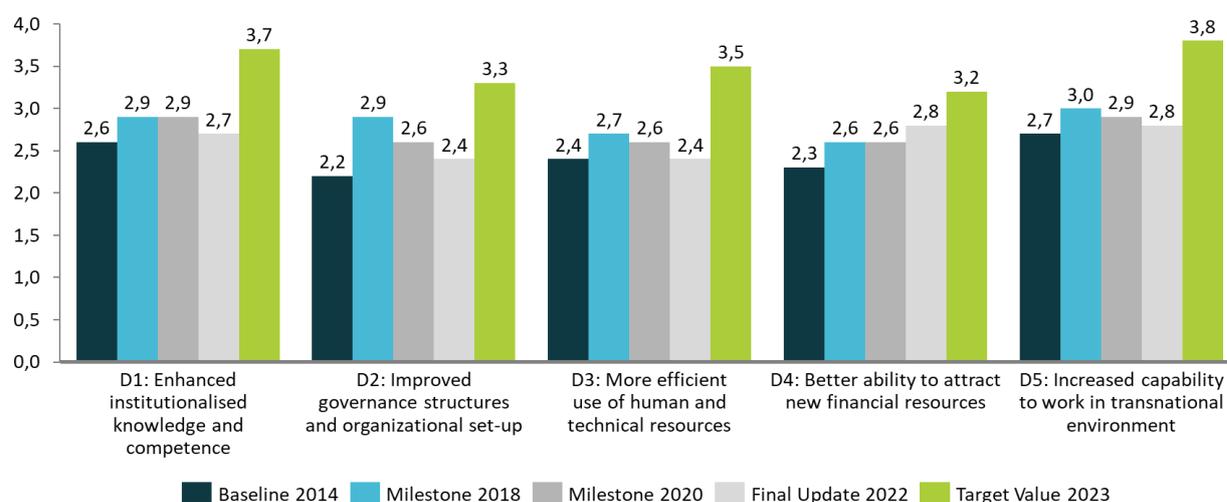
Results for SO 2.2 (Renewable energy) are based on responses from four experts in four countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

The indicator value has been slightly but constantly decreasing since 2020 and the overall progress made in institutional capacity since 2014 was only 18% of the desired outcome.

All dimensions with the exception of Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) feature slightly lower scores than in 2020 and the overall progress of those dimensions towards to the target set for 2023 was between 0% to 18%.

The only dimension with positive change compared to 2020 was Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources), where the score has increased by 8% and the progress towards the target value since 2014 has been 56%.

FIGURE 11: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 2.2 RENEWABLE ENERGY



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 9: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 2.2 (RENEWABLE ENERGY) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.6	
	Milestone 2018	2.9	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	2.7	Change -7%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 9%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.2	
	Milestone 2018	2.9	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.4	Change -8%
	Target 2023	3.3	Progress 18%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	2.7	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.4	Change -8%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 0%
DIMENSION 4:	Baseline 2014	2.3	

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
Better ability to attract new financial resources	Milestone 2018	2.6	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change 8%
	Target 2023	3.2	Progress 56%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.7	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change -3%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 9%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

According to the experts, there was satisfactory knowledge available, as the renewable energy area has been one of the most studied fields during the last years with plenty of RDI (research, development and innovation) investments.

The availability of knowledge also differs for the target groups – among the public authorities there may occur no knowledge up to profound knowledge available, when at the same time practitioners and researchers have often good and profound knowledge.

The main problem appears in implementation of knowledge – knowledge and latest improvements are not utilised enough. As stated by one expert, there are barriers such as lack of cooperation and sometimes trust. So, despite the satisfactory level on availability of knowledge in BSR, still some improvements need to be done to put this knowledge into the practice. Also, as stated by an expert, mechanisms for knowledge transfer are not sufficiently effective.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

The experts have evaluated the development of governance structures and organisational set-up in the field of energy efficiency as satisfactory, although already existing structures should be used more. The dimension has experienced a decrease of 8% in the result compared to 2020 and overall only 18% of the target value set for 2023 has been reached. Public authorities have problems to use the structures, because of a lack of time or interest or unclear responsibility.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The use of human and technical resources in the field of energy efficiency has steadily decreased since 2018 and reached the 2014 baseline level with the current update in 2022. The general trend continues to be that human resources are either limited or not used effectively, while technical resources have improved and are being used more frequently.

“I suppose there are plenty of human resource available, but they are not used enough.” (an expert)

The effective use of technical resources was sometimes limited to the availability of information on new solutions and also to cost related issues:

“Free available technical resources are often very general or difficult to find, others are developed by companies and mostly not free but costly.” (an expert)

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The ability to attract new financial resources was the only dimension of the institutional capacity of renewable energy that has made progress within recent years and had a positive change compared to the update in 2020.

The availability of public funding has been assessed slightly higher by the experts compared to the availability of private funding.

As regards to projects with public financing one expert observes, that the financing of large-scale implementation would help to improve the utilisation of new knowledge:

“If only funding could be used in large-scale physical investments as well - we don't have that much time to just do the RDI. Utilisation of the current knowledge in practice could make many things much better.” (an expert)

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Capacities to work in transnational environments have continued to decrease since 2018 and are almost back at the 2014 baseline level according to the current update in 2022.

The capacities appear to have developed unequally in different target groups. There was advanced knowledge and competences to work together with transnational partners among researchers, practitioners and regional public authorities, but lower in smaller municipal public authorities.

3.6. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2.3: ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
2.3. Energy efficiency	2.6	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.5	44%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

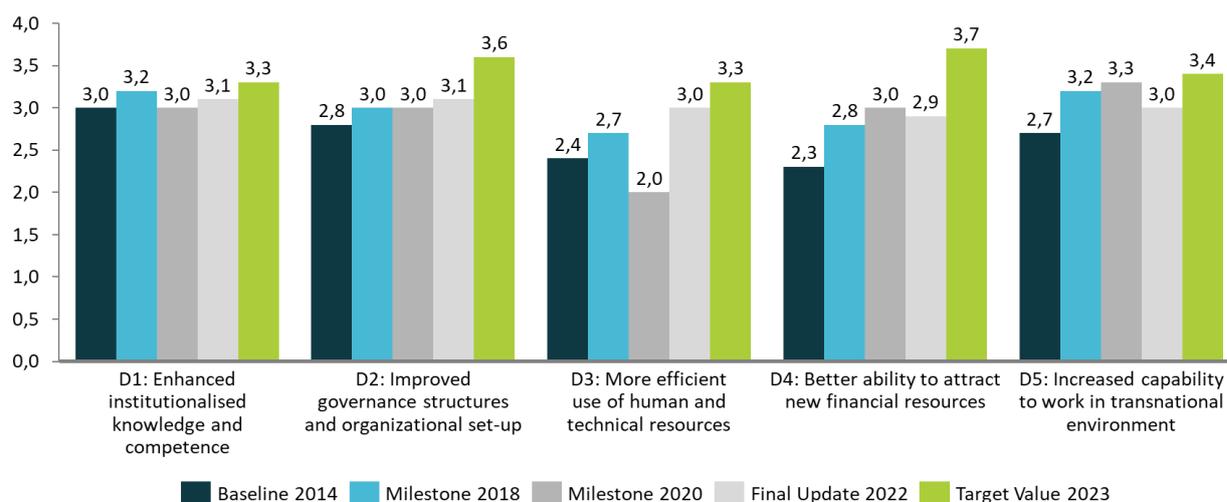
Results for SO 2.3 (Energy efficiency) are based on responses from seven experts in seven countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

SO 2.3 (Energy efficiency) was the second specific objective in addition to SO 2.2 (Renewable energy) in Priority 2, where the overall score of the institutional capacity compared to 2020 has decreased. The progress made towards the target value was 44% of the expected result.

Although there was slight improvement in the indicator values of Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence) and Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set-up), it was outbalanced by the moderate deterioration witnessed in Dimensions 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) and Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment).

The only dimension with substantial increase in score was Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources), which after a notable decrease in 2020 managed to make a 50% progress and has achieved 67% of the overall target set to 2023.

FIGURE 12: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 2.3 ENERGY EFFICIENCY



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 10: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 2.3 (ENERGY EFFICIENCY) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	3.0	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.3	Progress 33%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 38%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	2.7	
	Milestone 2020	2.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.0	Change 50%
	Target 2023	3.3	Progress 67%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.3	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	2.9	Change -3%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 43%

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.7	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	3.3	
	Final Update 2022	3.0	Change -9%
	Target 2023	3.4	Progress 43%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

There is good level of knowledge and competence available in the field of energy efficiency, which was indicated also by the relatively high baseline set to this capacity. As stated also in previous assessment, there are well-trained specialists working in this field and the knowledge base is gradually improving. There is still room for more research and development activities, as the industry is quickly evolving, and knowledge renews every day.

Advanced knowledge transfer mechanisms are possible and in place but should become more accessible and encouraged. Knowledge transfer between research and development infrastructure and especially existing SMEs is quite weak due to the lack of adequate resources to finance introduction of new innovations from the research institutions.

Knowledge transfer depends also on the interests of the private businesses as new energy efficiency technologies are developed in close cooperation with companies.

As regards the utilisation of knowledge the situation in the region could be better. The aim should be to reduce insufficient knowledge transfer mechanisms and lack of cooperation. As identified by one expert, there tends to be too much focus in energy efficiency to building renovations and less to other sectors.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Regarding governance structures and organisational set-up, the overall situation was evaluated as improving by the experts. There are different organisations for end users and companies, also communities that provide such platforms.

Nevertheless, some aspects could be better and the work among different institutions could improve. Advanced organisational structures as well as meetings, networks and platforms for knowledge exchange between different stakeholders should be developed. Also, as emphasised by one expert, the already existing organisational structures should be used more to achieve the goals of authorities, practitioners, and scientists.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The utilisation of human resources was assessed as satisfactory, and the capacity has made a great progress compared to the significant drop identified in the 2020 update.

Although the available human resources are often efficiently utilised, the problem, referred by one expert, lies in the insufficient development of personal networks. Another question arises, whether there are enough human resources available in the field. Additionally, there might be a problem with proper salary for highly qualified personnel.

As opposed to the previous evaluation in 2020, the use of technical resources has slightly decreased. According to experts, various resources are available, however there is room for improvement regarding

usability of such resources. There are also some technical resources, such as data registers, that are used, but they are not sufficient and are being currently developed.

One of the barriers to the use of technical resources might also be the issue of accessibility:

“Only very interested and ambitious persons are able to find and use it.” (an expert)

Regarding the application of time- and/or resource-saving measures, increasing efficiency through the development of new tools and methods to save time, creating new ways of communication and collaboration is still very important and necessary. Some experts have stated that the cause for such developments lies very much in the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The capacity to attract external financial resources has slightly deteriorated compared to 2020 and the overall progress was less than 50% of the target set for 2023.

Similarly to SO 2.2. (Renewable energy), it was also assessed that the use of private financial instruments is quite low, whereas public funding was used more commonly.

Authorities, practitioners, and researchers do not yet have a good experience in cooperation and relations with private businesses. Private financial resources are available, although there is still fear of utilising PPP (public-private partnership) mechanisms, which in some countries are strongly shadowed by issues related to corruption and transparency.

As stated by experts, there is a lot of room for improvement regarding the ability and interest to attract EU funds directly. Without public funds, rarely anything happens. To utilise these resources, there must first exist the ability to act and implement energy efficiency measures on a large scale. Therefore, in theoretical level, public institutions and researchers can attract public financial resources, but practitioners face certain technical and financial difficulties when preparing projects

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

There are different opinions among experts regarding the developments in the capacity to work in transnational environment, which has led to the decreased score of the dimension compared to the previous assessment in 2020.

According to experts with positive evaluations, authorities, practitioners and researchers have the knowledge and competences to work together with international partners and there are many transnational links open. Although there is always room for improvement, there are different transnational programs which help with the frequency – on few cases the frequency is even too high.

On the other hand, according to those who are slightly more critical about the current situation, due to the high employment of public authorities and specialists, cross-border cooperation was not very stable, and, in some cases, collaboration remains quite general. Projects have too few international contacts and transnational projects take too little benefit from transnationality as a way of working. Authorities and scientists maintain relations with individuals and institutions of other countries, but practitioners do this less due to financial and other reasons. Also, as specialists are often preoccupied with national day-to-day tasks and obligations, transnational project are often viewed as "shelf-warmers" (producing papers and little else), insignificant follow up on results and new products/methods developed.

3.7. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2.4: RESOURCE-EFFICIENT BLUE GROWTH

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
2.4. Resource-efficient blue growth	2.8	2.9	2.8	3.1	3.6	38%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

Results for SO 2.4 (Resource efficient blue growth) are based on responses from five experts in five countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

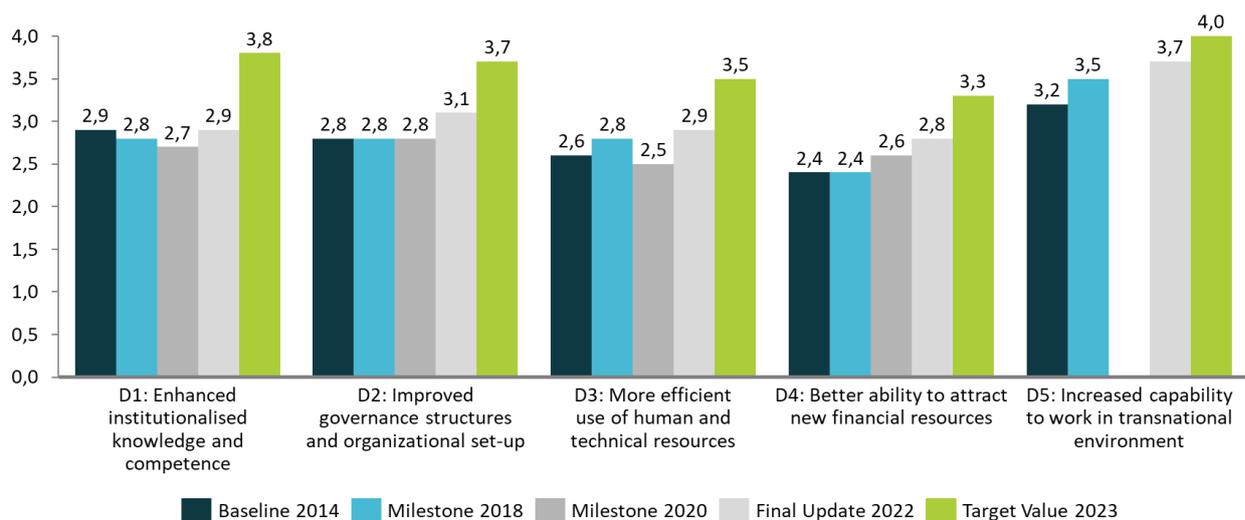
The progress of the institutional capacity in SO 2.4 towards the target has been slow. After slight increase in 2018, there was a minor setback in 2020, when the general score fell back to the 2014 baseline level. Although the final evaluation shows a path of improvement, the overall result was no more than 38% of target value.

The 2022 update witnessed positive change (3%-16%) compared to 2020 in all dimensions of the institutional capacity.

The most progress since 2014 towards the target set to 2023 occurred in Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment), which reached 63% of the goal.

No progress (0%) compared to the 2014 baseline value was made in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence), which after some setbacks in 2018 and 2020 reached the baseline level again by 2022.

FIGURE 13: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 2.4 RESOURCE-EFFICIENT BLUE GROWTH



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 11: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 2.4 (RESOURCE-EFFICIENT BLUE GROWTH) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	2.7	
	Final Update 2022	2.9	Change 7%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 0%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	2.8	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 11%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 33%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.6	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	2.5	
	Final Update 2022	2.9	Change 16%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 33%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	2.4	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change 8%
	Target 2023	3.3	Progress 44%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	3.2	
	Milestone 2018	3.5	
	Milestone 2020	3.6	
	Final Update 2022	3.7	Change 3%
	Target 2023	4.0	Progress 63%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

Although according to the current evaluation the result indicator was back on the level of the 2014 baseline, the experts assessed the situation regarding institutionalised knowledge and competence as satisfactory. There was a lot of institutionalised knowledge in public authorities, local research and

development institutions and international networking. As marine environment is changing due to climate change, new knowledge is always required.

The competences are very diverse, and the use of knowledge put into action is very different from country to country. The availability of knowledge and especially the exploitation of knowledge depends also on the participation in a specific project.

Building coherent (social) networks for knowledge transfer is needed. There is a lack of resources in formal procedures run by public authorities. In spite of recent data-sharing obligations, research institutes still hold data and information until published in peer-reviewed journals. The knowledge transfer could take years and information might be outdated or not needed anymore when it is available.

Sometimes there was a conflict of interests between scientists and companies regarding the time and focus of projects. Public procedures such as licensing often form a bottleneck for the utilisation of knowledge among organisations. At the same time, public authorities lack resources – financial and know-how – for collaboration with the private sector.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

The score for governance structures and organisational set-up was steadily stuck at the 2014 baseline level up until the current evaluation, according to which it finally managed to achieve slight increase and demonstrate some progress towards the target value.

In general, there are well working organisational structures in the BSR countries, also communication platforms between public bodies, researchers, experts, and companies. However, according to an expert, the traditional sea industries and activities, such as fishing, fish farming, or transport, are hard work at sea, which makes it challenging for public bodies and research institutes to reach these actors and engage them in long-term cooperation that benefits both sides. To overcome this conflict of interests, compensation mechanisms are needed. In addition, authorities and researchers should allocate resources to studying collaborative methods.

The utilisation of existing organisational structures seems to be limited due to some networks being closed for wider involvement (e.g. HELCOM, CBCC). Another barrier according to an expert was that authorities do not consider networks as partners in their daily work due to national legal frameworks.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

There are a lot of informal and formal platforms for experts to meet. Social connections are strong during the projects, but it was a challenge to keep up the communication after the projects have finished. People change jobs, research interests change etc., therefore lack of continuity was a great challenge.

There are a lot of modern technical resources available, parallel software, databases, etc. The key was to find coherence among the databases in a manner that supports national conditions and needs. Engaging private sector or public bodies for the development of certain software was necessary to make sure it was needed and usable.

Technical resources financed by EU are mostly project related and wider or commercial use is restricted. Using technical resources is sometimes also limited due to their location or range/coverage (in case of databases for example).

EU supported investments into technical infrastructure knowledge development have definitely been a strong input into efficiency development.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The capacity to attract new financial resources has been slowly, but steadily increasing.

The public source of financing was widely used by scientists but not so widely by companies, because of required skills to initiate projects for public financing. Public authorities still are reluctant with respect to the efforts.

Practitioners are doing well in attracting private resources, where scientists are not so successful or don't want to use private money. Due to the specificity of individual stakeholder groups, practitioners sometimes do not need to obtain private funds to achieve their goals.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

To work internationally has become a "business as usual". Scientists and some companies often act globally. For entities in smaller countries, it is the only way to be competitive.

The current level of public administration cooperation in the international arena is good. Some institutions could get more involved, but in some countries their possibilities are limited due to the statute of these organisations. Also, public administrations are rather focusing on the immediate "customers".

The use of English as a transnational common working language works well. However, there is a need to support the use of national languages and have proper resources for translation work. Many sea users are not able to effectively communicate in English and there should be established funding mechanisms to support activities in national languages, also during the project work.

3.8. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3.1: INTEROPERABILITY OF TRANSPORT MODES

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
3.1. Interoperability of transport modes	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.9	67%

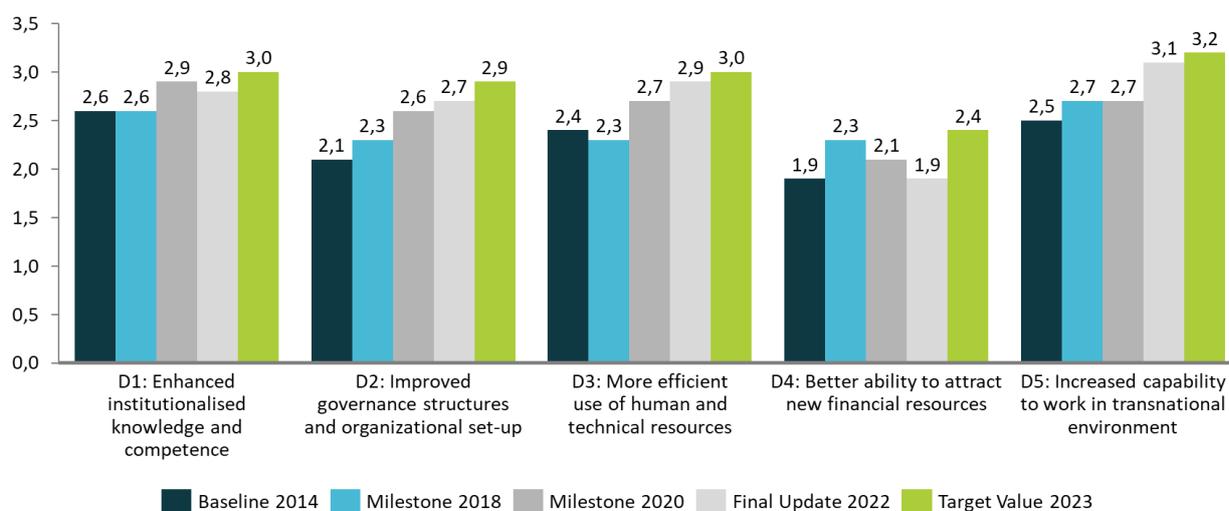
Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The survey for SO 3.1 (Interoperability of transport modes) was answered by five experts from five different countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

The final update shows that there has been a steady progress estimating the institutional capacities in the region, thus reaching 67% progress.

In the Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) has happened a significant setback, as the 2022 value has decreased at the same level as set baseline value in 2014. Although, progress in other dimensions of institutional capacity was positive achieving 50–86%, some minor -4% setback can be seen in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence) comparing indicator value in 2020 and updated value in 2022.

FIGURE 14: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 3.1 INTEROPERABILITY OF TRANSPORT MODES



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 12: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 3.1 (INTEROPERABILITY OF TRANSPORT MODES) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.6	
	Milestone 2018	2.6	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change -4%
	Target 2023	3.0	Progress 50%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.1	
	Milestone 2018	2.3	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.7	Change 4%
	Target 2023	2.9	Progress 75%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	2.3	
	Milestone 2020	2.7	
	Final Update 2022	2.9	Change 7%
	Target 2023	3.0	Progress 83%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	1.9	
	Milestone 2018	2.3	
	Milestone 2020	2.1	

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
	Final Update 2022	1.9	Change -10%
	Target 2023	2.4	Progress 0%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.5	
	Milestone 2018	2.7	
	Milestone 2020	2.7	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 15%
	Target 2023	3.2	Progress 86%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

The capacity of institutionalised knowledge was one of the two dimensions of SO 3.1 (Interoperability of transport modes), which has experienced slight setback comparing to indicator values in 2020.

Overall, the availability of knowledge in the BSR was satisfactory, however, experts identified several issues regarding the available mechanisms for knowledge transfer and utilisation of this knowledge, such as, there was no legal basis for cooperation, lack of cooperation, as well as it was more difficult to transfer the knowledge within greater (by size) countries:

“Utilisation is depending on connectivity between authorities and “acting” partners.” (an expert)

The other expert agreed on this opinion, although the overall knowledge in the BSR was good, and partner countries are open for cooperation, time to time there are projects that don’t utilise the knowledge completely as some good ideas “stay on the paper”, therefore no further share of valuable knowledge was happening.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Regarding experts’ opinion, the governance structures and organisational set-up are in satisfactory level, making 75% progress towards target value.

The availability of organisational structures among the experts was rated slightly better than utilisation of them. The expert expressed that most of the countries are used to EU formats and bilateral cooperation, therefore there are similar patterns of cooperation. However, there are also concepts of BSR that are overlapping with other programmes funded by the EU, therefore affecting opportunities to cooperate in BSR projects. The expert also mentioned that sometimes the cooperation within BSR has been neglected due to lack of human resources, as cooperation within organisations and with public bodies, such as EU, OECD, Nordic Council, are being prioritised over project-based cooperation such as Interreg BSR.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The efficient use of human and technical resources has made some significant progress, although still not reaching the target value, thus making 83% progress towards it.

Slightly better situation in SO 3.1 (Interoperability of transport modes) was the use of technical resources, nevertheless, also COVID-19 pandemic had made some positive impact, e.g., increased efficiency of using digital tools, online communication etc. Thus, there still can be seen difference in use of technical resources among the BSR countries, where Germany and Nordic countries are seen as more advanced than Eastern part of the BSR.

On the other hand, the use of human resources was more challenging, as the field in some countries were experiencing high staff rotation, as well as lack of experienced professionals in this field.

The expert agreed that currently there was a lack of human resources in both sectors public and educational, therefore more focus should be put on to use the resources wise and efficiently. Another issue, regarding the efficient use of human resources, was the amount of implemented projects. The expert expressed that there have been situations where the amount of the projects exceeds the possibilities to allocate the necessary human resources, therefore additional time needs to be allocated in prioritising the opportunities:

“There are times when there are bunch of projects at the same time, and there is, of course, not enough human resources to carry out them all. We also had a discussion with an entrepreneur in port sector some time ago, and he admitted that he needs one extra person just to visit all the conferences, just to keep up with all these projects and ideas. And not always they are interested to involved, especially if the project “stays on the paper”.” (an expert)

Regarding the application of time and/or resource saving measures one expert highlighted that although there are good examples in BSR, and projects has shown good results, though not always it is possible to implement the results in real life, especially, if similar measures are already existing and the change requires amendment of the regulatory acts.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Ability to attract new financial resources has experienced a serious setback, reaching the set base value in 2014 and making no progress.

The most critics goes to ability to attract external private resources. One expert highlight that there was no communication between stakeholders, and there was almost no initiative from neither of stakeholders. The expert added that most of the times private sector partners have very limited budget and limited possibilities to engage, also most of them do not simply see the benefit of cooperation. Hindering aspect was also that the public-private partnership was not implemented enough in most of the countries, so there was no environment where this kind of cooperation could grow out of.

Slightly more positive was the situation in public sector, though it was still rated as rather low. Expert expressed that most of support from public financial resources are already allocated for priority projects with acute necessity, thus it was difficult to receive funding or even co-funding for projects that have great ideas, however, are not urgent.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The capability to work in transnational environment has progressed the most of all dimensions making a good 86% progress and exceeding the indicator values in 2018 and 2020 by 15%.

Overall, the competences to work transnationally are satisfactory in the BSR. The expert added that, although the competences in BSR are good, and the language knowledge was good as well, however, the cooperation was hampered by lack of time and human resources, meaning that stakeholders need to prioritise in which cooperations to involve.

Regarding the frequency for the transnational contacts the thoughts among the experts differed, most of experts assessed it as frequent, however, others expressed that meetings due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are online which was not a substitute format for frequent contacts. Similarly, it also affected the intensity of transnational collaboration. Most of the cooperations happen ad-hoc, though, partners from BSR countries are always ready to participate:

“Usually, the cooperation is based on the need, if we need something we know where to turn, as well as if someone reaches to us, we will cooperate. But it is not like we are not cooperating, e.g. there is a good cooperation within joint policy “The Northern Dimension”.” (an expert)

Additionally, the other joint policies, such as “The Northern Dimensions”⁹, also improves the overall cooperation in BSR, even if it covers only some part of the BSR.

However, there also are some challenges among the beneficiaries in these transnational cooperations which are made in Interreg BSR, and other similar programs as well, as the project partners have different roles. As expert expressed, that most of the times the lead partner was the main beneficiary, therefore also the project results tend to affect the leader country more. However, on the more positive side, most of the cooperations are positive and valuable, as countries in the BSR have wide and different experience in the field.

3.9. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3.2: ACCESSIBILITY OF REMOTE AREAS AND AREAS AFFECTED BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
3.2. Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.2	3.8	40%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The results for SO 3.2 (Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change) are based on responses from five experts in five different countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

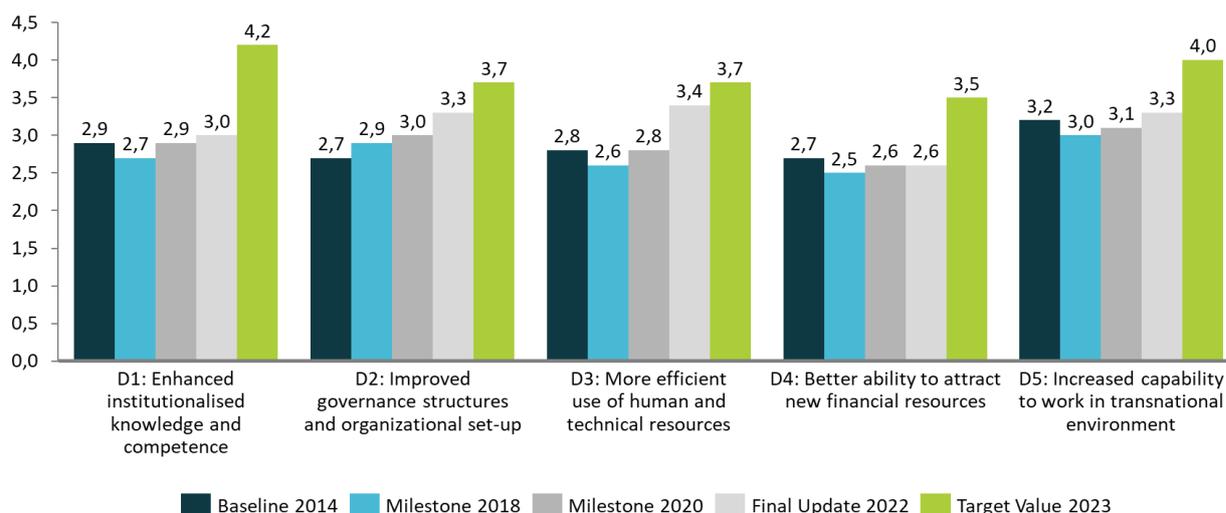
The final update shows that there has been slight increase in the indicator since the 2020 milestone, however the pace of growth has been too slow, therefore not reaching the target value, and making only 40% progress towards it.

Some slight 13% setback has happened in Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources), reaching the same result as in 2020, thus being lower than the baseline value in 2014.

On the more positive side, all other dimensions have experienced some positive progress in both comparing to indicator values in 2020 and to baseline values in 2014. The least progress can be seen in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence) and Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment). Thus, some good development has happened in Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set-up) and in Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources), where indicator values have reached 60% and 67% progress.

FIGURE 15: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 3.2 ACCESSIBILITY OF REMOTE AREAS AFFECTED BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

⁹ <https://northerndimension.info/about-northern-dimension/>



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 13: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 3.2 (ACCESSIBILITY OF REMOTE AREAS AND AREAS AFFECTED BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	2.7	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	3.0	Change 3%
	Target 2023	4.2	Progress 8%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.7	
	Milestone 2018	2.9	
	Milestone 2020	3.0	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 10%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 60%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	2.6	
	Milestone 2020	2.8	
	Final Update 2022	3.4	Change 21%
	Target 2023	3.7	Progress 67%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.7	
	Milestone 2018	2.5	
	Milestone 2020	2.6	
	Final Update 2022	2.6	Change 0%
	Target 2023	3.5	Setback -13%

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	3.2	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	3.1	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 6%
	Target 2023	4.0	Progress 13%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

A minor 8% progress has been made in the capacity for institutionalised knowledge in SO 3.2 (Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change).

According to experts the remote areas and areas affected by demographic change was still a growing subject, therefore new knowledge needs to be gained, thus it takes some more time, nevertheless the current situation shows good progress, and the capacity of institutionalised knowledge was being improved. Thus, one expert admits that still there was a lack of some data about public transport in the field, which can hinder more advanced development in the field:

“When we were trying to find some indicators at least in the work what we did, it was much more difficult from the point of view about the international information, of course we have the information concerning the infrastructure. So in case of individual transport it is enough. In case of public transport it is not enough and there is a lack of full information concerning the timetables which is possible to compare. Better ability for this comparison could be important.” (an expert)

Nevertheless, experts are more critical in rating the availability of mechanisms for knowledge transfer, the issue within this subject was the instability of these mechanisms:

“We have mechanisms for knowledge transfer knowledge within our organisation. Sometimes they are working excellent and sometimes there are lacks in the knowledge transfer process.” (an expert)

Additionally, experts positively rate the already established relations in the field, which support the knowledge transfer. Thus, the most confident experts are about utilisation of knowledge, however, it also depends on involved stakeholders, where some bodies are more open for knowledge utilisation than others.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Some slightly good improvement can be seen in the improvement of governance structures and organisational set up, where 60% progress has been made.

Overall, the experts are satisfied with existing structures and utilisation of them, one of the experts expresses that for current state and situation the structures are well available and used:

“Organisational structures are mostly relatively well adjusted to be constructive, cost-efficient, problem-oriented.” (an expert)

However, experts tend to refer more positive about structures in specific organisations, additionally another expert admitted that in some of the BSR countries the integration of transport policy and other policies, e.g., public services, is not developed well enough, public bodies, such as ministries have their own groups and experts, therefore in some countries intersectional cooperation at national level is still missing, affecting overall use of governance structures.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The efficient use of human and technical resources has made the most progress from all other Dimensions in the (Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change), reaching 67% progress.

Regarding the expert opinion, the utilisation of technical resources was very well working in this field. Experts assess the value of e-governance, web-based real-time co-creation platforms and software, as well as citizen inclusion solutions. However, some experts added that there are still some issues on accessing the necessary basic data in the transport sector, therefore hampering even better use of technical resources in the field of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change.

Similarly positive feedback experts are giving about application of time and resource saving measures, admitting that technical improvements significantly improved the efficiency of both time and resources:

“Improved use of web-based, real-time, co-creation platforms/software, e-governance and citizens inclusion solutions, webinars, virtual meetings, etc. have enabled more efficient, cohesive and time-consuming work processes.” (an expert)

However, the experts are more cautious rating the utilisation of human resources, although the already existing human resources are utilised well, the challenge is to attract new resources, as the field is still growing and developing, and to hold stable cooperations.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The ability to attract new financial resources has experienced a slight setback for about 13% and experiencing no change since 2020.

As a significant challenge experts see the ability to attract new private financial resources, rating it as rather low. One expert explained that it is not a common practice to attract private financial resources in the transport or infrastructure field. Additionally, the expert highlighted the lack of regulation for use of Public-private partnership, that could overall involve the private sector in the field:

“This cooperation in PPP investment is not very popular, however, in my personal opinion it is partly because there is still a lack of regulation, there is space to use it wider. [...] We need a better regulation to do it. And I would say the experience, and this is not even a case of big investment, but in case of organisational transport definitely there is a space for a private company. I would even say that this is much more efficient to subsidise some companies who win the contract to provide services somewhere than to create a communal or state-owned company.” (an expert)

Thus, another expert mentioned that the situation has slightly improved by the years, explaining that some national governments have developed new regional loan guarantee schemes for the market failure areas. However, all the experts agree that ability to attract private financial resources in this field should be better.

Regarding the ability of attract external public financial resources experts rate it as satisfactory. Although there is a political interest in improving accessibility of remote areas or areas affected by demographic change and throughout the years public bodies have improved the communication and technical support for the beneficiaries, however, there is lack of effective tools to do it, therefore, the situation in these years has not faced significant changes.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Regarding capability to work in a transnational environment a minor progress for about 13% has been made, however, the result was slightly improved comparing results in 2018 and 2020.

The competencies to work transnationally in the region are good and well used, some experts highlight that some organisations in the field already have long experience working in transnational environment, and the transnational collaboration also helps to overcome language barriers, additionally another expert also referred to the competences gained in Interreg BSR:

“This is the first time we are partner in an international project. In the start of the project, we worked on increasing the competence and we feel that after the project it improved.” (an expert)

Regarding the frequency and intensity of the transnational contacts, experts admit that, although during the projects and even after the end of it the communication was more frequent and intense, however, the exchange of the continues results and activities was not that common anymore. Additionally, another expert added that transnational collaboration still depends on the public body, some are more open to collaborate transnationally, and some are not.

3.10. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3.3: MARITIME SAFETY

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
3.3. Maritime safety	2.5	2.8	2.7	3.0	3.4	56%

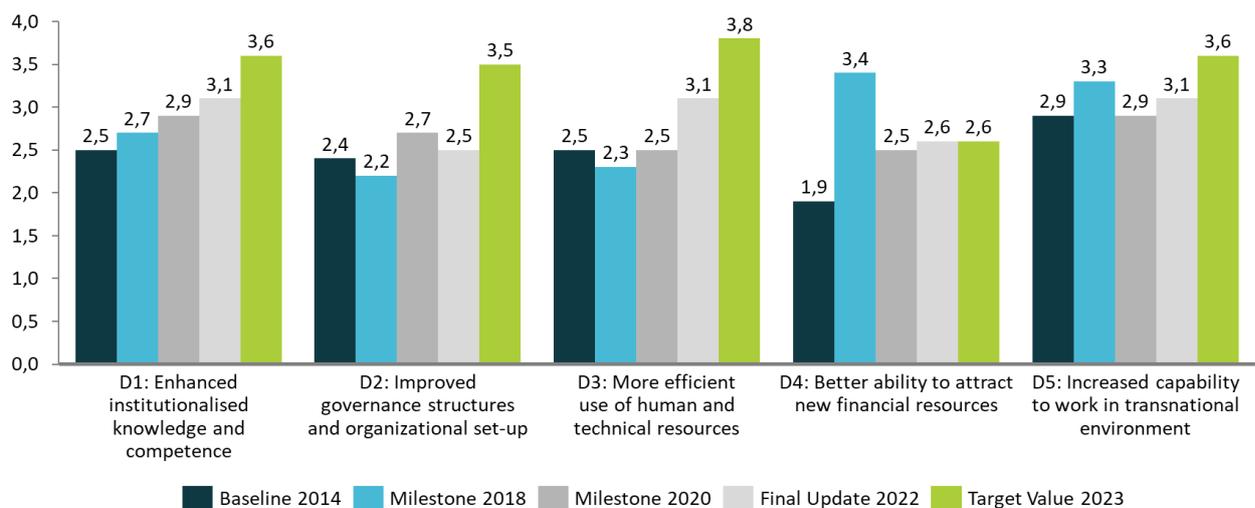
Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The survey for SO 3.2 (Maritime safety) was answered by five experts from five different countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

The final update shows that there has been a steady progress estimating the institutional capacities in the region, reaching 56% progress, and overall experts rate it as satisfactory.

A slight 7% setback comparing indicator values in 2020 and 2022 has happened in Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set up). Although, all other Dimensions are showing positive change compared to 2020 update, overall, only Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) has shown a great progress, reaching the target value. Progress in other dimensions of the institutional capacity remained between 9–55%.

FIGURE 16: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 3.3 MARITIME SAFETY



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 14: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 3.3 (MARITIME SAFETY) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.5	
	Milestone 2018	2.7	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 7%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 55%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	2.2	
	Milestone 2020	2.7	
	Final Update 2022	2.5	Change -7%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 9%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.5	
	Milestone 2018	2.3	
	Milestone 2020	2.5	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 24%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 46%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	1.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.4	
	Milestone 2020	2.5	
	Final Update 2022	2.6	Change 4%
	Target 2023	2.6	Progress 100%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.3	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 7%
	Target 2023	3.6	Progress 29%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

Although the capacity for institutionalised knowledge and competence has experienced steady progress throughout the years, it has reached 55%, hence not reaching the target value.

Overall, experts are satisfied about the existing availability of knowledge in the BSR, highlighting that for all BSR countries the maritime safety is an important subject. However, the most issues are related to utilisation and transfer of this knowledge:

“There is a lot of know-how in the BS region, but also a need to improve the sharing of this knowledge. Additionally, this knowledge is often not used effectively to support decision-making, particularly in high-level.” (an expert)

The expert agreed to this opinion, adding that there are no clear mechanisms to transfer this knowledge, although some projects do have the conferences, seminars etc., however, there is no arena or webstore where stakeholders could interact and find information. Another expert stressed out that the spread of knowledge still depends on personal level:

“Knowledge transfer happens by “accident” and on the basis of personal interest and/or research; if one is “in the loop” by, in particular, personal project contact, one receives invitations to programme/project debrief (“push”); otherwise only “pull” mechanism in place (own research on a more or less regular basis required).” (an expert)

Currently important knowledge stays in research papers, reports, as there are no working mechanisms on how to spread the knowledge and enrich the people not only in the maritime safety field but also in relating areas.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Regarding the governance structures and organisational set up in “Maritime safety” most experts assess the overall situation as satisfactory, however there still is a lot to improve.

Although, the basic structures in the BSR are working well and they are occasionally used, some of the experts express the existing amount of bureaucracy in maritime safety field, which is hampering the overall development:

“The basic settings are quite okay. However, there is still too much pointless bureaucracy in this field and responsibilities are not always clear.” (an expert)

The expert added that countries have their own organisational structures which are used well and in his experienced while collaborating with different BSR countries those have never been an issue, however, these structures do not maintain the sustainability:

“After the end of project, we lose the track of what other countries have achieved. I see the potential in the Programme to be the “glue” for these projects, it would be nice if we still would have the contact, and continuity of the project.” (an expert)

Overall experts express their worries about the continuity not only in project level but in policy level as well, as for some important subjects only few countries in BSR are implementing actions in policy level.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

Some moderate progress has been evaluating efficient use of human and technical resources in maritime safety, reaching 46% progress, and making positive 24% change comparing with 2020 indicator values.

According to observation of some of the experts, the utilisation of human resources was significantly improved during the years, however, due to specifics in the field it may be challenging to maintain specialists:

“(e.g.) A network of experts built in the project is able to perform complicated risk assessments regarding marine munitions, however, the demand of target groups is rather erratic, hence there is a problem to upkeep financing to maintain the experts in the institutions.” (an expert)

One of the experts sees a potential improvement in the use of different kind of digital, technical solutions, such as artificial intelligence, automatisations etc., as it would also help to use the human resources more efficiently. Overall, experts agree that the existing technical solutions in the field are used very well and

efficient, however, the demand on different kind of solutions in maritime safety is growing, therefore also the technical development is an open case.

Regarding the application of time and/or resource saving measures, overall experts are satisfied, attesting the pros made by COVID-19 pandemic:

“Home office and video conferencing much used during the COVID-19 pandemic and have been proven to be persistent so far, this is a substantial improvement as opposed to pre-COVID-19 times.” (an expert)

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Ability to attract new financial resources has made 100% progress, reaching the target value, however, experts see that also in this dimension some important issues need to be addressed.

Although, experts agree that stakeholders in maritime safety industry are open to cooperate, however, the funding and share of the business ideas in some cases may be the issue. One of the experts highlighted:

“Problems that we have faced are linked to limits of EU funds in spatial terms [evaluators explanation: limited use of EU funds in non-urban areas], and requirements of transparency for private sector. That is, they are not interested to share their business ideas.” (an expert)

The expert admitted that issues to get maritime industry onboard may be related to differences in funding also in public sector, as well as regarding to the Programme, e.g., some of the partners get 50% and some 90%, which, on one hand is understandable, as different regions have different financial capabilities, on the other hand, it questions the overall benefits from involvement for the companies and organisations.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The overall institutional capability to work in transnational environment by experts was rated as satisfactory, though making only 29% progress.

The expert express that it was very important to cooperate as in global arena the BSR should share the same opinion and making the value for the industry. However, currently there is a lack of a joint arena for professionals to gather and share the knowledge about the opportunities. Another expert expressed the issue that some of the international collaborations still are based on personal contacts and willingness to cooperate, as well as funding issues as mentioned in previous section:

“An international community dealing with maritime security was formed - with a lot of personal contacts and shared interests. It includes mostly institutions from Finland, Sweden, Germany, Poland and Norway to some extend also Lithuania. Slightly harder cooperation exists in Denmark, who has limited participation in Interreg projects due to financing problems for own contribution.” (an expert)

On the one hand, expert added that cooperation with BSR countries have always been professional and effective, as maritime safety in the region is important subject for all the countries, not only locally in BSR but also in global arena. On the other hand, most of the experts admit, that usually the cooperation happens more ad-hoc than regularly.

3.11. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3.4: ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SHIPPING

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
3.4. Environmentally	2.9	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.8	44%

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
friendly shipping						

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

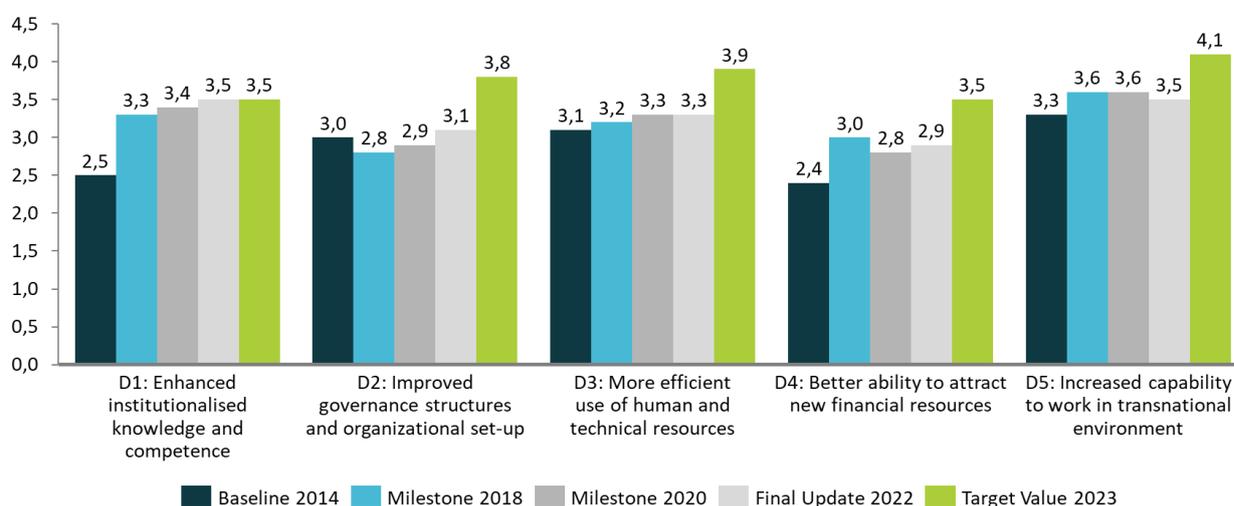
Results for SO 3.4 (Environmentally friendly shipping) are based on responses from five experts in five countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

Overall, there has been a slight increase in the indicator since the 2020 milestone, but the progress towards the target value since 2014 has been too slow, hence only 44% of the growth in institutional capacity has been achieved.

Similarly to previous updates of the capacity building, the picture for each dimension of SO 3.4 shows different patterns. There was slight positive change compared to 2020 update in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence), Dimension 2 (Improved governance structures and organisational set-up) and Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources), whereas no change occurred in Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources) and Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment) witnessed slight deterioration of the score.

Great progress in reaching the target value set to 2023 was made in Dimension 1, which was the only dimension to reach the goal 100%. Progress in other dimensions of the institutional capacity remained between 13–45%.

FIGURE 17: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 3.4 ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SHIPPING



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 15: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 3.4 (ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SHIPPING) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1:	Baseline 2014	2.5	

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	INCREASE (%)/ PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Milestone 2018	3.3	
	Milestone 2020	3.4	
	Final Update 2022	3.5	Change 3%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 100%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	3.0	
	Milestone 2018	2.8	
	Milestone 2020	2.9	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change 7%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 13%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	3.1	
	Milestone 2018	3.2	
	Milestone 2020	3.3	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 0%
	Target 2023	3.9	Progress 25%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.4	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	2.8	
	Final Update 2022	2.9	Change 4%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 45%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	3.3	
	Milestone 2018	3.6	
	Milestone 2020	3.6	
	Final Update 2022	3.5	Change -3%
	Target 2023	4.1	Progress 25%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

The capacity for institutionalised knowledge was the only dimension of SO 3.4, which has made constant progress and reached the target set to 2023.

As the maritime environment is under pressure to fulfil climate goals set by the Commission and national legislation, environmentally friendly shipping becomes more and more important. At the same time new technologies to mitigate emissions of any kind arise and are being improved constantly. This requires knowledge updates to meet learning curves and better fitting new technologies.

The field benefits from a big cluster of experts and research organisations in BSR, so there is a lot of knowledge out there. Information on environmentally friendly shipping is well available on many internet

platforms, which provides very good knowledge to the relevant interest groups active in the maritime sector. There is also significant data base available on different solutions, enabling to launch investment process.

According to an expert, the field also faces some challenges regarding knowledge. The availability of knowledge is a lot about communication between different stakeholders. Not all stakeholders understand each other and find or read the information. The expert proposes that there is a need for directed information to each stakeholder group and to make knowledge available for them based on a previously developed communication plan.

It is not easy to keep track on latest developments and technology availability. Active knowledge transfer is available through many social networks of the relevant interest groups involved in shipping supported by platforms of many public and non-governmental organisations. Sectoral associations and organisations play a key role in knowledge transfer towards the industry and have to be strengthened. The role of research institutions and universities is very important in delivering new solutions, ideally already tested with an industry to ensure they're workable in real-life practice. The cooperation between research institutions and universities is important to deliver solutions that have also been tested with the industry and are therefore workable in real-life practice. But knowledge transfer from research institutions and universities towards the entire industry sector is still lacking behind.

Regarding utilisation of knowledge, there is still room for improvement. According to experts, more work needs to be done on implementation processes and programs. There is a need for tools for informal multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to work better in the collaboration process. Also, knowledge is often used only by narrow group of authorities and stakeholders, also more cooperation and discussions between ecologists and thematic experts should be initiated.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Although there has been a slight positive change in the result indicator detected with the current update, the overall progress of the dimension in moving towards the target value has been very moderate (13%).

Such results are explained by the experts, stating that structures are more or less in place in order to work within one's own organisation, but collaboration structures outside organisational boundaries are less developed. There are few structures that actually include all stakeholders that needs to be involved in an organised way.

According to an expert, there is also a need for applying risk mitigating measures in order to reduce abuse of power, conflicts, unbalance between stakeholders, moving away from sustainable goals, prioritising own interests only, silencing other stakeholders, etc. Regulating or guiding collaboration could also be an alternative.

One of the limitations to utilisation of structures was the lack of human resources. Structures are there, but sufficient staff was missing to deal with challenges in time. At the same time responsibilities are sometimes overlapping between different authorities, which hinders efficient and effective actions.

Another problem referred by an expert regarding the utilisation of structures is a very narrow group of stakeholders, which is a result of low number of new interested members.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

There have occurred no changes in the utilisation of human and technical resources since the update in 2020 and the progress rate towards reaching the target was only 25%.

According to the experts' observations, there was a lack of reliable experts and stakeholders, but the existing human resources in the field of environmentally friendly shipping are utilised quite efficiently. The resources are easily detectable and accessible for those who need them, but the situation may vary in different countries.

To face the challenges regarding more efficient use of human resources, and expert proposes developing better regulated and guided multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Technical resources are well available on the market and are utilised by great number of different users of shipping services according to their capacities and needs.

Although technical resources are accessible for different target groups, sometimes there is lack of updated information or useful applications. Also, the implementation of new solutions may be postponed due to high cost:

As to the application of time- and/or resource-saving measures, the experts confirm, that participants of the shipping sector, where possible, make use of time and resource saving measures, by use of different applications and process improvement measures well available on the market.

One expert proposes that it could be interesting to move from "silo-thinking" to develop ecosystem-based funding/resources. This would mean that resources, funding, etc are planned according to the ecosystem region, not according to administrative boundaries.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

According to the experts' assessment, there has occurred a slight positive change in the ability to attract new financial resources compared to the previous update in 2020. Nevertheless, based on the score of 2022, the dimension was less than halfway (45%) towards reaching the target set for 2023.

Most of the activities in SO 3.4 are funded from public sources, cooperation with business entities was weak.

The private financial resources cannot be attracted due to several reasons. Often this infrastructure is not profitable and authorities or the state have to take care of it itself. Private investments can just be gained if a sufficient ROI (return on investment) can be expected. Start-ups play an increasing role in private investment possibilities, but those often come along with longer times, until a market uptake has been achieved.

An expert proposes, that in order to allocate more private funding, a win-win situation needs to be created. For that, new financial strategies have to be developed, which include target groups and explore win-win collaboration alternatives to attract more private financial resources.

As to public financial resources, they are easier to attract due to regular and frequent project announcements and initiatives. According to some experts, the public sector has better programs, and the public authorities, practitioners and researchers are aware of available funding sources. However, sometimes they exclude several stakeholders from applying. There is a need to widen the possibility of different stakeholders to apply together, as in a multi-stakeholder partnership, otherwise capacity-building and collaborative actions will be reduced.

Main critical aspects highlighted by the experts regarding public funding lie in the long and complicated application processes, which makes the success rate of application low.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

There occurred a slight negative change in the capability to work in transnational environment compared to the update in 2020, which makes the progress rate towards reaching the target value set to 2023 only 25%.

Regardless of the minor setback in the overall score of the dimension, the experts are rather positive in commenting the situation. According to one expert, there are highly qualified experts, who are able to work transnationally, although their number is limited to the demand on the labour market.

Another expert agreed that public authorities, practitioners and researchers possess the knowledge and competences in order to work together with transnational partners. They are able to communicate in a common language and have a profound knowledge of the institutional landscape in and cultural characteristics of other countries. Online meetings cannot substitute physical meeting experiences, which are often hindered by budget restraints.

Due to widely accessible communication platforms, use of transnational contacts is easy. Frequent contacts are mainly based on common projects. Especially Interreg projects support to keep track on the contacts, which change regularly. Without those projects, it's not easy for stakeholders to broaden one's horizons, unless they are active in international working groups anyway.

According to an expert cooperation in different fields of environmentally friendly shipping transnational collaboration takes place widely and intensively. The intensity increases with funding opportunities, otherwise it is more about knowledge exchange, not conducting measures together. Hence, the funding programs play a crucial role as a facilitator.

3.12. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3.5: ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY URBAN MOBILITY

Capacities per Specific Objective	Baseline Value (2014)	Milestone (2018)	Milestone (2020)	Final update (2022)	Target Value (2023)	Progress towards the target value (%)
3.5. Environmentally friendly urban mobility	2.7	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.5	50%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

Results for SO 3.5 (Environmentally friendly urban mobility) are based on responses from six experts in six countries. One interview was conducted with an expert for the respective SO.

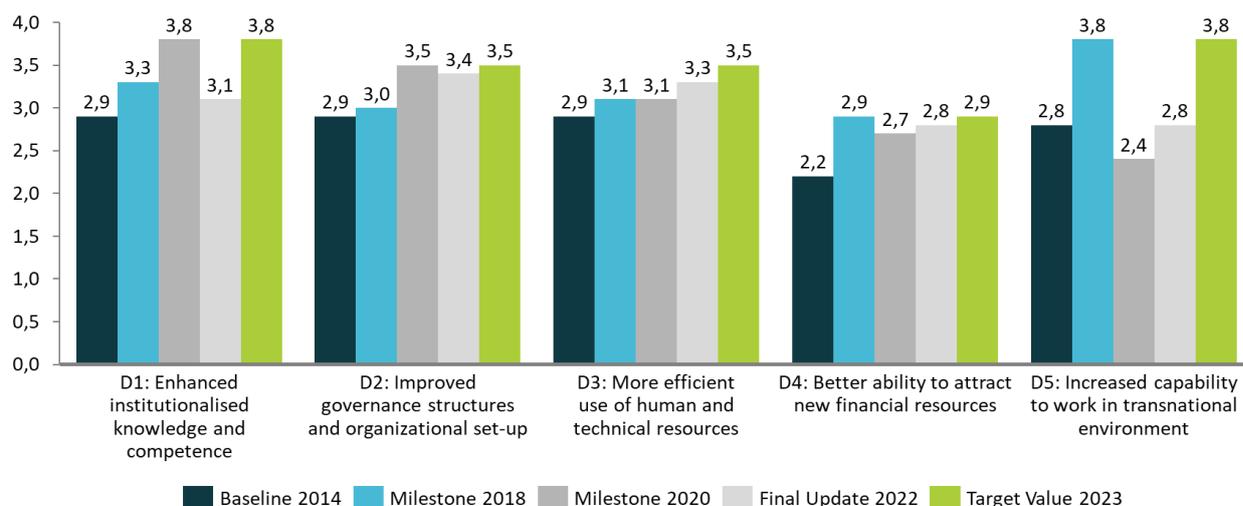
Although the progress of the institutional capacity building in SO 3.5 detected in 2018 was quite promising, the overall score has been decreasing since then, and according to the 2022 update only 50% of the target value has been reached.

Regarding different dimensions of the capacity, there has been notable decrease in the score in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence), which reached the target value already by 2020, but has witnessed a major setback (-18%), and according to the 2022 evaluation was now just slightly above the 2014 baseline level.

Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in transnational environment) shows positive change in the score compared to 2020, nevertheless there was overall 0% of progress compared to the 2014 baseline level due to significant drop in 2020.

Dimensions 2, 3 and 4 have made good progress towards reaching the target values set for 2023. Closest to the goal was Dimension 4 (Better ability to attract new financial resources) with 86% of the target value reached, followed by Dimension 2 ("Improved governance structures and organisational set-up) with 85% of progress.

FIGURE 18: DEVELOPMENT OF VALUES FOR EVERY DIMENSION OF SO 3.5 ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY URBAN MOBILITY



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

TABLE 16: BASELINE AND UPDATED VALUES SUMMARY FOR SO 3.5 (ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY URBAN MOBILITY) PER DIMENSION

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.3	
	Milestone 2020	3.8	
	Final Update 2022	3.1	Change -18%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 22%
DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.0	
	Milestone 2020	3.5	
	Final Update 2022	3.4	Change -3%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 83%
DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources	Baseline 2014	2.9	
	Milestone 2018	3.1	
	Milestone 2020	3.1	
	Final Update 2022	3.3	Change 6%
	Target 2023	3.5	Progress 67%
DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources	Baseline 2014	2.2	
	Milestone 2018	2.9	
	Milestone 2020	2.7	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change 4%

		ESTIMATED VALUE (AVERAGE)	PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE (%)
	Target 2023	2.9	Progress 86%
DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment	Baseline 2014	2.8	
	Milestone 2018	3.8	
	Milestone 2020	2.4	
	Final Update 2022	2.8	Change 17%
	Target 2023	3.8	Progress 0%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

DIMENSION 1 | ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

Very little progress (22%) has been made in the institutionalised knowledge and competence since the baseline value was set in 2014. There has occurred major setback (-18%) in the indicator result in 2022 compared to the previous update in 2020.

According to experts, new technologies from case-to-case challenge planners and no best practice was established yet, however, projects do succeed.

The idea of sustainable urban mobility is well established among larger cities, especially in some countries. The Centre for EU Transport Projects (CEUTP) – is a central government body that supports self-governments with a 2–3-year pilot focused on preparing a new generation of SUMP (Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans).

Regarding knowledge transfer, there are a few networks, otherwise it is individually based. The best transfer is among big cities with relevant knowledge and human resources, supported by academia and foreign cooperation networks. A lack of mechanisms could be seen among smaller towns and rural communes, especially when they do not belong to big urban functional areas.

Knowledge is transferred also through i.e., public transport network and regular meetings/conferences on mobility (such as Kollektivtransportforum/Mobilitet 2022). Also, networks, where stakeholders and research are combined, such as TØIs network for urban transport and development.

DIMENSION 2 | IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

Although there was a slight negative change in the indicator value of the governance structures and organisational set-up in SO 3.5, the capacity of the dimension has been progressing well and has achieved 83% of the target set to 2023.

According to an expert, larger cities present sufficient availability of organisational structures with the relevant capacity to develop, introduce and integrate different strategies and programmes related to sustainable urban mobility. Smaller towns and rural communities lack resources. The solution is to develop strategies for larger areas (i.e., for the functional urban areas), but on the other hand, there is no satisfactory legal framework for metropolitan cooperation.

DIMENSION 3 | MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The capacity of human and technical resources has been slowly but steadily increased since 2014 and has reached 67% of the target set for 2023.

Similarly, to the previous evaluation in 2020, experts observed that in this field, sufficient human resources are available, yet not always efficiently utilised.

“I would say that human resources are often overused. Sustainable urban mobility creates a demand for various experts, which are also attractive to private sector companies. It is challenging

to maintain a good, experienced expert in self-governmental administration when the private sector offers a better salary.” (an expert)

Regarding technical resources, the most critical challenge is data management and integration of different databases. Also, data produced by private operators of shared services are not always available to public bodies.

DIMENSION 4 | BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The capacity to attract new financial resources has made great progress since 2014 and has reached 86% of the target set to 2023.

According to estimations provided by the experts within the online survey, the ability to engage private funding was equal to the ability to engage public funding.

In some countries there was limited ability and willingness to collaborate within the public-private partnership business model.

Road charging scheme in Norway combined with Urban Growth Agreements is important in order to finance large transport projects in the largest cities. In Oslo also co-financing from large Estate Developers occurs, e.g., the new Fornebu Metro line.

DIMENSION 5 | INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The capability to work in transnational environment has made 0% progress since 2014 based on the result of the 2022 evaluation. There was substantial growth in the dimension in 2018 after which the score began to deteriorate and was back on the baseline level again.

According to experts, there are advanced competencies to work transnationally in larger cities, but in smaller towns and communes, lack of human resources and their overuse was a limiting factor. The capability depends also on the network of a particular city. Very efficient collaboration was seen through the Union of Baltic Cities.

3.13. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ON MONITORING THE RESULT INDICATORS

REACHING THE TARGETS PER SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES | The survey results of 2022 indicated that the targeted value set for 2023 was not reached in any of the SOs. Despite the overall positive development of the institutional capacities measured in 2018, half of the SOs showed a decreasing institutional capacity in 2020. According to the analysis in the 2020 update report¹⁰, there were two main explanations for the negative trend:

“First, the changing political landscape in some countries, leading to a lack of continued support to capacity development, and second, that BSR is reaching a ‘glass ceiling’ in the field of institutional capacities.” (2020 update report)

Although the overall picture of the institutional capacity in 2022 showed positive changes compared to the 2020 results, the pace of the increase has been too slow to reach the targeted values set for 2023.

The analysis of the development of the institutional capacities based on the information collected by the online survey and expert interviews showed a differentiated picture for the SOs. There were four SOs to reach more than 50% of the target set to 2023 (Figure 19). The most significant positive progress in comparison to 2014 baseline was observed for SO 1.1 (Research and innovation infrastructure), where 78% of the target value has been reached.

¹⁰ Spatial Foresight (2020): "Update 2020. Final Report: Interreg Baltic Sea Region Monitoring of the state of institutional capacity in the region."

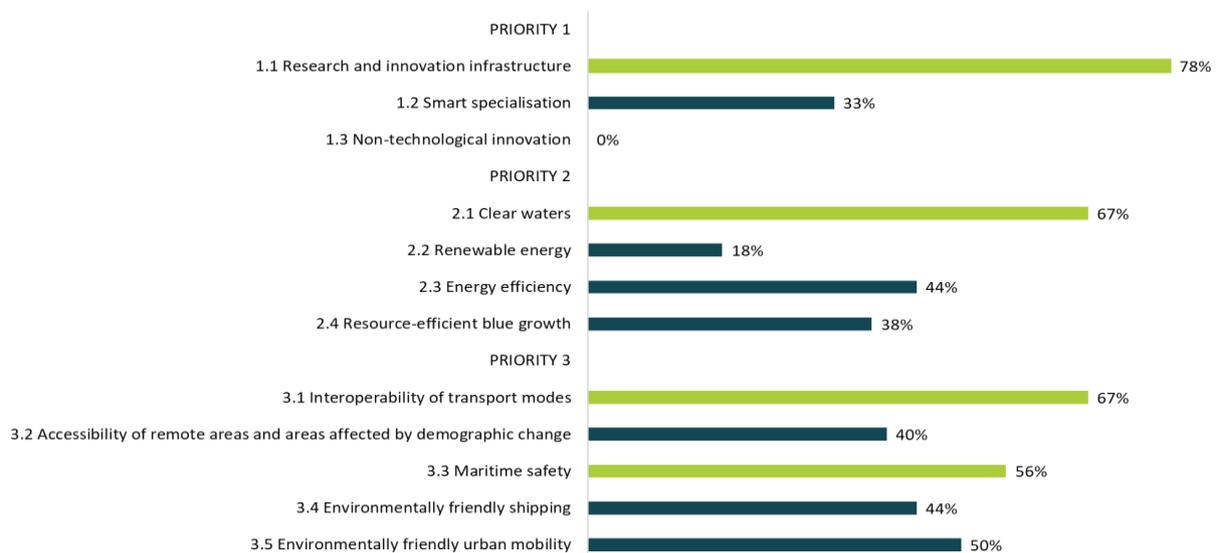
SO 2.1 (Clear waters) and SO 3.1 (Interoperability of transport modes) both reached 67% of the targets set to 2023 and SO 3.3 (Maritime safety) reached 56% of the target value.

No progress (0%) in comparison to the 2014 baseline was made in SO 1.3 “Non-technological innovation”. This can be explained with great potential seen in earlier years, which remained unfulfilled due to the fact that many organisations still prefer to invest their knowledge, time and funding rather in technological innovation.

The progress of the rest of the SOs (8 out of 12) towards reaching the goal remained within 18–50% (Table 3). As stated already in the 2020 update survey¹¹, the development of capacities has reached a certain maximum and was now hampered by structural and systemic factors, whereas further increase in capacities was not easy to achieve with a continuation of existing support mechanisms.

Also, COVID-19 pandemic introduced some changes. In one hand, some positive aspects were seen in time and resources measures, as meetings and cooperations were transferred to online mode. On the other hand, it negatively affected some funding possibilities, as in most fields business sector became more cautious on allocating their finances.

FIGURE 19: PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGET VALUE BY SO, 2022 FINAL UPDATE



Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

PROGRESS PER DIMENSIONS

The concept of institutional capacity consisted of five dimensions.¹² As the results from the survey and interviews already from previous assessments have indicated, different dimensions of institutional capacity proved to be challenging for the different specific objectives, even within the same priority area. Also, there were regional differences in the institutional capacity in the Baltic Sea Region and therefore, different measures are needed in different parts of the region.

Comparing progress on the dimension level, most progress on average was seen in Dimension 3 (More efficient use of human and technical resources) and in Dimension 5 (Increased capability to work in

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² DIMENSION 1: Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence; DIMENSION 2: Improved governance structures and organisational set-up; DIMENSION 3: More efficient use of human and technical resources; DIMENSION 4: Better ability to attract new financial resources; DIMENSION 5: Increased capability to work in transnational environment

transnational environment) and least progress was observed in Dimension 1 (Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence).

Further, a more detailed overview of the progress of each SO broken down to the characteristics of the capacity-building.

DIMENSION 1: ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

TABLE 17: ENHANCED INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE, % OF TARGET REACHED

DIMENSION/ SO	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 2.3	SO 2.4	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 3.3	SO 3.4	SO 3.5
Dimension 1	50%	17%	-33%	25%	9%	33%	0%	50%	8%	55%	100%	22%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The first dimension of capacity building was enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence. As described by the baseline study in 2015¹³ the dimension captured the extent to which know-how was available and made accessible (e.g. via mechanisms for knowledge transfer) to the target group and other relevant actors and whether that knowhow was absorbed and used in a sufficient way. The target situation was described as making better use of the existing mechanisms and tools for knowledge transfer and a better involvement of academia and private companies.

The target value set for this dimension was fully reached only by SO 3.4 (Environmentally friendly shipping). As the maritime environment is under pressure to fulfil climate goals, it causes the need to create new technologies to mitigate emissions, which requires knowledge updates. According to an expert, the field benefits from a big cluster of experts and research organisations in the BSR, so there is a lot of knowledge in the field, which is made available on various internet platforms to the relevant interest groups active in the maritime sector.

The result indicator was back on the level of the 2014 baseline in SO 2.4 (Resource-efficient blue growth). The main bottlenecks identified by the experts for the utilisation of knowledge among organisations were public procedures such as licencing, research institutions holding back data and information until published in peer-reviewed journals and lack of financial resources and know-how in the public sector for collaboration with the private sector. The experts also emphasised the need for building coherent (social) networks for knowledge transfer.

The negative result (-33% compared to 2014 baseline value) in SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) could be caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected person-to-person knowledge as it is an important factor for knowledge transfer and utilisation in the field.

Overall, there was a challenge to transfer knowledge in different levels, e.g., state and municipality levels. Municipalities do not have strong connections with majority of research institutions except the local ones, therefore the knowledge is accumulated in certain level and not spread further. Also, the best transfer was rather among big cities with relevant knowledge and human resources, whereas in smaller towns and rural communes lack of mechanisms could be seen.

¹³ Ramboll Management (2015): “Final Report: Analysis of projects in 2007–2013 and setting baselines and targets for the indicators 2014–2020”

DIMENSION 2: IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP

TABLE 18: IMPROVED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP, % OF TARGET REACHED

DIMENSION/ SO	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 2.3	SO 2.4	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 3.3	SO 3.4	SO 3.5
Dimension 2	120%	33%	0%	60%	18%	38%	33%	75%	60%	9%	13%	83%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The second dimension was governance structures and organisational set-up. According to the baseline study the dimension captured the extent to which the creation or redesign of organisational structures and committees, or the institutionalisation of regular encounters, such as in meetings or workshops had taken place. The target situation was described as having reached a higher level of coordination between institutions in order to make better use of the organisational structures.

The dimension improved the most in SO 1.1 (Research and innovation infrastructure) achieving 120% progress. The experts say that overall situation improved due to successful and long-term collaboration.

Experts evaluate the overall availability of organisational structures as good, however, there can be seen some differences among the BSR countries. In some countries there are already established good organisational structures and in other countries the necessary changes are happening. The structures differ also based on culture, language and work ethics making it easier to collaborate within structures in the regions (e.g., Baltic countries, Nordic countries) with similar backgrounds.

In general, there were well working organisational structures in the BSR countries (such as meetings, workshops, also communication platforms between public bodies, researchers, experts, and companies), but the experts stressed the need to focus on the sustainability of structures as some organisational structures were limited to project duration periods, which took away the continuity of the set-up.

DIMENSION 3: MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

TABLE 19: MORE EFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES, % OF TARGET REACHED

DIMENSION/ SO	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 2.3	SO 2.4	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 3.3	SO 3.4	SO 3.5
Dimension 3	63%	20%	100%	60%	0%	67%	33%	83%	67%	46%	25%	67%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The third dimension was more efficient use of human and technical resources. As defined by the baseline study the dimension captured the extent to which new time- and/or resource-saving processes, tools, methods, lines of communication, or ways of cooperation have been introduced. These could be databases, software solutions, automatised processes, staff exchanges, etc.

The efficient use of human and technical resources made the most progress among all the Dimensions. The target value set for this dimension was fully reached by SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) and the result indicator had fallen back on the level of the 2014 baseline in SO 2.2 (Renewable energy).

There are a lot of modern technical resources available, for instance databases, e-governance, platforms and software, the development of which have been a strong input into efficiency development. The limitation according to the experts' assessment was that there is missing knowledge of how to access and use existing technical resources.

According to observation of some of the experts, the utilisation of human resources was significantly improved during the years, however, the challenge was to attract and maintain new specialists. Some fields in some countries also experienced high staff rotation, as well as lack of experienced professionals.

Regarding the application of time and/or resource saving measures, overall the experts were satisfied with the substantial technical improvements created during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, the use of video conferences and home office. However, the use of online tools for interaction was not equally convenient for all fields or in all cultures where face-to-face communication is still more suitable, therefore not always do online alternatives provide necessary value.

DIMENSION 4: BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES

TABLE 20: BETTER ABILITY TO ATTRACT NEW FINANCIAL RESOURCES, % OF TARGET REACHED

DIMENSION/ SO	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 2.3	SO 2.4	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 3.3	SO 3.4	SO 3.5
Dimension 4	67%	22%	-117%	20%	56%	43%	44%	0%	-13%	100%	45%	86%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The fourth dimension of capacity building was better ability to attract new financial resources. According to baseline study the dimension captured the extent to which the target group in the region was able to attract external private and public sources of finance, whether knowhow existed about funding sources and application processes, and whether formal funding requirements were met. The target situation was described as having increased the awareness of available external financial resources and also the knowledge on how to access these. Additionally, more public private partnerships have been initiated in order to attract external financial resources.

The capacity to attract new financial resources made great progress since 2014 in SO 3.3 (Maritime safety) reaching the target set for 2023. Major setbacks occurred in SO 1.3 (Non-technological innovation) and SO 3.2 (Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change).

Regarding the ability to attract **external public financial resources**, the experts rated it as satisfactory. According to some experts, the public sector had better programs, and the public authorities, practitioners and researchers were aware of available funding sources. Main critical aspects lie in the long and complicated application processes, which made the success rate of application low.

The ability to attract new **private financial resources** was seen as a significant challenge by the experts. According to several experts, the main difficulty lied in the inability to provide detailed, precise estimates that would inform private stakeholders of the benefits of the investments. Private investments can just be gained if a sufficient ROI (return on investment) can be expected. Start-ups play an increasing role in private investment possibilities, but those often come along with longer times, until a market uptake has been achieved.

Regarding PPP (public-private partnerships) mechanisms authorities, practitioners, and researchers do not yet have a good experience in cooperation and relations with private businesses. The main reason is the risk of possible violation of public and private interests, which creates also fear for utilising PPP mechanisms. In some countries those mechanisms are strongly shadowed by issues related to corruption and transparency.

DIMENSION 5: INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

TABLE 21: INCREASED CAPABILITY TO WORK IN TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, % OF TARGET REACHED

DIMENSION/ SO	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 2.3	SO 2.4	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 3.3	SO 3.4	SO 3.5
Dimension 5	88%	73%	30%	100%	9%	43%	63%	86%	13%	29%	25%	0%

Source: Expert survey on the institutional capacities, 2022

The fifth dimension was increased capability to work in transnational environment which captured the extent to which the target group maintained contacts with persons or institutions in other countries in their relevant thematic fields, had the ability to take part in transnational activities and gained experience working in transnational cooperation. The target situation was described as having enhanced the geographic mobility and having increased international collaboration between companies.

The target value set for this dimension was fully reached by SO 2.1 (Clear waters). Good progress was also made in SO 1.1 (Research and innovation infrastructure) and SO 2.4 (Resource-efficient blue growth), where transnational cooperation has become as inseparable factor in daily work routine for stakeholders.

No progress compared to the established baseline value was made in SO 3.5 (Environmentally friendly urban mobility).

The experts agreed that public authorities, practitioners, and researchers possess the knowledge and competences in order to work together with transnational partners. They are able to communicate in a common language and have profound knowledge of the institutional landscape and cultural characteristics of other countries. Geographical mobility remains a challenge, as travelling is often hindered due to budget restraints, but online meetings cannot always substitute physical meeting experiences.

The capacities appeared to have developed unequally in different target groups. There was advanced knowledge and competences to work together with transnational partners among researchers, practitioners and regional public authorities, but lower in smaller municipal public authorities. Also, there were advanced competencies to work transnationally in larger cities, but in smaller towns and communes, lack of human resources and their overuse were limiting factors.

Overall people understood that international cooperation is a must, and it helps to solve problems, gain new knowledge by seeing how people in other regions deal with different issues.

3.13.1. CONCLUSIONS ON MONITORING THE RESULT INDICATORS

The result indicators were developed as instruments to monitor changes in the Programme region by capturing changes in the situation of institutional capacity during the Programme period 2014–2020.

The final evaluation of the Programme has concluded that the development of capacities reached a certain maximum in 2018 and further increase has slowed down due to structural and systemic factors such as:

- **DIFFICULTY TO ESTABLISH KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER** | In some fields the availability of knowledge differs among public authorities, practitioners, and researchers, which sets barriers to the implementation of knowledge. The longitudinal transfer of knowledge created in different levels, e.g., state and municipality levels, is not working well. Knowledge transfer was also hindered by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in areas, where face-to-face communication remains essential.
- **DIFFERENCES IN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES** | In some countries there are already established good organisational structures, whereas in others the necessary changes are happening. The structures differ also based on culture, language, and work ethics. The set-up of the structures is often limited to the project duration. The differences in governance structures affect the quality of cooperation among partners and the success of the projects, whereas the sustainability of the structures is important for maintaining contacts and developing transnational cooperation.
- **DIFFICULTY TO ATTRACT PRIVATE FUNDING** | Public authorities, practitioners and researchers do not have good connections to private businesses and are not able to identify areas of common interest, as projects often tend to be driven by scientific excellence and not so much by economic interests. The perception and implementation of public-private partnership varies across countries and the model is underused due to obstacles related to transparency and corruption.

- **INEQUALITIES BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF TERRITORIES** | Advanced competences that lead to positive developments are concentrated rather in larger cities and capitals than in smaller municipal public authorities.

Also, COVID-19 pandemic introduced some changes. In one hand, some positive aspects could be seen in time and resources measures, and on the other hand, it negatively affected some funding possibilities.

Overall, the experts were satisfied with the state of institutional capacity, but further increase in capacities with the continuation of existing support mechanisms will be difficult and requires changes in current policies and systems. The potential changes should take into consideration that the above-mentioned challenges differ between specific objectives and countries, therefore different measures or approaches need to be applied.

4. EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME IMPACT

The backbone of the Interreg BSR evaluation was the Theory of Change, which was developed for each SO and also at the Programme level.

GENERAL THEORY OF CHANGE OF INTERREG BSR

The Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme seeks to “strengthen the integrated territorial development and cooperation for a more innovative, better accessible and sustainable Baltic Sea Region.”¹⁴ The Programme finances projects addressing common key challenges and exploiting common opportunities of the region, thus seeking to promote transnational cooperation and integration. The added value of the Interreg BSR is the transnational dimension of the supported actions and investments, as the supported investments target matters which cannot sufficiently be dealt with by one country or two countries but require a joint response from several countries. In line with the Territorial Agenda 2020 of the EU, the Programme follows a place-based approach, i.e., its projects are implemented in both sectoral and territorial contexts.

Interventions are focused on four dimensions, delivered under four priorities, as follows:

- **Capacity for innovation:** Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” finances projects which are intended to improve the strengthening the capacity of the stakeholders in Baltic Sea region in terms of creation and commercialisation of innovation. The priority also aims at supporting the public sector as an innovation driver and enhancing innovation uptake by SMEs. The priority has three specific objectives, targeting: utilisation of the potentials of existing and planned research and innovation infrastructures, capacity-building for smart specialisation strategies and their implementation, and support for non-technological innovation.
- **Efficient management of natural resources:** Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” finances projects which are intended to enhance the capacity of the stakeholders (public authorities and practitioners in the BSR) to improve the environmental status of the BSR waters and to strengthen the resource-efficient growth. Supported projects are expected to produce solutions on four specific objectives: reducing nutrient loads and decreasing discharges of hazardous substances to the Baltic Sea and the regional inland waters; renewable energy; improved energy efficiency; sustainable and resource-efficient blue growth in the Baltic Sea region.
- **Sustainable transport:** Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” covers capacity building measures ensuring more sustainable transport solutions in the region. Reflecting the substantial and complex role of the transport sector in the socio-economic context of the BSR area, the supported projects are expected to cover a broad range of topics, falling under five specific objectives: interoperability of transport modes, accessibility of distant areas and of areas affected by demographic changes, maritime safety and environmental-friendly shipping and environmentally friendly mobility in urban areas.
- **Institutional capacity for macro-regional cooperation:** Priority 4 “Institutional capacity for macro-regional cooperation”¹⁵ finances actions strengthening the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) as well as the implementation of common priorities of the EUSBSR and regional strategies of the partner countries.

At 263 million euros of ERDF dedicated for the entire area, spanning across nine countries, the Interreg BSR resources are limited. Thus, the Programme sought to invest in developing the institutional capacities

¹⁴ Interreg BSR Programme document

¹⁵ Priority 4 is outside the scope of this evaluation

of the target groups, thus triggering a leverage effect on regional development. Improved institutional capacity in the Programme context is understood as:

- 1) Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence.
- 2) Improved governance structures and organisational set-up.
- 3) More efficient use of human and technical resources (databases, technical solutions, small infrastructure etc.).
- 4) Better ability to attract new financial resources.
- 5) Increased capability to work in transnational environment.

The inputs for the interventions took the form of non-refundable grants to fund actions in a wide range of topics, for each SO. Examples of actions included (indicative, non-exhaustive list): improving joint planning, particularly strategic planning; addressing administrative and fiscal barriers; simplifying procedures; harmonising technical, legal, organisational and other aspects; seed/experimental activities; training and exchange of experience between project partners, establishing platforms which help to gather financing; developing and testing innovative solutions through pilot actions. Projects financed under Interreg BSR were encouraged to develop and test new methods and solutions, including new governance and funding models, as well as technological solutions to address the common challenges and valorise the opportunities in the Programme area.

The main project type in the Programme was a regular project. Most of the Programme co-financing was devoted to these projects. To strengthen project results, the Programme offered its projects two other instruments – extension stage and project platforms. The extension stage aimed to verify results of the finalised projects in practical application and/or to realise investments. The instrument of project platforms supported further use of the outcomes of the on-going projects and increasing their visibility, by grouping projects previously financed in specific objectives.

Outputs included newly developed, transferred or adapted products (such as IT systems, platforms), **governance structures, tools** (such as guidelines, methodologies) **processes or strategic documents.** These resulted in learning experiences for the target groups involved in the projects (public and private actors in the Programme area). Projects also developed **communication materials**, such as brochures or even games, for **dissemination and education purposes** and organised numerous **events**, involving a variety of stakeholders.

The supported interventions prompted an increase in the number of cooperation actions between the stakeholders in different countries in the BSR. The Programme intervention logic expected that the learning experiences would lead to an increased institutional capacity of the stakeholders (authorities, public and private actors, research and education institutions NGOs etc.) for generating lasting improvements in the strategic, regulatory and operational fields of their sectors. This increased capacity should allow stakeholders to find/develop and implement optimal solutions and measures for addressing the current and future challenges and valorising opportunities arising in the Programme area.

The outcome of the interventions is that of improving the overall performance of each of the sectors targeted by the Programme. In turn, increased innovation, better environmental conditions and improved transport will lead to visible benefits for citizens and businesses, will create good conditions for sustainable growth and territorial cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Programme expected that the supported interventions would have mature cooperation level¹⁶. Given the extent of the existing transnational cooperation in the BSR, it was expected that projects would focus on defining joint objectives and developing concrete actions, establishing binding commitments of partners and supporting joint implementation of actions. It was also expected that project would have efficient joint management and fulfilment of requirements by each partner.

Based on the Programme document, several assumptions were identified, i.e., preconditions which were necessary for reaching the Programme goal. These preconditions are grouped by the timing when they should have materialised, based on the Programme life cycle (Table 22).

TABLE 22: GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE INTERREG BSR TOC

<p>Preconditions for projects to be implemented and outputs to be produced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The funding conditions were adequate (sufficient/ attractive, timely, accessible, known to potential beneficiaries) B. The partnership had adequate capacity to implement the projects as planned: the partners had adequate financial and technical capacity to implement the projects; the mix of partners (by type) was appropriate to ensure the necessary knowledge and capacity for the projects achieve their goals; different types of organisations had different roles in the capacity building process and in the generalisation and transfer of results from pilot activities. C. Target groups were willing/ motivated to participate in the projects D. The projects' activities were adequate to enable the learning process to develop into institutional capacities and implied mature cooperation levels (4-6) <p>Preconditions for immediate and intermediate results to be achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E. Outputs responded to the needs of the target groups F. Outputs were able to contribute to achieving and maintaining the learning outcomes G. The target groups showed adequate engagement to enable the take on/ use the results of the learning experiences <p>Preconditions for final outcomes and impacts to be achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> H. Project build upon previous experience. Projects considered the achievements, best practices and lessons learned of BSR 2007–2013 projects, to capitalise on their results and improve the outcomes of the 2014–2020 period. I. Appropriate mechanisms were in place to ensure that results from pilot activities are transferred and taken up/ generalised, beyond the location of implementation, including communication activities, involvement of relevant stakeholders (for example as associated organisations), signed commitments etc. J. Synergies and complementarities with other measures were exploited K. Projects sought to support integrated territorial development and place-based approaches. Projects addressed territorial challenges, made use of territorial assets and considered the relevant territorial development policies as far as possible in designing and carrying out their activities.
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The Programme achievements are measured by result indicators in terms of increased institutional capacities of the Programme's target groups, as well as by output indicators quantifying products of the projects and relevant target groups. The Programme's expected result of increased institutional capacities of target groups means that there has been a process of generating and absorbing new knowledge. The 'learning experience' stands for a process of acquiring institutional knowledge in the transnational context

¹⁶ As per Interact scale to measure the degree of cooperation: 1. Meeting: Getting to know each other, learning about motivation, interests, needs, skills, expectations, cultural and structural aspects; 2. Information: Delivering (targeted) exchange of information, building basic cooperation structures and trust, shaping common ideas; 3. Coordination/Representation: Creating a joint partnership structure, first allocation of functions and roles; 4. Strategy/Planning: Defining joint objectives and developing concrete actions; 5. Decision: Binding commitments of partners, partnership agreement; 6. Implementation: Joint implementation of actions, efficient joint management, fulfilment of requirements by each partner.

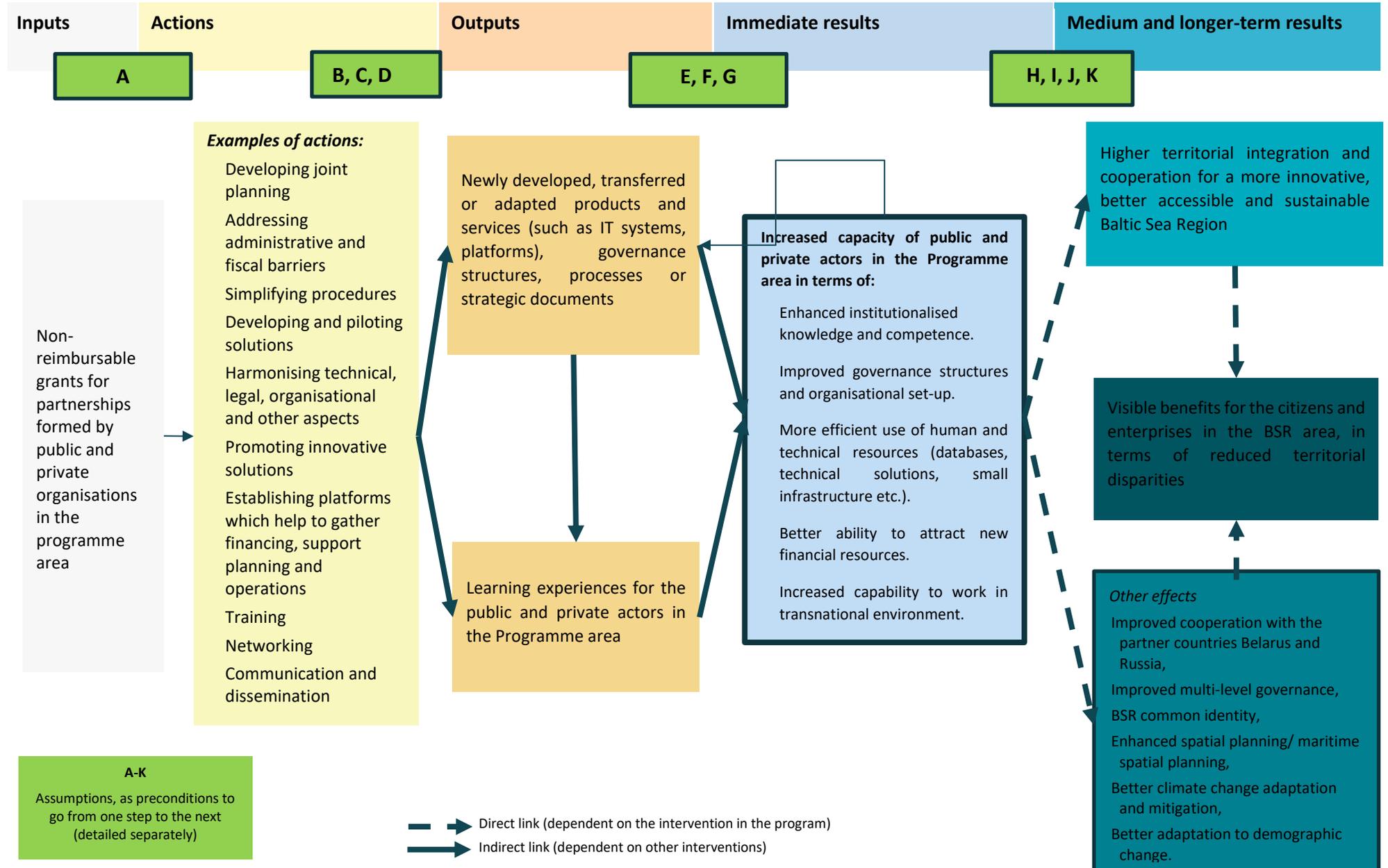
through joint testing, piloting or any other type of demonstration activities related to newly developed, transferred or adapted services, products, structures, processes or strategic documents. Whereas 'documented' means that documentary proofs that such a learning process has occurred have to be in place and available to any interested party. These documents may be strategy documents, products, reports, etc.

All supported projects were expected to contribute to EU horizontal principles. Sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as equality between men and women, are three major horizontal principles that constitute an integral part of EU policy and the Programme. The supported projects had to promote these principles whenever possible. In practical terms, projects had to reflect the horizontal principles of sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women in their activities, outputs and results.

Projects were also encouraged to contribute to a policy area or a horizontal action of the EUSBSR and to the development strategies of the partner countries. Thus, they were expected to maximise the synergies and leverage effects of the Programme on other financing sources for implementation of the Strategy. Alongside the EUSBSR there are development strategies of the partner countries, Norway, Russia and Belarus, which address similar priorities. Projects were supposed to link their scope to these strategies, to support their delivery.

In line with the integrated approach, the Programme sought to integrate one or more of what are known as cross-cutting issues. The contribution to the cross-cutting issues was not obligatory. These cross-cutting issues derive mainly from the horizontal actions of the EUSBSR and refer to: cooperation with the partner countries Belarus and Russia; multi-level governance; BSR common identity; spatial planning/maritime spatial planning; climate change adaptation and mitigation; adaptation to demographic change.

FIGURE 20: GENERAL THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE PROGRAMME



Detailed ToCs were developed for each SO under the three Programme priorities, which can be found in Annex 2 Theory of change. By documentary analysis, interviews with representatives of Programme bodies, survey for beneficiaries and case studies, the assumptions were tested. Thus, the valuable information in respect to the Programme implementation mechanisms and the factors which influenced its performance was collected.

The following chapters have been presented separately in four subtasks and all three priorities were analysed under each subtask. The analysis was based on ToC and the main conclusions are provided at the end of each subtask.

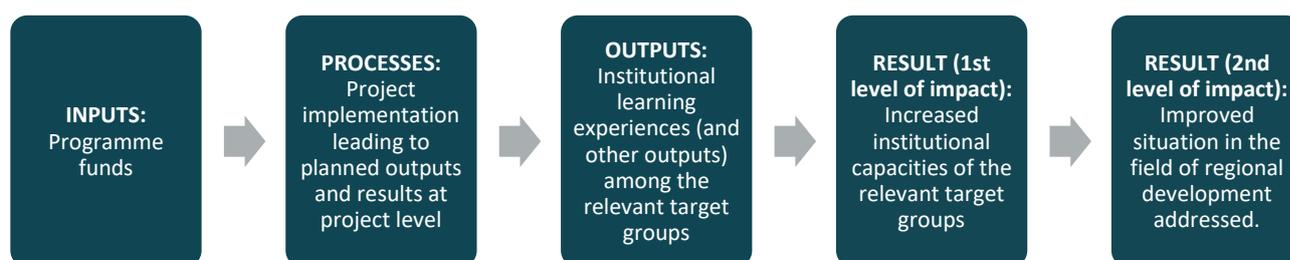
4.1. THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING UNDER PRIORITIES 1–3

INTERVENTION LOGIC

Given the limited resources, the Programme could not carry out large-scale investments. As such, it acted as an enabler, under the assumption that superior institutional capacities of the target groups would lead to increased cooperation and better territorial development outcomes in the region. To develop institutional capacities of the target groups, the Programme sought to contribute to enhancing institutionalised knowledge and competence, improving governance structures and organisational set-up, increasing efficiency of using human and technical resources, improving the ability to attract new financial resources and increasing the capability to work in transnational environment (Figure 21).

Considering the long history and the advanced stage of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, the Programme supported projects that focused on consolidating stages 4-6 of cooperation, namely: defining joint objectives and developing concrete actions, buildings binding commitments and supporting the joint implementation of actions by partners in the region.

FIGURE 21: INTERREG BSR INTERVENTION LOGIC (PRIORITIES 1–3)



Source: Terms of Reference, Interreg BSR 2014–2020 Final Programme evaluation

The mid-term evaluation of the Programme, conducted in 2018¹⁷ showed that Programme implementation was well on track, that outputs and results are highly likely to be produced as planned and that participation in Interreg BSR lead to the generation and adoption of new knowledge by the target groups and beneficiaries. It also concluded that the Programme interventions reached the relevant target groups and whether the outputs and results, observable at that date, lead to institutional learning experiences (See Box 1) among the target groups.

BOX 1: DOCUMENTED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The Programme’s expected result of increased institutional capacities of target groups means that there has been a process of generating new knowledge. The way in which the indicator is formulated, the ‘learning experience’ stands for a process of acquiring institutional knowledge in the transnational context through joint testing, piloting or any other type of demonstration activities related to newly developed, transferred, or adapted services, products, structures, processes, or strategic documents. Whereas ‘documented’ means that documental proofs that such a learning process has occurred have to be in place and available to any interested party. These documents may be strategy documents, products, reports, etc.

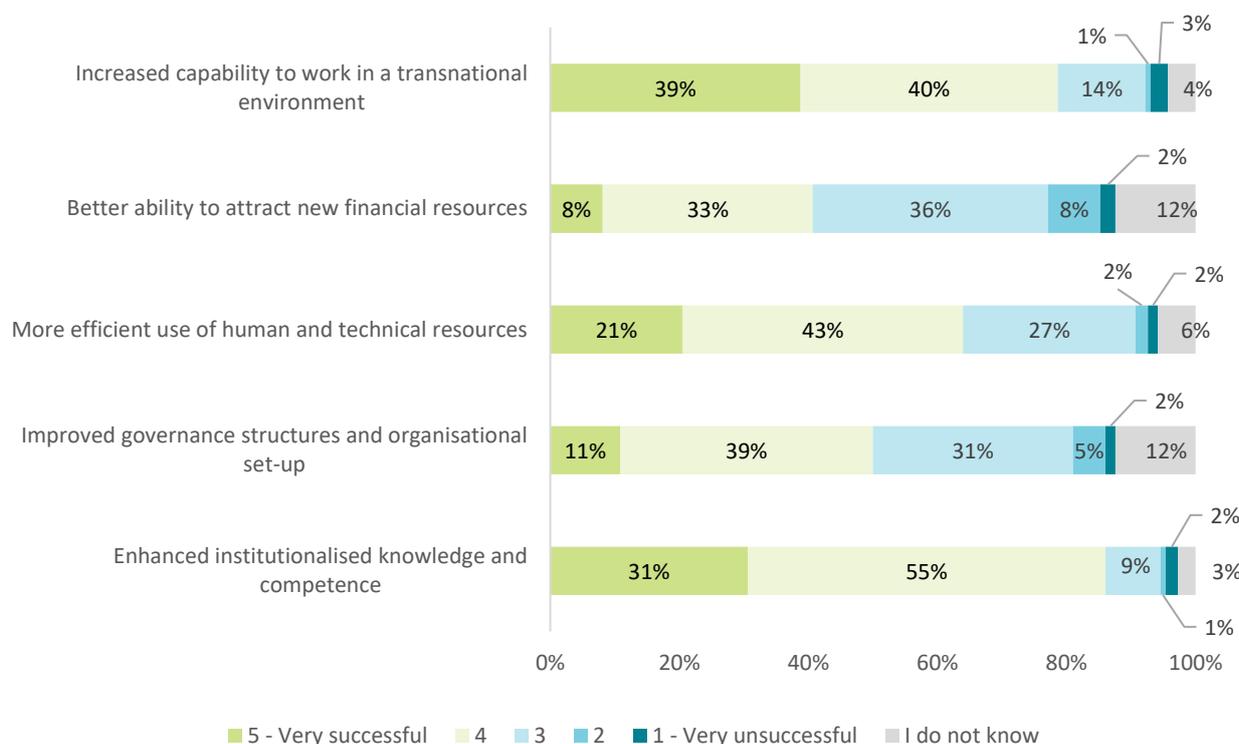
¹⁷BSR midterm evaluation final report available at https://interreg-baltic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2018.12.20_FINAL_BSR_midtermevaluation_finalreport.pdf

Source: Programme documents

As indicated by the progress of result indicators, the largely positive trends captured in 2018 could not be sustained equally across all SOs of the Programme. At the same time, even though the overall measurement of 2022 shows positive changes compared to 2020, the speed at which the changes were produced was insufficient to allow for the Programme targets of 2023 to be reached in any of the SOs (see Figure 21 in previous section).

Nonetheless, the evaluation showed that the Programme interventions produced valuable outputs and results. In fact, 85.06% of the beneficiaries participating in the survey considered that they wouldn't have been able to implement similar activities in absence of the Programme resources. The majority also acknowledged that the projects increased their institutional capacity, by generating institutionalised knowledge and competence (86.05%), increasing their capability to work in a transnational environment (78.68%), improving efficiency of using human and technical resources (63.95%) and improving governance structures and organisational set-up (50.00%). To a lesser extent, the projects also increased the beneficiaries' ability to attract new financial resources (Figure 22).

FIGURE 22: BENEFICIARIES' PERCEPTION ON PROJECTS' CONTRIBUTION TO INCREASING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY % (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Respondents also mentioned that their projects were successful in further exploitation of results produced in individual projects involved in the project platforms or that their project led to enhanced knowledge and behavioural change of the target groups and the end users of the project outcomes.

Beneficiaries (in survey and case studies) confirmed that the uptake of the project results by the target groups was generally good. However, they noted that *“There is always room for improvement.”* and that results that point to a need to change rules, regulations, institutional/organisational arrangements are often very hard to implement. However, beneficiaries acknowledged that this is a general point that all projects have in common - be it EU funded or not EU funded ones.

All information sources (documentary analysis, interviews, survey, case studies) confirmed that, at project level, activities were adequate to deliver documentable learning experiences. The analysis also showed that the supported activities implied mature cooperation levels, most building upon previous collaborations.

SUCCESS FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS

Project beneficiaries and the MA/JS mentioned several success factors in maximising the institutional capacity building process. Among these, partnership is one of the most important, from multiple perspectives as presented below:

- Partners' expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project was mentioned by a little over three quarters (76.74%) of the survey respondents. In addition, motivation was mentioned as essential for internalising the knowledge acquired. Interviews with project partners and the Programme authorities and ESBSR representatives confirmed that common theme-specific expertise and experience enhances knowledge sharing and networking. Also, the case studies showed that the capacity of the lead partner in helping the other partners to define concrete aims and content of the activities is a key factor for success.

"Long lasting cooperation between the partners during different programming periods actually was contributing to results and intensified cooperation during the projects." (MC member)

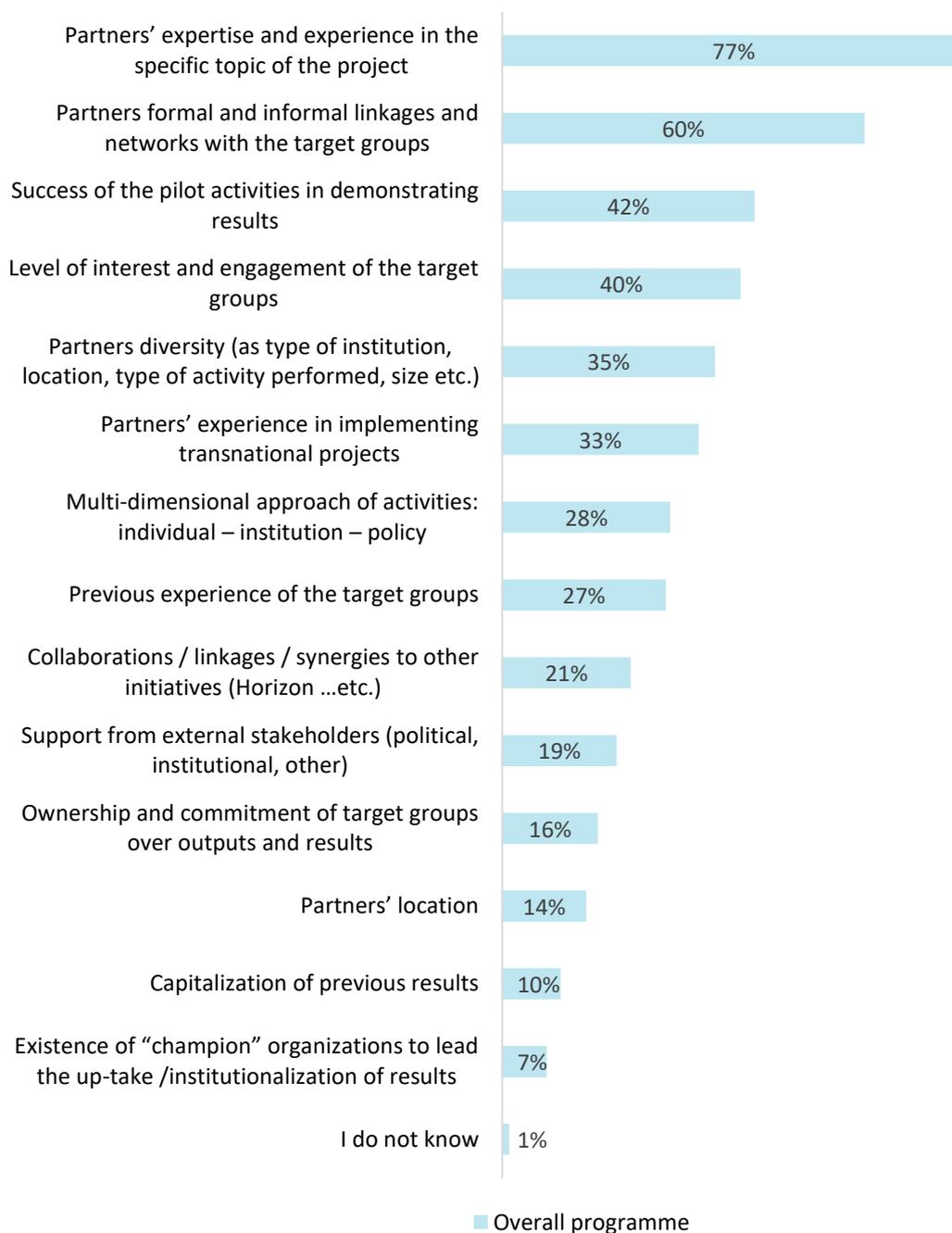
- Partners' formal and informal linkages and networks with the target groups were mentioned by 60% of survey respondents. Interviews with the Programme authorities and the case studies confirmed that having access to the target groups, having previously been connected with them and having a large-enough pool of organisations to potentially engage helped ensure their involvement in the activities, facilitated constructive dialogue and ensured the overall engagement for the uptake of results.
- Having a diverse partnership, in terms of types of institutions, location, type of activity performed, or size is also perceived as a success factor at project level by 35.27% of respondents.

"Success factors are to find the best experts in different countries and areas to work together to solve a common problem, including from the beginning also the people who would benefit from the project results and are supposed to use them in the future. The BSR projects have influenced for this quite well." (EUSBSR representative)

The **level of interest and engagement of the target groups** is another important factor influencing the institutional capacity building process, mentioned by 39.53% of respondents. However, evidence show that this is different among the various target groups. For example, the research community and NGOs were generally perceived as easier to engage than the industry. Beneficiaries also mentioned cases where public authorities could be more difficult to engage by NGOs than by other types for organisations. In other cases, enterprises and economic institutions were perceived as *"not trusting universities, especially in the areas of practical technical and economic knowledge."* This is due to the weak links between universities and industry. On the other side of the spectrum, beneficiaries noted that having a research or education institution in the partnership was an asset, as they provide vital expertise, which would otherwise be unreachable for the target groups.

Other determining factors mentioned were related to the **success of the pilot actions in demonstrating results** (mentioned by 41.86% of respondents) or the **multi-dimensional approach to activities** (mentioned by 28.00%). However, as pointed out during the interviews, it is important that the people participating in the project and benefiting from the capacity-building activities should remain in the institution, to allow for learning and dissemination of the newly acquired knowledge at institutional level. Additional factors mentioned in the beneficiary survey are detailed in Figure 23.

FIGURE 23: FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO MAXIMISING THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS AT THE LEVEL OF THE TARGET GROUPS, OVERALL PROGRAMME (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

In addition, interviews with beneficiaries and MA/JS mentioned the **general public awareness in respect to a topic** as a strong support factor for implementing the projects and consequently, to achieving the expected results. Political support and relevance of the topic for the policy agenda of the region can also support projects and, especially the uptake of results, facilitating actual changes to take place at institutional level. Generally, topics related to green transition in economy and society ranked high in terms of interest, from all stakeholders. As observed in the [GO LNG project](#) case study, the topic was of high interest, but it was challenging for the project partners to reconcile the different policy agendas and approaches to LNG, to build trust and reaching to common solutions.

MA/JS has noted that for the projects to be successful in maximising the institutional capacity building for target groups outside the partnerships, a thorough analysis should be done beforehand in understanding the issue and the need of the target groups. This understanding can come both from performing an analysis before project preparation phase and both from already existing experience, network and connections with the target groups.

MAIN CHALLENGES INFLUENCING THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS

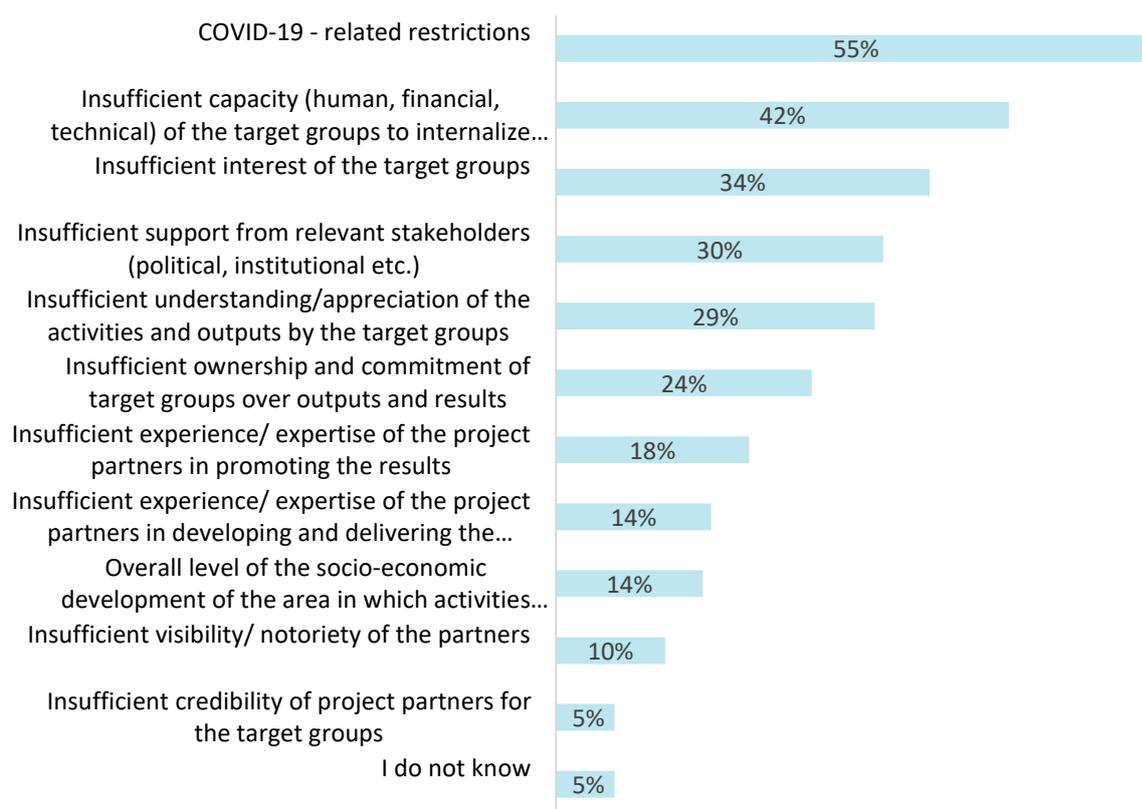
COVID-19-related restrictions stand out as the most important challenge affecting the capacity building process. Many beneficiaries brought out that their planned results were weaker due to restrictions, and they had to make adaptations to their dissemination strategies. Furthermore, the outreach to and engagement of planned target groups was also affected. The impact of COVID-19 restrictions is presented in more detail in Chapter 4.4 about the online shift.

The next factors, as highlighted by the beneficiaries in the survey and confirmed by the interviews, are related to the target group and other stakeholders and refer to:

- Insufficient human, financial and technical capacity of the target groups to internalise the changes / maintain results was mentioned by 42.00% of survey respondents. Financial capacity was particularly mentioned in the case of private entities, which are also subject to state aid rules. Beneficiaries from Norway are also affected by less favourable co-financing conditions. For public authorities, a combination of technical, human and financial constraints is often hindering them to uptake and maintain results. For smaller organisations, the limited capacity prevents them in taking on a leading role in the projects, which affects their chances of gaining more exposure and achieving full potential in terms of capacity growth. In other cases, staff turnover prevents the learning experiences at individual level to be internalised at the level of the organisation. These findings were confirmed by the interviews with the beneficiaries, MA/JS and the MC members.
- Insufficient interest of the target group was mentioned by 34.00% of survey respondents. Interviews confirmed that difficulties in involving the target group in the projects' activities are associated with diminished interest in respect to the outputs and results and, consequently, to less successful institutional capacity building processes taking place for those organisations. These responses reinforce the previous findings in respect to the importance of level of interest and engagement of the target groups for increasing institutional capacity (see previous sub-section, in main support factors).
- Insufficient support (political, institutional etc.) from relevant stakeholders was mentioned by 30.00% of survey respondents and also noted during the interviews. As confirmed by the interviews, engaging the right types of entities in the partnership is essential for the successful uptake of results (see sub-section on the role of project partners, below).

Other challenges are presented in Figure 24.

FIGURE 24: MAIN CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

In addition, interviews also highlighted the **different legal frameworks, systems, and approaches** to the subject of the projects in partner countries as an important factor for the capacity building process. While in the beginning of the projects this may not pose significant challenges, the longer the project lasted the more differences the partners found, which made the implementation more complicated and, consequently, it was more difficult to deliver effective results.

“Results that point to a need to change rules, regulations, and institutional/organisational arrangements are often very hard to implement. This is a general point that all projects have in common [not only those funded through Interreg].” (a beneficiary)

Moreover, beneficiaries and MA/JS pointed out that some projects have had great ambitions but did **not devote enough time in communicating and working properly with the target groups**. Certain target groups needed more time to be involved than others, such as businesses and youth. Project beneficiaries were not always ready to involve the target groups from the beginning to see whether their proposed plan matches the needs, and this has also affected the capacity building process. This led to situations where, for example, *“the technology was too technically limited compared to the target groups’ needs and demands”*, as mentioned by one project partner.

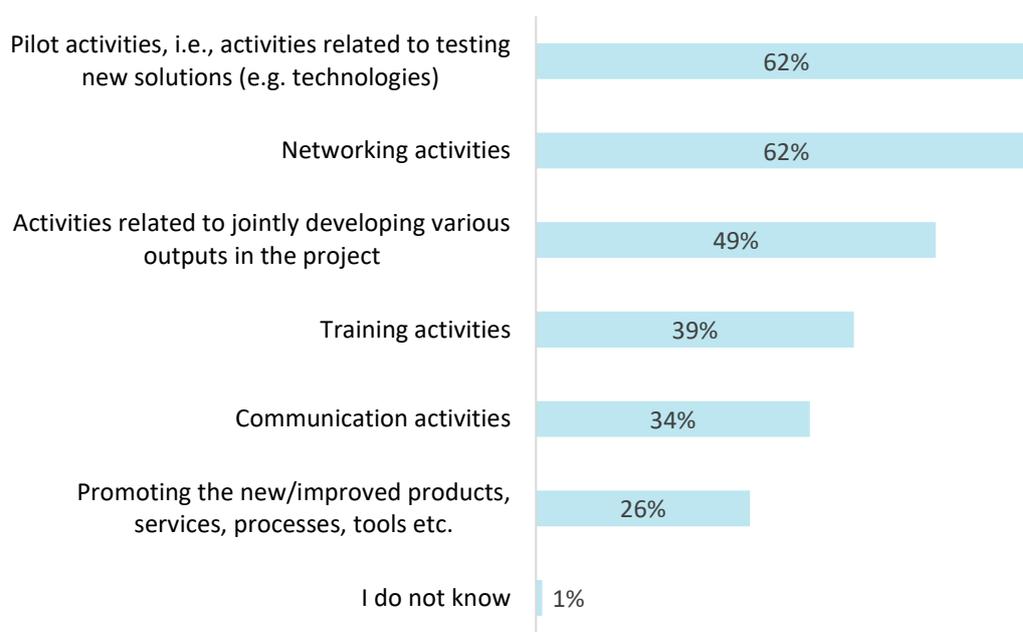
Case studies showed that there were **language barriers**, especially complex topics such as those related to energy or to technical aspects, therefore the partners felt that they could reach only those who speak good English. In some cases, getting access to high level stakeholders like policymakers or SMEs was challenging, but it got easier when the project started to produce interesting outputs.

“Anything to do differently? We could have thought of local conferences – switching from English to a national language. Language is a challenge. We got a lot of attention and outreach, but we only reached people who were fluent in English, therefore leaving out many.” (a beneficiary)

MOST EFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES

Beneficiaries mentioned networking and pilot actions as the most successful in supporting the learning process to develop into institutional capacities. In addition, beneficiaries mentioned activities related to jointly developing various outputs in the project to be useful for increasing institutional capacity (Figure 25). Especially during the interviews project partners have noted that the best and most valuable activities took place in person and the most valuable indeed was networking, sharing knowledge and experience, testing their hypotheses in real life as pilots and of course working together transnationally.

FIGURE 25: TYPE/S OF ACTIVITIES WERE MOST USEFUL FOR INCREASING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Project partners also mentioned that **timing of activities** is very important, particularly when implementing final result activities. The final tool of the project should not be developed in the very last stages of the project, as there is not enough time to test it and disseminate the results properly to the target groups.

Direct approach was also mentioned as one key element for capacity building. For example, municipalities' capacity was increased by directly participating in the projects' activities, but also participating in projects' events. These municipalities who were in direct contact with the projects benefitted the most. Project partners held national stakeholder meetings where they spoke with municipalities, authorities and associated companies and institutions. The workshops worked very well in the learning process.

"The value of creating and maintaining competence networks that continue beyond the end of the project cannot be underestimated." (a beneficiary)

PILOT ACTIONS TRANSFER AND UPTAKE TO OTHER LOCATIONS

Based on the evidence collected from the beneficiary survey and interviews, the main mechanisms contributing to the transfer and uptake of pilot actions are as follows:

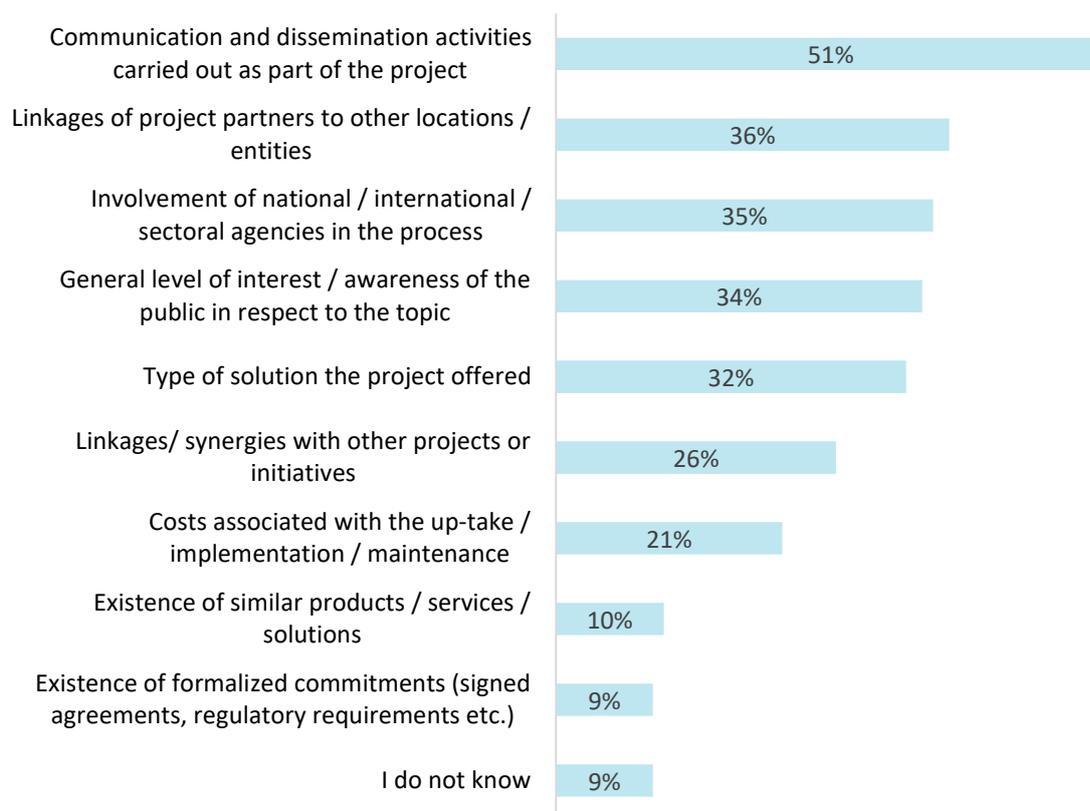
- Communication and dissemination activities carried out as part of the project are most frequently used, being mentioned by 50.75% of respondents. These took place both within the partnership and with other categories of stakeholders. As confirmed by the case studies, they were also most successful and versatile.

“Communication methods were different: storyboards, films, presentations, events in many languages, and many other that are spread among partners and by them – among everyone interested. Also, we promoted the idea of making the green impact. Target groups were citizens, municipalities, policy stakeholders and decision-makers. The strategy was that we told the story about pioneers [in the sector] and about opportunities. The pioneers shared their stories of success. Moreover, we also told municipalities and citizens about taxes, best practices and about negative experiences, as well. In the end, actually, all pilots were successful.” (a beneficiary)

- Linkages of project partners to other locations or entities were pointed out by 36.32% of respondents. Interviews and case studies confirmed that project partners usually reach out to other entities in their network to promote the transfer of piloted solutions. In this context, field visits were beneficial for learning from each other and demonstrating the added value of the solution.
- Involvement of national / international / sectoral agencies in the process was mentioned by 34.83% of respondents. This aspect is particularly applicable for the outputs and results intended to produce changes at policy level.
- The general level of interest or awareness of the public in respect to the topic was considered a contributing factor by 33.83% of respondents. In some cases, the project partners were approached by other entities who were interested in the uptake and transfer of the pilots.

Prior formalised commitment, such as signed agreements or regulatory requirements were least mentioned (8.96%) as being effective in the transfer and uptake of pilot actions’ results (Figure 26). The findings were confirmed by the interviews carried out with the project partners, as part of the case studies, and by the documentary analysis of the projects.

FIGURE 26: TOP 3 FACTORS WHICH WERE CONSIDERED BY PARTICIPANTS THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR THE TRANSFER AND UPTAKE OF PILOTS IN THEIR PROJECTS. OVERALL PROGRAMME, IN % (N=201)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Interviews with MA/JS, MC members and project partners pointed out that pilot activities can be easily communicated to wide audiences, therefore they spread quite well to other locations. However, different countries have different practices and approaches to the topics and legislative frameworks often determine the way in which the result of a pilot activity can be taken up and implemented elsewhere.

“National legislation often hinders the capitalisation of the results. We have a challenge; how can we commit the participating Member States to using the results of the projects more broadly? Somehow, it seems that after having such long experience in Structural Funds (from mainstream programmes since year 1999), we repeat the same projects year after year in the Interreg Family and also in mainstream programmes.” (MC member)

It is worth mentioning that in some projects pilot activities served as a source for knowledge, thus, the pilot goals were not so much place-based, as it was field-based. In some cases, the pilot activities were used to bring together stakeholders from different fields, in order to learn about each other’s needs and requirements. In other cases, the piloting was focused on transnational collaboration and piloting, and resulting in new procedures and documents for international testing. Overall, projects felt that they managed to transfer the knowledge to municipalities and other targets well.

Also, many projects collected a palette of measures or examples of good practices, which can be taken as an example to tackle the problems, and each country can decide which suits the best for them.

ROLE OF PROJECT PARTNERS IN THE IN THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS AND IN THE GENERALISATION AND TRANSFER OF RESULTS FROM PILOT ACTIVITIES

As highlighted previously, partners’ expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project, their formal and informal linkages and networks with the target groups and their diversity were regarded as

particularly important for achieving the projects' objectives. Interviews emphasised the fact that core partnership is usually set-up based on previous collaborations and pre-existing networks, but eventually partners are invited based on the specific needs identified in terms of expertise or location.

Undoubtedly, varied backgrounds of different project partners positively impacted the transfer from pilot activities, not only reaching different kinds of target groups, as partners have different kinds of networks, but also ensuring the necessary expertise from different perspectives:

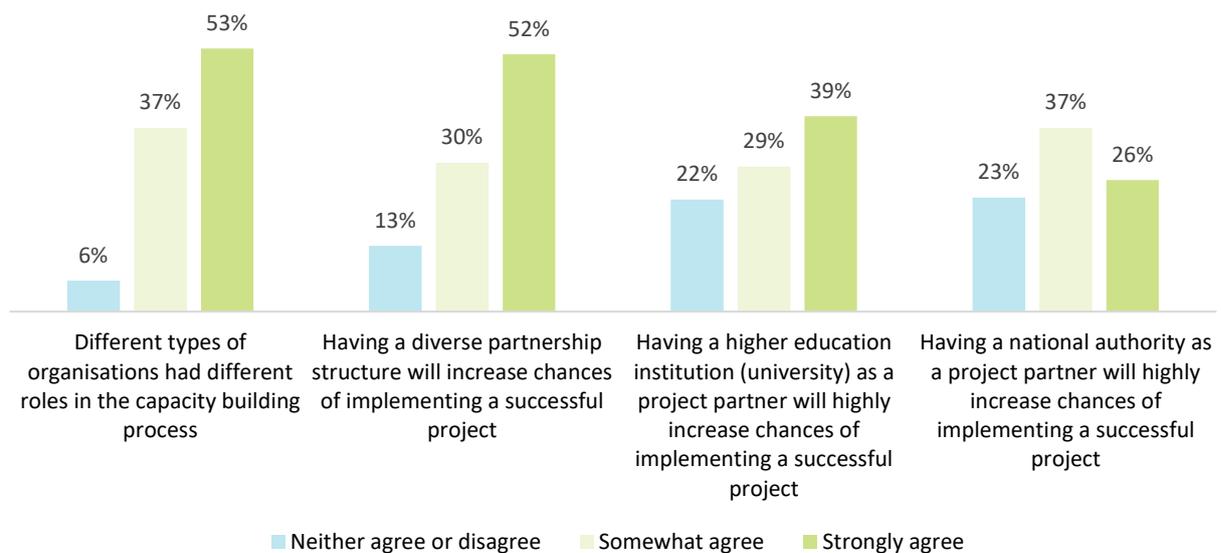
- International organisations, such as HELCOM, are particularly involved in developing high-level proposals and recommendations and supporting their uptake at policy level. It also assumed responsibility for maintaining some of the results (for example [Basemaps](#), web-based tool created in the [Baltic Lines](#) project, that collects Baltic maritime spatial planning decentralised data from official data providers in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden).
- National, regional and local authorities are able to ensure compliance with the regulatory and framework and alignment with wider policy priorities, while also advocating and facilitating for the needed changes to be implemented. Additionally, national organisations have a great role in facilitating the regional policy dialog.
- Local authorities and municipalities are closer to grass-root implementation of the developed solutions, often bear the responsibility to transfer the results in their local plans or processes and are also closest to the citizens. Often, municipalities have the key role in transferring the results from pilot activities and raising awareness among citizens and enterprises.
- Research organisations and higher education institutions are particularly valuable for providing access to knowledge and expertise which would otherwise be unavailable for the target groups, but also for their wide networks and good financial and operational capacity.
- Clusters provide the knowledge and networks of industries
- SMEs in many cases have hands-on experience directly working with target groups

In some projects the capacity building process, such as networking, working with target groups, disseminating the results, working on the project output – these activities were done by all organisations in projects. And as project partners admitted, it not only helped to reach a wider number and more diverse target groups, but also played a significant role increasing the institutional capacities, including working in a transnational environment, as all partners were similarly responsible for implemented activities.

As observed in the [GO LNG](#) case study, the initial project promoters designed the idea, the concrete actions and deliverables and then looked for specific competence. First, they needed research/scientific institutions and universities with relevant knowledge and training infrastructure. Later, they looked for strategy development competence (to design the infrastructure around BSR). Then, organisations which could ensure good access to industry and good knowledge about managing business development process. Finally, they looked for partners that had knowledge about NLG and green solutions. With some partners, they already had previous experience.

In the [CSHIPP](#) project platform case study, research institutions and universities were tasked with research and development activities, but also had project management responsibilities, as they had better capabilities compared to other types of partners, particularly those from the private sector. The latter were, however, essential to the project given their relation to the industry and the end-users.

FIGURE 27: ROLE OF PARTNERS IN THE PROJECTS (% OF TOTAL RESPONSES)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

More than half of the survey respondents (52.71%) confirmed that different types of organisations had different roles in the capacity building process and 51.55% strongly agreed that having a diverse partnership structure will increase chances of implementing a successful project. 39.15% of respondents consider that having a higher education institution (university) as a project partner will highly increase chances of implementing a successful project, while 26.36% have the same opinion about involving a national authority (Figure 27).

According to experts, there still are some challenges in collaboration between research and business sectors, as both “talk in different languages” and have different interests in the field. Therefore, in order to use the full potential of innovation, more focus should be put on relationship building and networking which include both of these sectors.

UNINTENDED EFFECTS

Slightly less than a quarter of respondents (24.02%) percent of the survey respondents experienced unintended effects. These were both positive and negative, as presented below:

- Positive unintended effects were partially determined by the online shift and resulted in wider reach of audience and more exposure, as the information was published online and could be re-watched at a later stage. More details on the online shift are presented in Chapter 4.4. Other positive effects refer to higher than expected appreciation of the outputs produced, the initiation of new project ideas or continuation of collaboration, extension of the network. As observed in the GO NLG case study, partners didn’t expect the project to be so popular and to establish many business partnerships with the industry, including internationally (partnership built up with Chinese LNG cluster, which resulted in visits to fares in Shanghai). Also, business contribution was over the partners’ estimations, in terms of positive feedback received from many companies.
- Negative unintended effects were also associated with the online shift, as some audiences and target groups could not be reached. Other negative effects were rare, as for example, in the case of one project did not yield the output they had expected/hoped for or another project which only discovered during the implementation that their concept had to be adapted in different countries differently.

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In terms of best practices for project implementation, beneficiaries emphasised the need for **strong and experienced leadership**, one which would be “a hands-on actor in the project topic, not just taking care of application process, administration and reporting”, so as to be able to give direction and support to the other partners in relation to technical matters. A common ground for all partners in the beginning of the project was also suggested.

“The project aims, activities and outputs should be more specific already in the application phase: a detailed project plan could be made already for the application, not after the project has already started. This would make each partner more committed early enough for the project aims and activities.” (a beneficiary)

Stakeholders consulted during the evaluation suggested that **it is essential to include partners who are really willing to learn and try new solutions**. This was more often observed in case of extension stages, where partnerships were made based on partners who had the willingness to implement real-life pilots, so these partners joined who really wanted to continue. There are partners who are overwhelmed with their tasks from daily work, thus, they are not able to contribute that much into the capacity building process. Therefore, each partner should assess their capability of contributing to the future.

Also, the projects pointed out that **having too many partners can also be tricky**, as they needed to find a common ground and everyone had their own needs, therefore, less partners would make the work more efficient. Thus, both the Programme authorities and the applicants should critically consider the number of partners.

“Not all partners necessarily all have the same incentive, even if on paper it looks like you do, when you actually get people around the table and you get to know them after six months or whatever, you realise that one of the partners is not going to act as they said they would, they're not going to learn and share, some actors are there for the money, some are just a kind of bystanders. [...] if you want to involve partners, you have to be sure that there's mutual benefit. So maybe some of that has to be thought through, [...], but it was very clear that that was a forced collaboration, they wanted the money, they didn't want anything from the project, they were not interested in the project at all, and we were not interested in the objectives that they were pursuing, because they weren't related to the project at all.” (a beneficiary)

Experts and beneficiaries also suggested that the **participation for private companies should be made more attractive**. Enterprises could be involved stronger to Interreg projects. Private companies don't have much motivation to join the project as they don't want bureaucracy. To provide sustainability **companies could be given a more central role** in the design and implementation of the projects. Special attention should also be given to the **uptake of project results in practice and the commercial focus, by end-users** – businesses, public and private service providers and operators, local authorities, sectoral agencies with regulatory and administrative powers etc. In this respect, interviewers have expressed concerns regarding the risks of having supply-driven projects, mainly pushed forward by research and higher education institutions.

Also, it was pointed out that the Programme should be made **more attractive to new partners** and more new forms of consortiums should be supported. It should be made possible also for smaller organisations to be the lead partners. It was pointed out that the lead partner should be assigned by the competence and expertise, not by the resources.

“It should be a rule of thumb that the lead role in the partnership is assigned based on competencies and experience and is not based on human resource availability. This is essential since the existing system where the lead partners are chosen based on human resource availability excludes small but experienced organisations from the leading roles.” (a beneficiary)

Pilot activities stand out as particularly effective, not only in respect to increasing capacity and producing lasting effects, but also for demonstrating the value of a proposed solution to the relevant interested

parties and to the public. Study visits are also highly effective in building capacity, particularly in areas which require on-site presence.

“I would like to emphasise the great, positive role of study visits and demonstrations of solutions adopted by partners in their cities for the transfer of good practices.” (a beneficiary)

Having **strong coupling to policymakers and providing outputs that serve the policy-making process** was also seen as a good practice. Stakeholders also suggested **further emphasis on capitalising the results** of the implemented projects, for example through a "spin-off" Programme (beneficiary suggestion). This could also be achieved by dedicated calls or by encouraging future beneficiaries to capitalise on previous results, by introducing specific requirements, by giving additional scoring points in project appraisal and by increased promotion and dissemination of the results, by the Programme authorities.

More meetings with international partners e.g., United Nations, UNESCO, The Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) were suggested, for deepening understanding of complexity of impacts and solutions under development and implementation at other continents. There are many topics (for example, toxicology, wastewater) that require prior research to know the situation, therefore, no measures should be done, before information about the need and efficiency is assessed.

“Effective macro-regional cooperation requires four factors: a common perception of interests, a common identity, a well-balanced cooperation method, and the involvement of the EU. Efficient transnational linkages and matching of end users, innovative firms and research partners for team co-creation, and access to other resources such as knowledge and prototyping are critical success factors. Interreg BSR projects provide good examples of this [approach].” (EUSBSR representative)

Dissemination and events in national language are important, because not all interested practitioner are confident with their English. Extending the time of project implementation was sometimes considered necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

EQ 1. Which were the success factors maximising the institutional capacity building process within the project partner organisations and among target groups outside the project partnership? Which were the hindrances setting challenges to the institutional capacity building process? Which type/s of activities supported the learning process to develop into institutional capacities?

The process of institutional capacity building was similar across all priorities. Several factors have contributed to maximising the results, as follows, in order of relevance as derived from the evaluation:

- partners’ expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project, as well as to their motivation to be engaged in the activities.
- partners’ diversity, understood as combining the right types of institutions, from various locations, and relevant expertise, to ensure proper delivery of all project activities. Also, each partner should have a clearly defined and concrete contribution to the project.
- partners’ formal and informal linkages and networks with the target groups
- the level of interest and engagement of the target groups.
- the outreach and engagement strategy to the needs and profile of the target groups
- end-users benefiting from the projects’ outputs and results, the people who participate are anchored to the institution, so as to ensure that results are taken up and integrated in the organisation.

On the negative side, the main hindrances setting challenges to the institutional capacity building process are related to the following aspects:

- engaging the private sector was also mentioned several times as being challenging because this target groups seems to be harder to reach by the project partners.

- involving the target groups in the activities, particularly in the context of the physical distancing measures
- insufficient capacity of the target groups to internalise the changes / maintain results
- insufficient interest of the target groups
- insufficient support from relevant stakeholders.
- the national contexts
- language barriers

Pilot actions and networking activities were mentioned as the most successful activities in supporting the learning process to develop into institutional capacities. In addition, activities related to jointly developing various outputs, as well as trainings, proved to be very useful for increasing institutional capacity.

EQ 2. How were the results of pilot activities in specific locations generalised and transferred? How did the transfer and uptake work in locations other than the one where pilot activities were implemented?

The evaluation showed that the mechanisms contributing to the transfer and uptake of pilot actions largely lay at project level. These are mainly related to the communication and dissemination activities carried out as part of the project. The projects introduced their pilots or other relevant outcomes in online conferences, webinars, or seminars, also only on national level. In addition, projects organised transnational meetings where they evaluated results and compared results.

The linkages of project partners to other locations or entities are also important for the transfer and uptake of results. Involving national / international / sectoral agencies is also helpful for transferring results, but these organisations are either project partners or are part of their networks. Before the COVID-19 restrictions, field visits were regarded as highly beneficial for hands-on knowledge exchange and peer learning.

The evaluation showed that generally the developed pilot actions are relevant for other locations and have a high potential for transferability. However, the national and local contexts need to be considered and are often a barrier against further generalisation.

EQ 3. Did different types of organisations have different roles in the capacity building process and in the generalisation and transfer of results from pilot activities?

The evaluation confirmed that the different types of organisations held different roles in the capacity building process and in the generalisation and transfer of results. By design, projects were required to have a relevant mix of partners, not only from a territorial perspective, but also in terms of expertise, access to target groups and overall leverage for ensuring relevant results.

International organisations were mostly responsible for developing high-level proposals and recommendations and supporting their uptake at policy level. Local authorities and municipalities were involved in the practical implementation of the developed solutions, often bearing the responsibility to transfer the results in their local plans or processes. Research organisations and higher education institutions often assumed leadership roles and also developed the analytical outputs, guidelines or methodologies and delivered the training to the target groups. Private entities ensured hands-on experience and NGOs facilitated access to the target groups and ensured on-the-ground knowledge.

Some activities, including networking, engaging the target groups, disseminating the results or communication were done by all organisations in projects.

EQ 4. Can any possible unintended effect be detected among interventions under priorities 1–3 (in the capacity building process)? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?

The evaluation did not identify significant unintended effects. Most were determined in the context of the COVID-19-related restrictions, for example the faster uptake of digital meeting tools. Generally, the new communication methods have enabled partners to meet more often and to reach wider audiences. However, other target groups were more difficult to reach, and some activities were not as effective.

Other unexpected effects refer to higher than expected recognition and appreciation for the projects, emergence of new opportunities or continuation of collaboration, extension of the partner's networks.

EQ 5. What are the main aspects to be improved, considering the experience of implementing the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the best practices in increasing institutional capacity, that could be used in the 2021–2027 Programme?

In respect to the main aspects to be improved, the evaluation is pointing to the following:

- Research organisations and higher education institutions were prominent as project lead partners, mainly for their financial operational capacity. While this was beneficial for the learning process, the outputs and results were sometimes oriented more towards knowledge creation and less to practical application, which on occasion lead to their being difficult to take-up in practice. It could be useful to encourage more private actors to participate in the projects and to support other organisations, particularly those at regional and local levels to take on leading roles. Potentially, this would contribute to improving the sustainable uptake of results at local level.
- “Outsiders”, namely organisations which are not linked directly to experienced partners are less likely to be able to participate in the Programme, as partnerships are mainly built on previous joint initiatives or collaborations. As such, access to newcomers could be further encouraged, for example in the call instructions, during meetings with potential applicants or even during project appraisal.
- Increased focus should be placed on the transfer, uptake and capitalisation of results. In this respect, extension projects and project platforms have proved useful and can be employed also for the future programme. Additional solutions can be considered, such as dedicated calls for ensuring capitalisation of results or for promoting synergies with other initiatives, by introducing specific requirements or by giving additional scoring points in project appraisal. Mapping and promoting and disseminating results in a systematic manner, in collaboration with other managing bodies and EUSBSR governance structures can be highly effective for maximising institutional capacity building and achieving visible results at the level of the Programme area.

In respect to the best practices to be further employed, the evaluation is indicating the following:

- Involving high-level, international stakeholders had proven effective for achieving results beyond national level. Such practices should be maintained and strengthened, including by actions carried out directly by the Programme authorities. These could include organisation of thematic meetings between project partners and international organisations, provision of information and awareness raising etc. Potentially, this would contribute to improving the governance structures and organisational set-up at macro-regional level.
- Pilot activities have been highlighted as remarkably successful, from multiple perspectives. The evaluation agrees with the Programme authorities that their inclusion in future projects should be made compulsory. Study visits should also be encouraged, as a means for exchanging knowledge, building trust, and overcoming cultural barriers.
- The mix of partners was a determining factor, which ensured the necessary knowledge and capacity for the projects achieve their goals. Also, different types of organisations had different roles in the capacity building process and in the generalisation and transfer of results from pilot activities. The requirements in the call documents but also to the guidance provided by the Programme authorities in respect to building a diverse partnership can be considered a good practice, which should be continued.

4.2. THE INFLUENCE OF THE TYPES OF TERRITORY ON PROJECTS

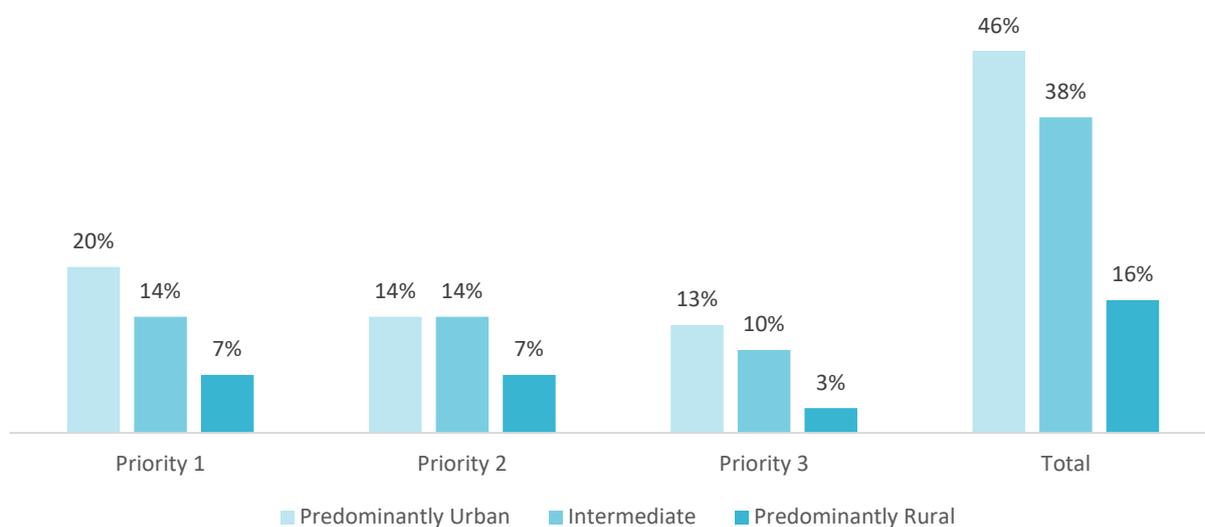
PROJECT PARTNERS TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION

The Programme areas comprises both metropolitan areas (such as Berlin, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, or Warsaw) and rural areas. Regarding the latter, the Programme document specifies that the “settlement structures in the south are denser with most rural areas being in close proximity to a city, while in the northern, and to some degree also in the eastern part of the region, rural regions are often characterised as remote”. The “Territorial typologies manual”¹⁸ was used in order to analyse the share of project partners located in rather economically stronger metropolitan and other central areas, along with the share of project partners located in economically weaker rural areas. The document classifies the territorial typologies in the following three categories¹⁹:

- **Predominantly urban regions**, NUTS level 3 regions where at least 80% of the population live in urban clusters;
- **Intermediate regions**, NUTS level 3 regions where more than 50% but less than 80% of the population live in urban clusters;
- **Predominantly rural regions**, NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50% of the population live in rural grid cells.

Based on these categories, the territorial distribution of the partners showed that they were mainly concentrated in predominantly urban areas (46%), followed by intermediate ones (38%) (Figure 28). Even in SOs which had a more place-based approach, such as SO 3.2 “Accessibility of remote areas and areas affected by demographic change”, partners were located mostly in intermediate type of regions.²⁰

FIGURE 28: TYPES OF TERRITORIES COVERED BY THE PROGRAMME (BY LOCATION OF PARTNERS)



Source: MA Interreg BSR data, authors' processing

In Interreg BSR 2014–2020, the project partners located in economically weaker rural areas represented around 16% of total number of partners. A very limited participation of partners from predominantly rural areas was observed within Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” – with only 1 partner from rural areas in SO

¹⁸ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Territorial typologies manual - urban-rural typology](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Territorial_typologies_manual_-_urban_rural_typology)

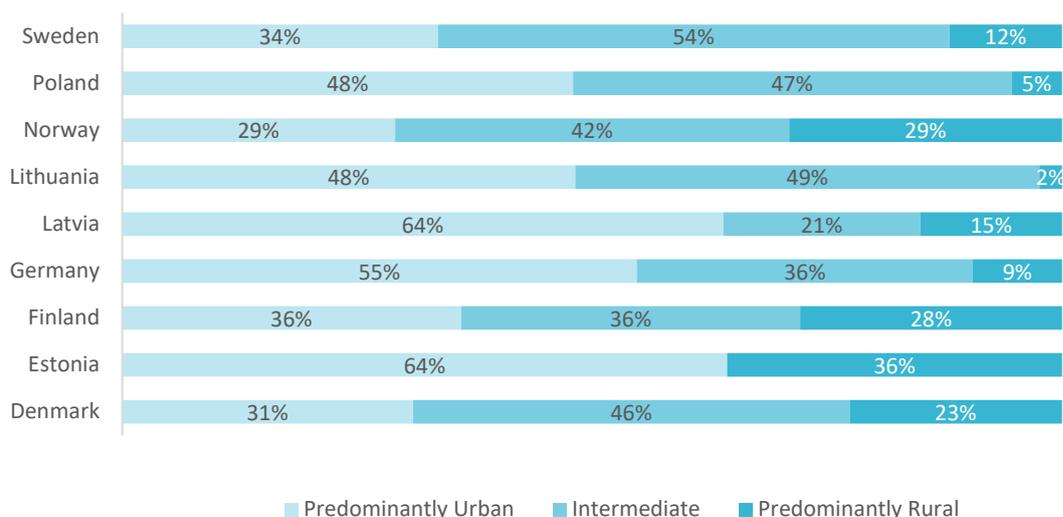
¹⁹ The urban-rural distribution by NUTS 3 region across all countries in the programme area can be accessed here: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=urbanrural.urb_typology&lang=en

²⁰ The analysis doesn't reflect the location of associate partners.

3.3 “Maritime safety”, respectively 2 partners in SO 3.5 “Environmentally friendly urban mobility”. On the other side, Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” attracted the most partners from predominantly urban areas, with no less than 107 partners from urban areas in SO 1.3 “Non-technological innovation”.

The analysis of the location data of the partners from Priorities 1–3, shows quite large discrepancies across countries regarding the involvement of partners from economically weaker rural areas (Figure 29). The countries with the fewest partners in rural areas are Lithuania and Poland. Only 2%, respectively 5% of the partners in these countries come from rural areas. On the other hand, countries such as Estonia, Finland or Norway have succeeded best in involving partners from rural areas. Across them, partners from rural areas represent over 25% of the total partners from each country.

FIGURE 29: SHARE OF PARTNERS IN PREDOMINANTLY URBAN - INTERMEDIATE - PREDOMINANTLY RURAL AREAS (% OF TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTNERS IN EACH COUNTRY)²¹



Source: MA Interreg BSR data, authors' processing

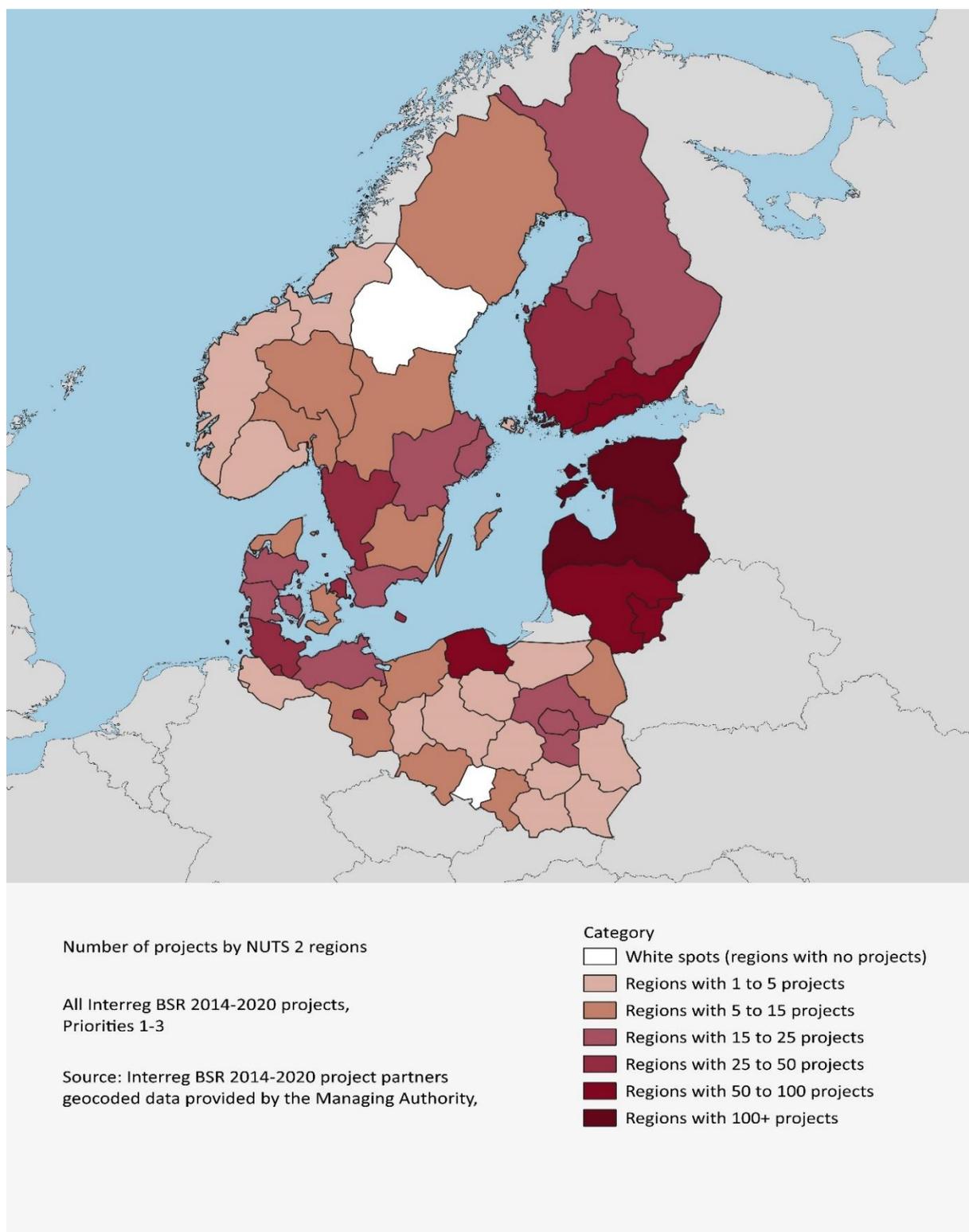
WHITE SPOTS

The white spots are defined as territories from the Programme area which were not involved or targeted in projects. To evaluate the territorial coverage of the Programme, the white spots and the number of projects implemented in the Programme area at NUTS 2 level were analysed (Map 2).

²¹ The percentages must be taken into account in relation to the number of rural, intermediate and urban areas in each country. These can be accessed at

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=urbanrural.urb_typology&lang=en

MAP 2: WHITE SPOTS BY NUTS 2 REGIONS



Source: Interreg BSR 2014–2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS

Except for one region in Poland (Opolskie) and one region in Sweden (Mellersta Norrland), all the other NUTS 2 regions are targeted by at least one project.²² The Opolskie region is composed by one predominantly rural and one intermediate NUTS 3 regions. Also, Mellersta Norrland region is composed by two intermediate regions. Moreover, there are three other regions targeted by only one project – Åland in

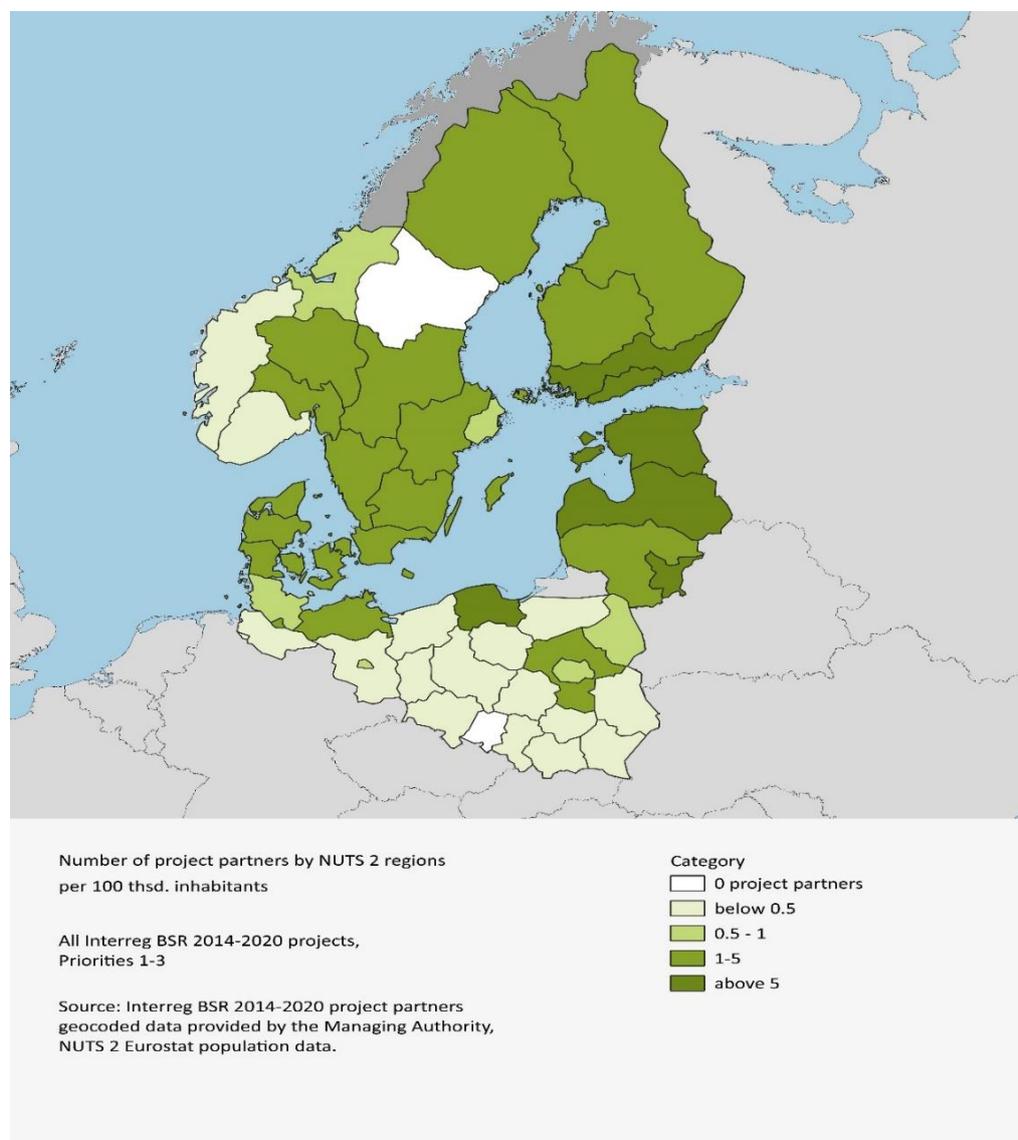
²² Belarus and Russian Federation are excluded from the analysis.

Finland, Lubuskie in Poland, and Vestlandet in Norway. Furthermore, 26 NUTS 2 regions are covered by more than ten projects and 7 regions, including the entire territory of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, are covered by more than 50 projects. On average, each region of the programme area is covered by approx. 25 projects.²³

The regions with limited or no involvement in projects are either regions with a rather low socio-economic development²⁴ (such as Lubuskie Voivodeship and Warminsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship in Poland, or Mellersta Norrland in Sweden) compared to other territories in the same country, or smaller regions, by area and population (e.g. Åland region in Finland, which also has an autonomous status).

The involvement of NUTS 2 regions in projects was also analysed by the number of inhabitants in each region. In this respect, Map 3 illustrates the number of project partners in NUTS 2 regions per 100 thousand inhabitants.

MAP 3: NUMBER OF PROJECT PARTNERS BY NUTS 2 REGIONS PER 100 THOUSAND INHABITANTS



Source: Interreg BSR 2014–2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS

²³ Idem.

²⁴ According to Human Development Index.

Analysing this map, one may observe that most of the regions in Poland had a low percentage of partners in projects relative to their population (below 0.5 partners per 100 thousand inhabitants). The same applies to three regions in Germany (Brandenburg, Bremen and Lüneburg) and two regions in Norway (Agder og Sør-Østlandet and Vestlandet). On the other side, the NUTS 2 regions with the highest rates of partners relative to their population (above 5 partners per 100 thousand inhabitants) are Helsinki-Uusimaa and Etelä-Suomi in Finland, Sostines regionas in Lithuania, Pomoroskie in Poland and Eesti and Latvija (the only NUTS 2 regions of Estonia and Latvia).

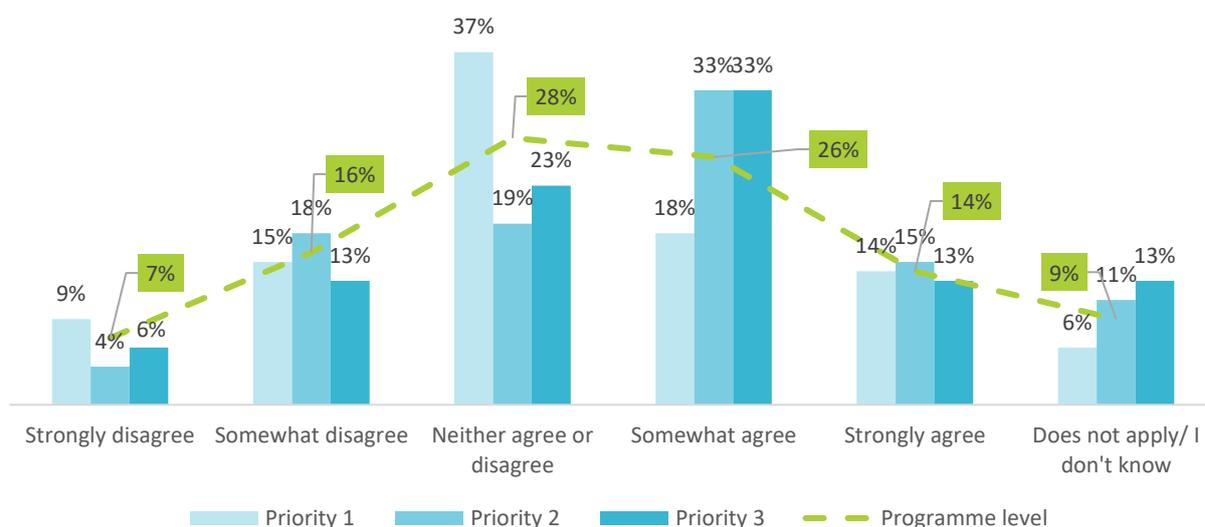
CAUSES FOR UNEVEN TERRITORIAL PARTICIPATION

Although the collected evidence confirms a certain need for a more balanced territorial participation in the Programme, the higher share of partners located in rather economically stronger metropolitan and other central areas is not surprising, considering the degree of urbanisation of the Baltic Sea region. Sure enough, the unequal territorial distribution of partners is also due to the fact that urban/metropolitan areas are where most eligible partners carry out their activity and where the most citizens live in the region.

Nevertheless, the beneficiaries perceive the involvement of partners from economically weaker rural areas more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas. From the total survey respondents, 40% somewhat or strongly agreed that involving partners from economically weaker rural areas in the Interreg BSR projects is more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas. This finding was also validated through the inputs received from the Monitoring Committee members who confirmed that in all the countries in the Programme area, the involvement of partners from economically weaker rural areas was more difficult in their perception, especially because they lacked the necessary human resources and appropriate skills.

At Priority level, within Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” and Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” there is a similar percentage of partners (around 47%) who somewhat or strongly agree that involving partners from economically weaker rural areas in the Interreg BSR projects is more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas (Figure 30). The percentage is considerably lower in the case of Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation”, with only 32% of partners validating this statement.

FIGURE 30: BENEFICIARIES CONSIDERING THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARTNERS FROM ECONOMICALLY WEAKER RURAL AREAS MORE DIFFICULT THAN IN THE CASE OF STRONGER, URBAN AREAS, % (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

A main cause is that project partners perceive a relatively high administrative burden in respect to implementing Interreg BSR projects, underlying the need for sufficient administrative capacity (financial, technical) to participate in the projects. Moreover, the partners also emphasised the partners’ expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project and their formal and informal networks with the target

groups, as the main factors contributing to maximising the institutional capacity building process at the level of the target groups.²⁵ However, the interviewed stakeholders also confirmed that partners from economically weaker rural areas usually have limited human resources available and often lack the proper competences (including English language knowledge, or international cooperation and diplomacy skills) and linkages with relevant target groups. In this context, the low involvement of partners from predominantly rural areas is an effect of their limited administrative capacity and connectivity to relevant networks and stakeholders.

On the other hand, there are no strong evidence to confirm that the implementation of pilot activities in economically weaker rural areas is more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas. The qualitative data gathered in this regard are confirmed by the partners' responses to the survey, showing a relatively evenly distributed opinions – 32% of the partners agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: *“Implementing pilot activities in economically weaker rural areas is more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas”*. For the same statement, 30% of the respondents neither agreed or disagreed, while 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

In the case of regular projects, it turned out that involving partners and target groups from economically weaker rural areas is generally more time consuming and resource intensive for lead partners, than in the case of urban areas. This is especially valid in the case of stakeholders from the private sector, or in the case of interest groups (including NGOs), which are usually more difficult to identify and engage in institutional capacity building activities. Therefore, the lead partners might often reach out to known partners from larger and more developed urban areas, streamlining the partnership building process.

THE IMPACT OF TERRITORIALITY

Analysing the impact of territoriality on the design and implementation of projects, we can conclude that there is enough evidence to suggest that the location of the project partners has influenced the topics and activities in the projects.

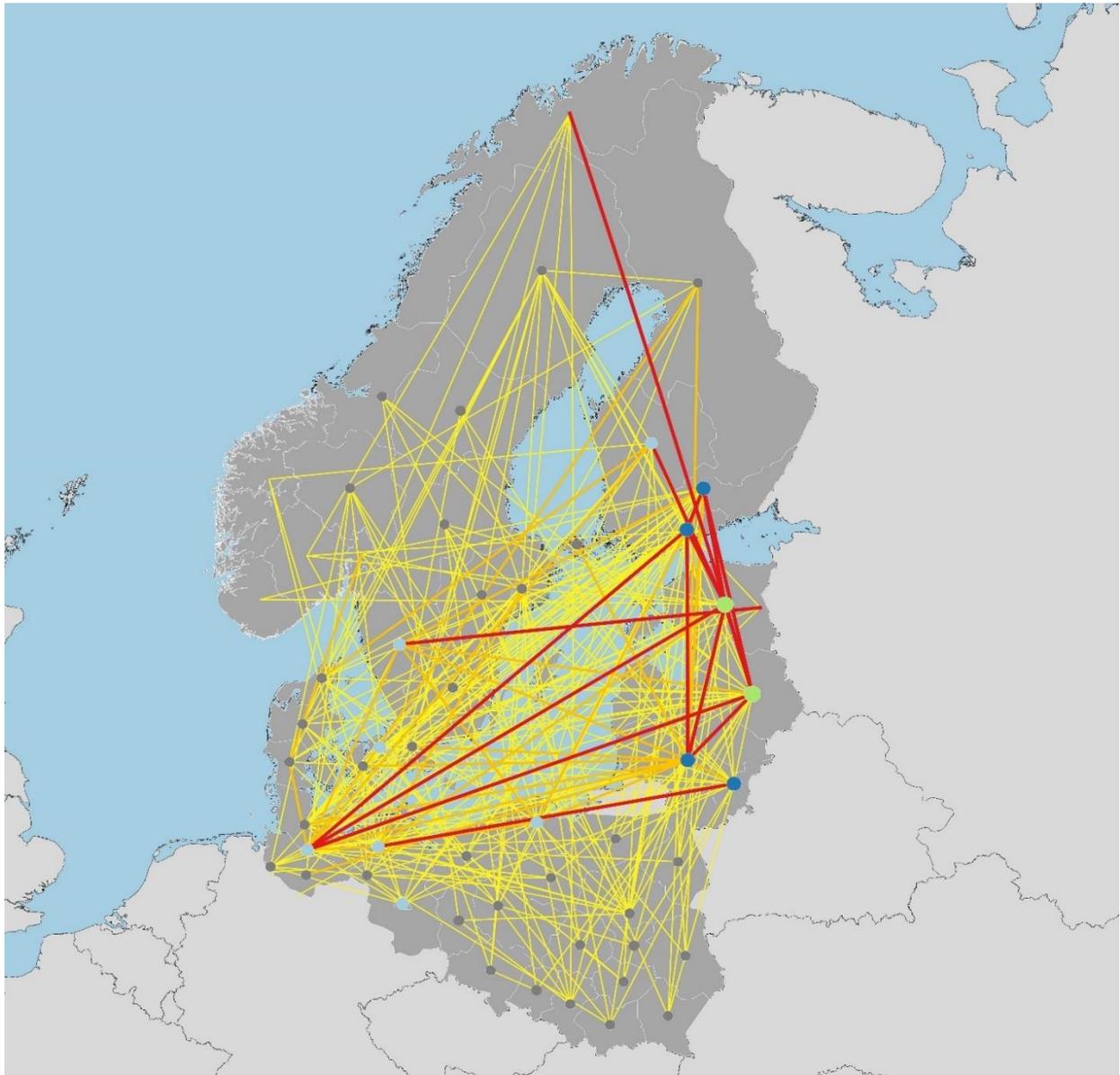
A clustering tendency was observed among partners located in geographical proximity, often having previous collaborations, common interests and similar expertise. Regarding the design of the interventions and the topics addressed, it is observed that shared interests among partners were often generated by geographical proximity and traditional ties. In this context, it was noticed that some countries or regions have a particular interest in certain issues – for example, partners from Nordic countries had a particular interest in circular economy and blue growth projects, while those in Poland had a lower expertise and involvement in these fields.

The GIS analysis performed at the Programme level on the intensity of cooperation across projects also confirmed the strong linkages between some NUTS 2 regions.²⁶ Map 4 shows an increased intensity of cooperation between the following regions: DE60 Hamburg, DE80 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, EE00 Eesti, FI1B Helsinki-Uusimaa, FI1C Etelä-Suomi, LT01 Sostines regionas, LT02 Vidurio ir vakaru Lietuvos regionas, LV00 Latvija, SE23 Västsverige and NO07 Nord-Norge.

²⁵ The survey results show that the “Partners’ expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project” is the main factor contributing to maximising the institutional capacity building process, with 77% of partners selecting this factor, followed by the “Partners formal and informal linkages and networks with the target groups”, selected by 60% of respondents.

²⁶ A similar analysis for each of the three priorities may be found in Appendix at the end of the report.

MAP 4: INTENSITY OF COOPERATION ACROSS PROJECTS AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL (PRIORITY 1–3)



Intensity of cooperation across projects
by NUTS 2 regions
All Interreg BSR 2014-2020 projects
Programme level

Source: Interreg BSR 2014-2020 project
partners geocoded data provided by the
Managing Authority

Category

- High intensity
- Medium intensity
- Low intensity

Number of project partners

- 1 - 25
- 25 - 50
- 50 - 100
- above 100

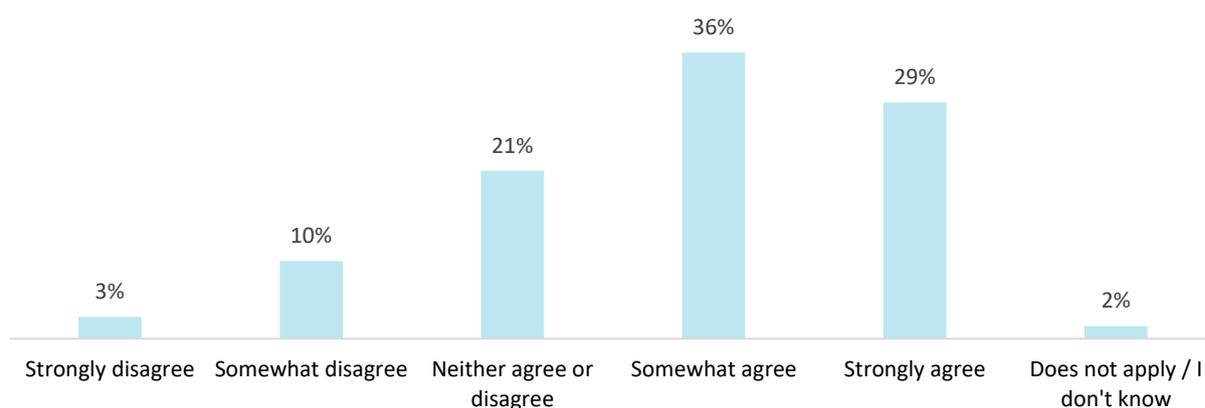
Source: Interreg BSR 2014–2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS

However, the involvement of partners or regions from less economically developed areas and with less expertise seems to be key for the objective of developing the institutional capacities. In some cases, where the topics were rather new for partners from certain regions, they were initially reluctant to take over or implement certain solutions developed in projects, given their lack of necessary expertise. However, although the economic reasons sometimes held the partners from less developed regions back, with the new developed outputs and solutions initially perceived as risky, these partners eventually became familiar with the new topics and enhanced their expertise.

On a different note, the partners' awareness and knowledge about the socio-economic context, market readiness and local demand, or the quality and availability of the necessary data/information for implementing a project, may differ greatly from one region to another. This is also valid in the case of target groups and end users, whose engagement in project activities can vary a lot among different countries or regions. In this context, the same activities may end up not having the same outcomes and impacts in different places. Therefore, the project design should be based on solid background research and a mapping of the current situation and interest in the specific sector addressed by the project, in its entire geographical area.

The strong link between the partners location and project design (Figure 31) was also confirmed by the survey results. More than a half of the survey respondents (65%) have confirmed that the location of the project partners (in terms of country, region and/or its respective level of economic development) influenced the choice of topics and activities in projects.

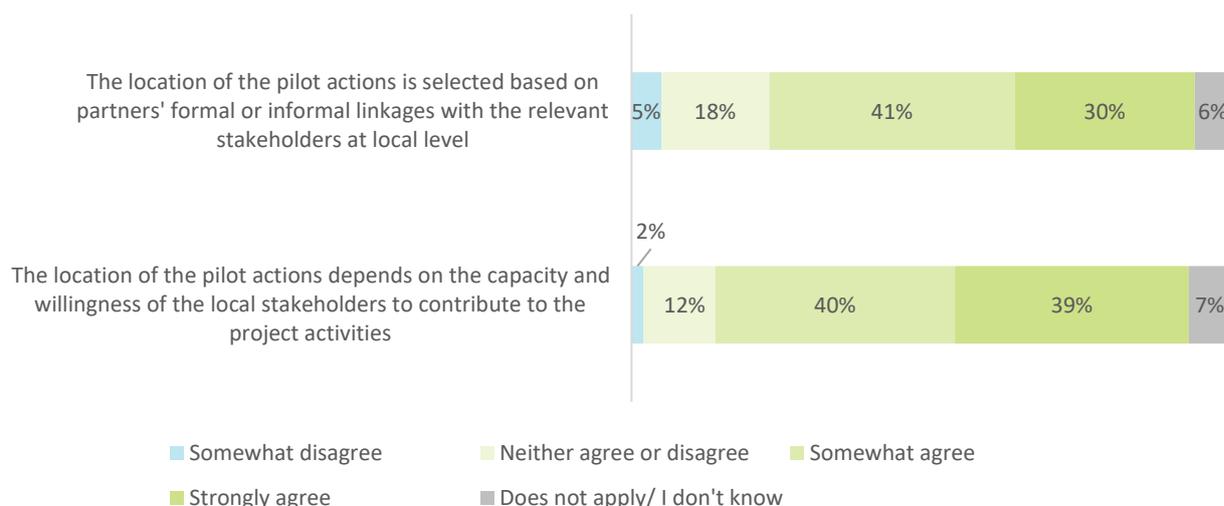
FIGURE 31: INFLUENCE OF PARTNER LOCATION ON PROJECT DESIGN (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

The beneficiary survey also suggested a strong link between the location of the pilot actions and the capacity and commitment of the local stakeholders (Figure 32). Likewise, there appears to be a strong link between the partners' formal or informal linkages with the relevant stakeholders at local level and the locations selected for the pilot. These aspects have most likely contributed to the successful implementation of the pilot actions.

FIGURE 32: INFLUENCE OF LOCATION ON PILOT ACTIONS (N=211)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

The findings in the beneficiary survey related to pilot actions could be also validated through the case studies. For example, in the case of Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” project Sohjoa Last Mile (initial Sohjoa Baltic project and extension), pilot actions were implemented in three locations: Kongsberg Municipality and TalTech had previous experience in pilot implementation on a larger scale while the City of Gdansk had previously implemented a small-scale pilot. All three municipalities had been very interested to engage in the project and had previously collaborated with at least some of the project partners.

Other evidence collected through the survey seems to suggest that, in cases where the overall administrative structure is more centralised, activities performed by the partners in those areas are stronger aligned to the national policies and priorities and that these partners have less flexibility in respect to their engagement. Moreover, in some instances it seems that the differences between the national administrative processes hindered the project implementation and the institutionalisation of the results.

SUCCESS FACTORS IN INVOLVING ECONOMICALLY WEAKER RURAL AREAS

As mentioned before, the involvement of economically weaker rural areas in the projects allowed them to benefit from up-to-date knowledge and expertise and to implement solutions and actions that otherwise would not have been accessible to them.

As shown by the documentary analysis, interviews and case studies, the engagement of actors from economically weaker rural areas was positively influenced by:

- The territorial focus of projects.** Most of the situations in which the partners from weaker rural areas were successfully involved, occurred in projects designed to address specific needs or problems at the local/ regional level. These seem to have been the most useful types of projects for stakeholders from rural areas, who showed a greater interest in such interventions, and a higher willingness to be involved in project activities. Also, these were the types of projects to which partners from economically weaker rural areas could contribute the most, through their expertise and knowledge at the local level. This type of interventions was more attractive when the projects also included pilot activities, implemented within the economically weaker rural areas. Good examples of such projects are: TENTacle, MAMBA or SEMPRE.
- LinkedIn partner search tool.** The Interreg Baltic Sea Region search tool functioned well in improving the identification and engagement of partners from economically weaker rural areas. This tool allowed the identification and expansion of networks and the identification of suitable partners from rural areas, who otherwise could not have been involved in some projects. In the

light of 2021 – 2027 Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, a new matchmaking platform was established, improving and facilitating even more the partners searching process. In order to ensure further ensure an even more equitable territorial coverage, it is key for this tool to be used and promoted adequately among the beneficiaries. Also, for the constant improvement of the new matchmaking platform, it is important that the beneficiaries can easily and constantly provide feedback regarding its functionality.

- **Previous experience in engaging/ communicating with rural areas stakeholders.** The involvement of economically weaker rural areas also functioned well when the partners (especially the lead partner) had experience in communicating with stakeholders from these areas. Previous experiences and the lessons learned in engaging local level target groups were particularly important for successfully implementing projects at local level. These allowed the partners to know in advance both the challenges in these areas, as well as the most effective communication methods, in order to implement further actions (including pilot actions). In some cases, the previous experience was replaced/complemented by extensive consultations with stakeholders from economically weaker rural areas. One such example is the TENTacle project, which organised a stakeholder dialogue process in various scales (e.g. local, regional, and macro regional level). Following the consultations, which involved over 100 actors in the BSR, the locations for the pilot actions were selected, each representing areas affected by key growth challenges (e.g., low economic competitiveness, depopulation, weak supply chains or peripheral location).

Besides all this, for a better continuity of interventions at the level of economically weaker rural areas, the project activities need to explicitly identify and inspire new actions to ensure that the results can be further capitalised and the impacts to be extended after project finalisation.

TERRITORIAL UNINTENDED EFFECTS

The only unintended effect identified from a territorial perspective refers to the territorial coverage of the programme. According to the territorial data of the partners in Priorities 1–3, the programme also reached other territories outside its area through the partnerships developed within projects. In this respect, it was observed that partners from countries such as the Netherlands (3 partners) or Belgium (1 partner) were also involved in partnerships. However, most of them came from Germany, from other regions outside the programme area (23 partners from 9 NUTS 2 regions).

No specific unintended effects were identified from a territorial perspective. However, the influence of national context (administrative and political) to project design, highlighted previously, could be further explored, to see whether some effects materialised at priority level.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES FOR A FAIR TERRITORIAL IMPACT

Building upon the findings presented above, further efforts could be dedicated to better represent economically weaker regions in the programme. These can be achieved through ensuring an increased retention of partners from rural areas among those who already benefited from funding, and through reaching and attracting new partners, either as project partners or associated organisations. In the case of the latter, the involvement of partners from rural areas as associate organisations in the projects can be highlighted as a best practice for a fair territorial impact, as it allows them to be involved as a target group of the projects, or to carry out certain activities without having the responsibility of implementing major tasks. In this way, the partners from the rural areas were able to encounter the activities and results of the projects, as well as with the working processes within them, which helped them to be better prepared to become partners in future projects.

However, the main lesson learned is that the composition of partners could be focused more on the less developed regions, for a fairer territorial impact. More efforts could be made to increase the participation of local governments, particularly of smaller municipalities, as well as of private companies and NGOs from the rural areas. For this purpose, the Programme points tailored to local problems in combination with an appropriate Programme language (other keywords, other text styles) would have to be developed, which

would make the Programme more comprehensible and thus more recognizable for local representatives. Also, considering the major positive impact of the pilot actions in the less developed rural areas, the following interventions should aim for a greater coverage of these areas by the projects implementing pilot activities.

Another aspect that can be improved is related to the clustering tendency observed when analysing the territoriality impact on the topics and activities in projects. This phenomenon occurred against the background of previous cooperation between partners, as well as on the basis of geographical proximity. Although this tendency will continue to occur naturally, the programme authorities should try to limit it as much as possible, in order to ensure a wider and even more balanced spread of the programme's effects.

On the other side, one of the main best practices identified was the territorial coverage of the programme. Only two white spots were identified at NUTS 2 level and the programme also managed to reach some partners outside its area (from Belgium, Netherlands or from other regions in Germany than those in the programme area).

Another key best practice identified was the implementation of pilot activities in the rural areas. Besides the fact that they were very effective at the local level, their implementation has not proven to be more difficult in rural areas than in urban areas. Carrying out activities in structurally challenged areas is also a means of achieving a fair territorial impact. The implemented projects provide examples of good practices in terms of selecting the most appropriate locations and engaging the local stakeholders. These practices could be promoted by the Programme authorities, for the benefit of future projects.

The transfer of knowledge from urban to rural partners also proved to be very effective when these two types of partners had the chance to cooperate within projects. Sometimes, the partners from urban areas facilitated the uptake of new solutions and tools by the partners from rural areas. The programme authorities should support this type of linkages and to encourage them. One way of doing this might be through the operationalisation and maintenance of the matchmaking platform in the period 2021–2027.

CONCLUSIONS

EQ 6. What is the share of project partners located in rather economically stronger metropolitan and other central areas, and what is the share of project partners located in economically weaker rural areas? Are there white spots, meaning territories which are not involved or targeted in projects? What could be the reasons for eventual uneven participation from different types of territories?

The territorial distribution of projects shows that the majority of the project partners are located in urban and intermediary regions, with only 16% of partners from rural areas. While the involvement of partners from economically weaker rural areas was limited across all Priorities and countries from the Programme area, significant discrepancies exist among them. At Priority level, a particularly low percentage of partners from economically weaker rural areas was observed within Priority 3 'Sustainable transport', while at country level, Lithuania and Poland turned out to be the countries with the fewest partners in rural areas.

Only few NUTS 2 regions in the Programme area are not covered by projects, and these are located in Poland, Finland and Sweden. The white spots, or the regions where a limited number of projects were implemented (1–3 projects) are either less developed regions from a socio-economic point of view, or smaller regions, by area and population (compared to other NUTS 2 regions in the same country).

The lower representation of rural areas is generated primarily by the degree of urbanisation of the Baltic Sea region, with urban/metropolitan areas being those where most eligible partners carry out their activity and where the most citizens live in the region. However, a large part of the surveyed partners (40%) considers that the involvement of partners from economically weaker rural areas is more difficult than in the case of stronger, urban areas.

The insufficient administrative capacity (financial, technical, human) of partners from rural areas to participate in projects, their often lower expertise and experience in project topics, or their limited formal and informal networks and linkages with the target groups, are among the causes for uneven rural - urban participation. Moreover, at least in the case of regular projects, involving partners and target groups from

economically weaker rural areas seems to be generally more time consuming and resource intense for lead partners, than in the case of urban areas.

EQ 7. Did territoriality (location of project partners) impact on the topics and activities in projects?

There is enough evidence to conclude that the location of the project partners had an influence on the topics and activities in the projects. Shared interests among partners were often generated by geographical proximity and traditional ties and a clustering tendency among partners located in geographical proximity was observed.

Also, the activities in some projects end up not having the same outcomes and impacts in different places due to the differences between rural and urban areas, in terms of partners' awareness and knowledge about the socio-economic context, market readiness and local demand, or the quality and availability of the necessary data/information for implementing a project.

Projects have often dedicated a lot of attention to adapting their activities to the local needs and contexts, and several good practices can be extracted in this respect, including in terms of engaging the target groups and consulting the local stakeholders.

In terms of results and impacts, the inclusion in projects of partners from less economically developed areas (usually with less expertise), together with partners from urban more economically developed areas, seems to be key for developing the institutional capacities of the former. These experiences helped the partners from rural areas to get in line with up-to-date knowledge and expertise, and allowed them to participate in pilot actions, which they could not have benefited from without the projects.

EQ 8. Which were the success factors in involving economically weaker rural areas in the projects?

The engagement of partners from economically weaker rural areas was positively influenced by four main factors. Firstly, their engagement was higher in projects designed to address specific needs or problems at the local/ regional level. Secondly, the LinkedIn partner search tool positively influenced the identification and engagement of partners from economically weaker rural areas. The new matchmaking platform to be used in the 2021–2027 period was already identified as very useful by some beneficiaries. Thirdly, one may conclude that the involvement of economically weaker rural areas functioned well when the partners (especially the lead partner) had previous experience in communicating with stakeholders from these areas.

EQ 9. Can any possible territorial unintended effect be detected among interventions under priorities 1–3? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?

No specific unintended effects were identified from a territorial perspective. Although some cases were identified where national contexts had an influence on project design, eventually it can be concluded that they did not generate any unintended effect (positive or negative), neither at project nor at programme level.

EQ 10. What are the main aspects to be improved, considering the experience of implementing the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the best practices for a fair territorial impact, that could be used in the 2021–2027 Programme?

The main aspects to be improved are related to better involving the economically weaker rural regions in the future programme, either as project partners or associated organisations. The latter should, however, be seen as a steppingstone towards being a partner in future projects and beneficiaries could be encouraged to involve such organisations.

Furthermore, the composition of partners could be focused more on the less developed regions, for a fairer territorial impact. More efforts could be made to increase the participation of local governments, particularly of smaller municipalities, as well as of private companies and NGOs from the rural areas.

The programme authorities should also try to limit the clustering tendency among partners and to encourage the development of new cooperation relationships, in order to ensure a wider and even more balanced spread of the programme's effects.

In terms of best practices that could be used in the 2021–2027 programme, the fair territorial coverage at NUTS 2 level was underlined. When it comes to the types of activities, pilot activities seem to function particularly well in the rural areas. Carrying out such types of activities in structurally challenged areas is also a means of achieving a fair territorial impact. The programme authorities should also support and encourage the cooperation of rural and urban partners within projects in order to sustain the transfer knowledge process between them. One way of doing this might be through the operationalisation and maintenance of the matchmaking platform in the period 2021–2027.

4.3. THE IMPACT OF PROJECT PLATFORMS

The project platforms were a new type of project to capitalise on the results and products of existing projects, as each partner had to either represent one regular project or be a coordinator of the EUSBSR. The project platforms were designed with the main scope of increasing the impacts and expanding the effects of Interreg Baltic Sea Region interventions and other EU-funded projects in the Programme area. The link between regular projects and project platforms was a direct one, both contributing to an extended impact on the Programme area. In general, project platforms were seen necessary as they linked ongoing or recently completed projects in the Baltic Sea Region. The project platforms were implemented as a project within the framework of Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

Nine project platforms were implemented within the Programme. The project platforms joined efforts of several projects funded by different programmes dealing with transport corridors, rescue actions at the coast and sea, clean shipping, water management, nutrient management, energy efficiency and blue bioeconomy. The budget of the project platforms was around € 1 million each and they had a contribution to ten different EUSBSR policy areas, they were implemented in seven different SOs within all three priorities, as shown in Table 23. Five of the project platforms were chosen as case studies and analysed in more detail.

TABLE 23: PROJECT PLATFORMS WITHIN THE PROGRAMME

PROJECT PLATFORMS	THE EUSBSR POLICY AREA INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT PLATFORM	LEAD PARTNER	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	PROJECT BUDGET (TOTAL)
#C001 BSR WATER	PAs Nutri and Hazards	Finland	2.1 Clear waters	1.13 mil. EUR
#C002 SuMaNu	PAs Bioeconomy (agriculture) and Nutri	Finland	2.1 Clear waters	1.00 mil. EUR
#C003 Blue Platform	PAs Innovation and Bioeconomy (fishery and aquaculture)	Finland	2.4 Resource-efficient blue growth	1.05 mil. EUR
#C004 BSR Access	PAs Transport and Spatial Planning	Finland	3.1 Interoperability of transport modes	1.00 mil. EUR
#C005 ResQU2	PAs Safe and Secure	Finland	3.3 Maritime safety	0.99 mil. EUR
#C006 CSHIPP	PAs Ship and Transport	Finland	3.4 Environmentally friendly shipping	1.08 mil. EUR
#C007 BSR S3 Ecosystem	PA Innovation	Sweden	1.2 Smart specialisation	1.27 mil. EUR
#C008 CAMS Platform	PA Energy	Estonia	2.3 Energy efficiency	1.05 mil. EUR
#C009 Capacity4MSP	PA Spatial Planning	Latvia	2.4 Resource-efficient blue growth	1.09 mil. EUR

Source: Analysis based on the Programme data received from the MA of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

DIFFERENT FUNDING SOURCES

The nine project platforms within the Programme brought together 80 projects in total from 13 different programmes and initiatives (Table 24). 44 projects out of 80 came from the Programme. The Blue Platform and CAMS Platform brought together equally 13 projects, while also the Blue Platform was the project platform that gathered the most projects from different programmes (7).

The project platform BSR S3 Ecosystem under Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” had eight different projects from two different programmes, Interreg Baltic Sea Region and Interreg Europe. The project platforms under Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” had altogether 53 different projects from nine different programmes. The three platform projects under Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” brought together 19 projects from six different programmes and initiatives.

TABLE 24: THE NUMBER OF PROJECTS BY PROJECT PLATFORM AND BY DIFFERENT PROGRAMMES WITHIN THE INTERREG BSR 2014–2020 PROGRAMME

PROGRAMMES	BSR S3 ECOSYSTEM	BSR WATER	SUMANU	BLUE PLATFORM	CAMS PLATFORM	CAPACITY4MSP	BSR ACCESS	CSHIP	RESQU2	TOTAL NR OF PROJECTS PER PROGRAMME
Interreg Baltic Sea Region	4	5	2	6	8	6	4	6	3	44
Horizon 2020	-	-	-	1	4	1	-	-	-	6
BONUS	-	1	1	1	-	2	-	1	-	6
Interreg South Baltic	-	1		1	-	1	-	-	-	3
Interreg Central Baltic	-	4	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	7
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Interreg Europe	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Connecting Europe Facility	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
Interreg North Sea Region	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
EuropeAid	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Interreg Bothnia-Atlantica	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
	13	8	11	4	13	13	7	8	4	80

Source: Analysis based on the Programme data received from the MA of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

One of the main added values of project platforms was that they united several projects from different funding sources, which gave more holistic view on the issues. Uniting different funding sources helped to share practices and expand the network of highly experimental and interactive processes, bringing together BSR (and wider EU) actors from policy, research/science, and industrial perspectives, to sharpen the focus of wider collaboration efforts across the macro-region.

“It definitely allowed learning from various useful and relevant experiences and approaches obtained beyond the Baltic Sea region. It allowed linking the science, policy and practice thus giving

an opportunity to tackle the issue of climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy efficiency from broader perspective.” (a beneficiary)

As it was noted also by the beneficiary, bringing together different funding sources made it possible to approach the problems from a wider angle and it applied to other topics as well (e.g., innovation, sustainable transport, maritime safety, blue economy). According to the survey 75.00% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that project platform helped them to develop synergies with projects from different funding sources (e.g. other Interreg programmes, BONUS, Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon Programme) (Figure 35). One beneficiary of a project platform pointed out that they were especially proud of using the results of the three winners in BONUS Return competition on their project platform’s outcomes. There was an active cooperation in both directions. For example, the BONUS programme has more research related projects, thus Interreg wasn’t so known for them. Through project platforms they got to know Interreg and the projects and implementors, which was also confirmed in the interview by the MA/JS. The BONUS programme’s partners claimed that they got useful connections who are close to the implementation, which was beneficial for all the parties, for the BONUS programme and the Programme.

Moreover, the beneficiaries confirmed in the survey that in the absence of the funding from the Programme, their organisation would not have implemented similar activities, with their own resources or other fundings (87.50%). Many beneficiaries added that their organisations do not have money for this kind of activities. Another aspect apart from the monetary resources mentioned by beneficiaries was that without the Programme they would not have so many partners from different countries and connections to implement similar activities on their own.

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND THEIR ROLE

The public authorities were represented in all nine project platforms (Table 25). In total, 28 public authorities (out of 87 partners) joined the partnerships of the project platforms, as follows: 12 national public authorities, 6 regional public authorities, 8 local public authorities and two sectoral agencies. The public authorities involved in project platforms differed both in terms of level and type. Thus, both public authorities at local level (city halls, city councils) and at regional level (regional councils, regional agencies) or country level (ministries or agencies) were involved. The average share of public authorities was 35.44% from the total project budget, within those project platforms that included this type of partners. This can be considered a relatively high share, having in mind that the project platforms involved an average of 9.5 partners per project. Public authorities were also involved beyond the partnership of the project platforms.

TABLE 25: PUBLIC AUTHORITIES INVOLVED IN PROJECT PLATFORMS IN THE PROGRAMME

PROJECT PLATFORMS	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	PROJECT BUDGET (TOTAL)	PUBLIC AUTHORITIES (INCL. SHARE IN PROJECT BUDGET)
#C001 BSR WATER	2.1 Clear waters	1.13 mil. EUR	Riga City Council (Latvia): 7% City of Helsinki (Finland): 8% Union of the Baltic Cities, Sustainable Cities Commission c/o City of Turku (Finland): 23%
#C002 SuMaNu	2.1 Clear waters	1.00 mil. EUR	Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinow (Poland): 6%
#C003 Blue Platform	2.4 Resource-efficient blue growth	1.05 mil. EUR	Swedish Board of Agriculture: 6% Municipality of Guldborgsund (Denmark): 7%
#C004 BSR Access	3.1 Interoperability of transport modes	1.00 mil. EUR	Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council (Finland): 26% Joint Spatial Planning Department Berlin-Brandenburg (Germany): 20% Region Blekinge (Sweden): 12%

PROJECT PLATFORMS	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	PROJECT BUDGET (TOTAL)	PUBLIC AUTHORITIES (INCL. SHARE IN PROJECT BUDGET)
			Capital Region of Denmark: 11%
#C005 ResQU2	3.3 Maritime safety	0.99 mil. EUR	Hamburg Ministry of the Interior and Sports (Germany): 10% The Finnish Boarder Guard: 10% Southwest Finland Emergency Services: 10% Estonian Police and Boarder Guard Board: 6% Swedish Coast Guard: 10% Fire and Rescue Department of Lithuania: 6% Safety Region Zeeland (The Netherlands): 10% Fire and Rescue Board of Klaipeda County (Lithuania): 0%
#C006 CSHIPP	3.4 Environmentally friendly shipping	1.08 mil. EUR	Finnish Meteorological Institute: 5%
#C007 BSR S3 Ecosystem	1.2 Smart specialisation	1.27 mil. EUR	Region Västerbotten (Sweden): 30% Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology MITA (Lithuania): 5% Trøndelag County Council (Norway): 5%
#C008 Platform	CAMS 2.3 Energy efficiency	1.05 mil. EUR	Tartu Regional Energy Agency (Estonia): 17% County Administrative Board of Dalarna (Sweden): 21% Ministry of Economics (Latvia): 11%
#C009 Capacity4MSP	2.4 Resource-efficient blue growth	1.09 mil. EUR	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM): 8% Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MoEPRD) (Latvia): 6% State Regional Development Agency (VASAB) (Latvia): 23%

Source: Analysis based on the Programme data received from the MA of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

The role of public authorities was very important, covering mostly the policy-related role, which allowed them to provide valuable inputs to preparation of project platforms' deliverables. For example, public authorities as project partners were responsible for elaboration of policy recommendations and they organised the discussions with target groups and networking with other stakeholders in the countries. The results of the survey confirmed the statement. Local authorities had a great role in the implementation because their work in general is persistent, therefore it was seen important by beneficiaries. Some beneficiaries, who had been involved with Interreg projects before, pointed out that in their case public authorities played bigger role than they usually do in their regular projects. Also, there was a project platform, where public authorities were involved in workshops and through national networks, but their role was still important.

As one of the main aims of the project platform was to influence, improve knowledge and raise discussion among regional, national and EU level policy makers and experts, some project platforms were led by a public authority to achieve its goals and reach other public stakeholders more efficiently. For instance, five project platforms were led by the public authority, other four were led by the higher education and research institution. As mentioned before, 28 different public authorities were involved in the partnerships

of project platforms. Moreover, the public authorities represented 10 different countries, out of which Finland and Sweden were the most numerous, being present six times each. There was also a general observation that Finland was the lead partner of six project platforms out of nine project platforms. The reason behind it might be their willingness, knowledge base or the location which fits with the topics (clear waters, maritime safety, clean shipping). This assumption might apply to Sweden as well, as both are close to the Baltic Sea and have a considerable experience in cross-border cooperation.

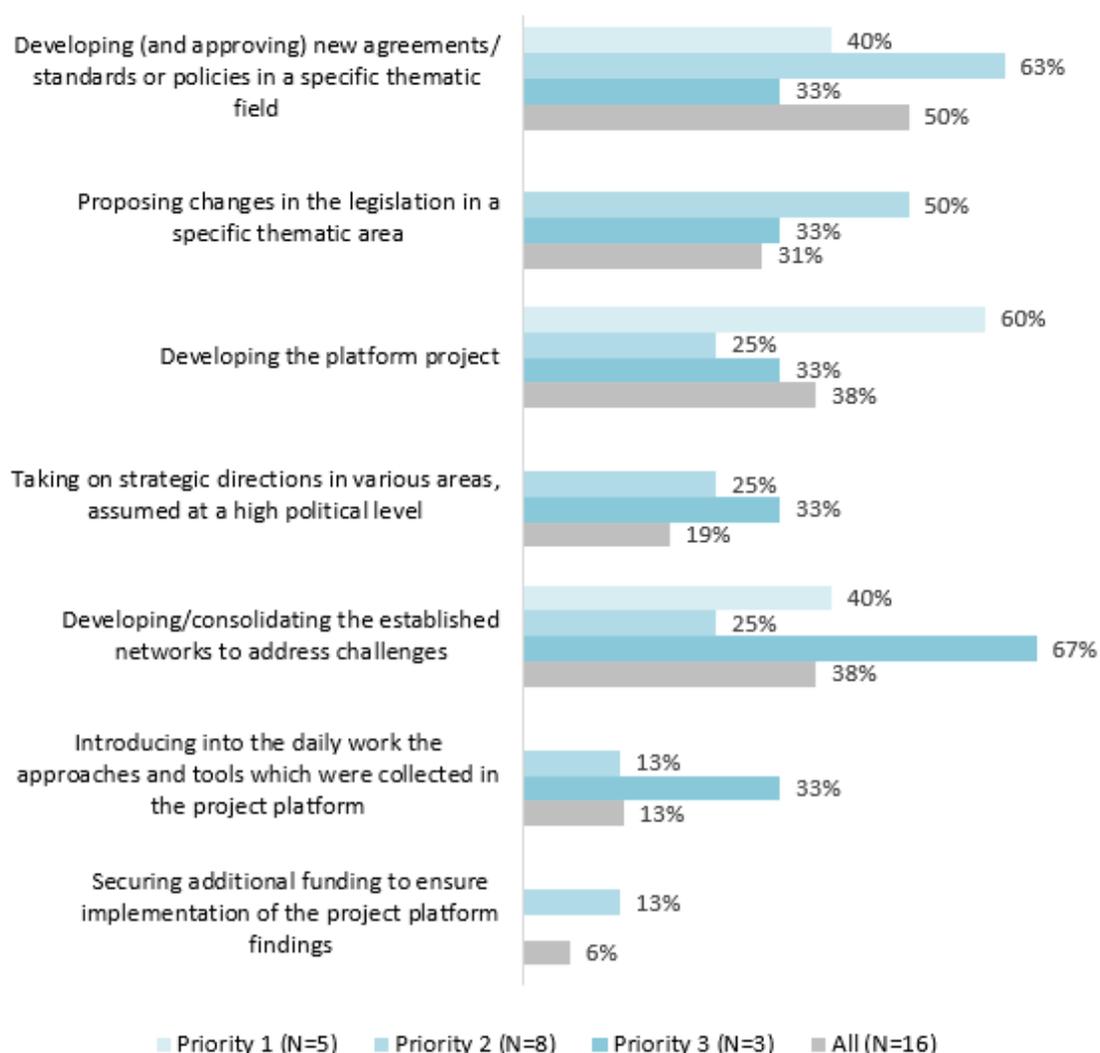
The important contribution of public authorities within the Programme project platforms was also validated by the results of the survey. The survey had a question about involvement of a national authorities, where 68.75% of the respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that having a national authority as a project partner will highly increase the chances of implementing a successful project. 18.75% of the respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement. Further investigation revealed that in one project platform the national authority would have been a great addition to the partnership, but nevertheless the project platform succeeded to influence the policy on a higher level, as the partnership involved HELCOM.

According to the respondents of the survey the main role of public authorities was to develop (and approve) new agreements/ standards or policies in a specific thematic field (50.00%) (Figure 33). Therefore, the contribution of public authorities supported the project platform work. It was also confirmed by the beneficiaries who said that there were close dialogues between project partners and public authorities especially in the countries of the partners.

„Their role was very important. [...] The opinions, ideas and feedback from public authorities supported the work in project platform very much and we felt that we were able to communicate our results and information effectively.“ (a beneficiary)

However, the role of public authorities was seen differently between the project platforms and Priorities (Figure 33). Survey respondents under Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” saw the main role of the public authorities as the platform developers. Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” respondents found that the main role of their public authorities was to develop (and approve) new agreements/ standards or policies in a specific thematic field and to propose changes in the legislation in a specific thematic area. The role of public authorities under Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” was mainly developing/ consolidating the established networks to address challenges.

FIGURE 33: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN PROJECT PLATFORMS' IMPLEMENTATION



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Under Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation”, the survey answers from the beneficiaries confirmed that the role of the public authorities in the project platform was to develop the project platform (done by the lead partner Region Västerbotten). Under Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” in case of BSR WATER the role of local authorities was important in carrying out the activities. They participated in gathering water protection and water management good practices and tools. As the gathered practices and solutions by the project platform help municipalities and water operators to manage fresh, sea, storm, and wastewater more efficiently and in a sustainable way, the decisions of how to implement the solutions is up to the local authorities. Therefore, local authorities were involved to support the quality control of accumulated solutions and exchange on the Hub content and developments. In SuMaNu on the other hand, the public authorities (e.g. national agricultural and environmental ministries, local and regional authorities, and policy implementors) were the main target group. As the project was more about Baltic Sea regional recommendations for the countries not for municipalities, there weren’t many municipalities involved as partners. Nevertheless, the most important partners were the authorities involved in advisory organisations, dealing with farmers, who had a better reach to them. The ResQU2 platform under Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” addressed the objective of increasing emergency preparedness and enhancing knowledge and capacity for the rescue authorities, actors, and decision makers. Thus, the project platform assumed the involvement of many public authorities with responsibilities in the field (8 out of 11 partners), whose role was to disseminate the project platform's learning experiences to other areas, professionals, and decision makers on local, regional and EU level. In the case of the BSR Access platform (Priority 3

“Sustainable transport”), the objective was to mobilise stakeholders to a more coherent, cross-sectoral, and adaptive planning approach in order to ensure a better access infrastructure to and an enhanced development of the trans-European transport network. In this case, the role of public authorities was to work on transferable solutions with market stakeholders to contribute to viable policy and action proposals in transport interoperability.

It can be concluded that public authorities are often having an indispensable role in the achievement of the project platforms’ expected results. Also, according to the survey the least popular roles of public authorities were considered firstly securing additional funding to ensure implementation of the project platform findings and secondly introducing the approaches and tools which were collected in the project platform into the daily work. The role of public authorities could be strengthened if they could be more involved in the dissemination process (e.g. introducing the findings into the daily work). For political support and dissemination, it is important that the project partners are in the respective structures, for instance, the Council of the Baltic Sea States or a ministry. If there is a ministry involved in developing the solutions together with other partners, the ministry would be able to concretely take the steps forward from there to introduce policy recommendations in the country.

REACHING FURTHER ORGANISATIONS

The project platforms also aimed to reach further the organisations of the partnerships and cooperated with other EU-funded thematic related projects, engaging in new networks to gather, promote and disseminate know-how.

It is evident that project platforms facilitated the reach of other organisations beyond the ones of the single projects involved in the project platform. The project platforms helped to reach further organisations, 68.75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The project platforms allowed reaching further organisations beyond those within the partnership both directly, through the types of activities carried out, and indirectly through the final results and impacts of the project platforms.

The project platform's interventions directly assumed the involvement of other entities outside the partnership. In this regard, the most eloquent example can be the coordinators of the EUSBSR policy areas, as many of the projects that were part of the project platforms had flagship status within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Region PAs and the ongoing cooperation was continued and developed within the project platforms, including through the participation of coordinators of different EUSBSR policy areas in the project platforms. Also the pan-Baltic organisations were involved across the project platforms such as, HELCOM, the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions Baltic Sea Commission, the Union of the Baltic Cities, and the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

The success of reaching further organisations also depended on the results of the projects which were covered in the project platforms. Good practices and case studies were collected not only from the projects involved, but the examples from the entire region and even from the private practitioners were collected. The further organisations were reached by hosting webinars to reach a wider audience, establishing, and disseminating policy guidelines and other documents.

“Reaching stakeholders beyond the project partnership was based on information and contacts established during previous projects and applying a ‘snowball effect’ for getting acquainted with more specialists.” (a beneficiary)

In general, the project platforms helped to reach further organisations and the partners were successful in reaching new organisations and forming new partnerships. The project platform’s communication and networking strategy played an important role in reaching beyond the partnership. Furthermore, the outreach depended on how actively the project partners interacted with project platform partners, as they had the best knowledge and understanding of the initial results.

CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS

The project platforms contributed to all dimensions of capacity-related result indicators. For this, they implemented a wide range of activities, usually generating and sharing new ideas, knowledge, or synergies

in the addressed fields, therefore filled the gaps between research, business, and policymaking representatives. The project platforms also addressed and contributed to solving several limiting factors, such as the limited time of interventions, specifics of national practices and regulations, limited experience sharing and inefficient use of resources, as well as insufficient communication and employment of the relevant target groups.

The data collected across the Programme confirms the key role of project platforms in developing new synergies across different EU funds and programmes, while also allowing them to reach extended impacts in the region. The project platforms supported the capacity building process by mainly contributing to enhancing the institutionalised knowledge and competences and increasing the capability to work in a transnational environment.

“Platforms are a project type that seems to be a good way to improve cooperation between projects working on the same issues and to activate more actors to work towards improvements. Especially when a platform manages to involve several sub-projects even from different financial instruments and strives towards a “bigger picture”.” (EUSBSR representative)

The capacity building process followed quite a similar approach across the project platforms. To enhance the stakeholders’ institutional capacity the project platforms focused on facilitating access to new and/or consolidated knowledge in different areas and to new stakeholders, directly contributing to the development of the cooperation. Moreover, the project platforms had a key contribution in developing synergies among a wide range of projects, collecting, benchmarking, and spreading their good practices and lessons learned, as well as their outputs. Eventually, the capacity building process involved regulatory, technological, and organisational developments. The project platforms supported the interventions in improving the compliance of the regulatory framework, and enhanced the use of technologies, or developed new policy papers, action plans or recommendations.

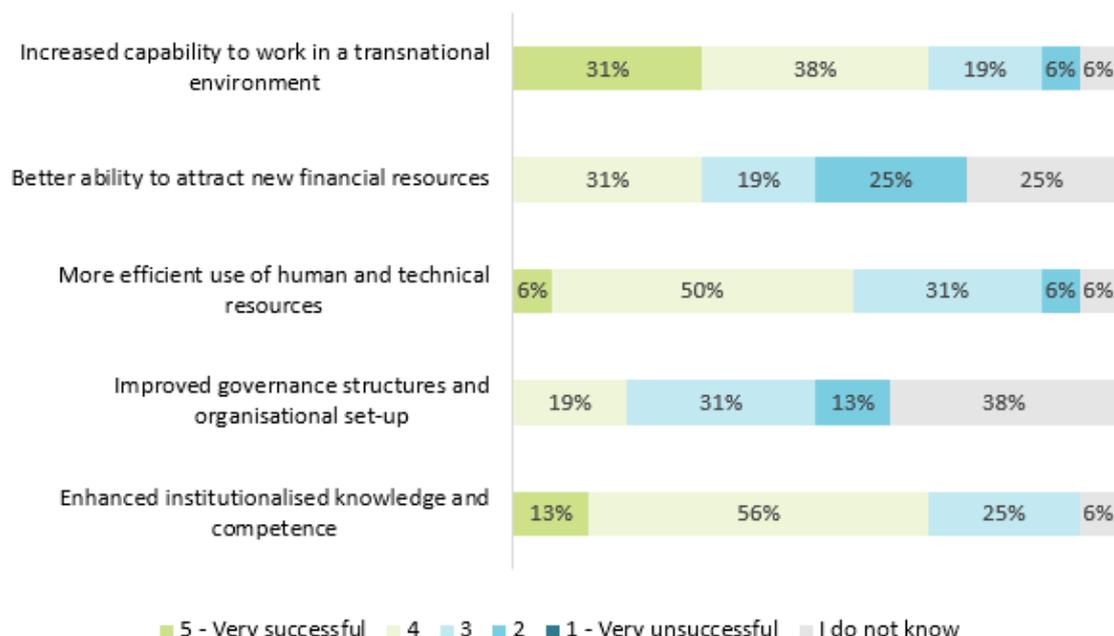
“The capacity building process worked through meetings, common workgroups and common conferences that disseminated the project results and gave the opportunity to invite and discuss the project results with non-project members that brought new insights. This approach also increased the visibility of the platform and the projects.” (a beneficiary)

The capacity building process through the project platforms worked by knowledge synthesis and discussion between different stakeholder groups. The holistic approach was seen as an important factor in the success of project platforms.

“In practice, there has been cooperation with the issues for over a decade via EU funded projects, but a synthesis of all the knowledge has been missing.” (a beneficiary)

The survey data showed that project platform partners within the Programme considered the enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence as one of the main benefits from the project platform together with increased capability to work in a transnational environment (Figure 34). The main success factors that contributed to maximising the institutional capacity building process at the level of the target groups according to the survey were partners’ expertise and experience in the specific topic of the project (75.00%) and partners formal and informal linkages and networks with the target groups (43.75%). Improved governance structures and organisational set-up was evaluated as the least unsuccessful benefit provided to target groups, but it was not the primary aim of the project platforms. Nevertheless, the project platforms managed to bring the policy change using the organisational set-ups that were already in the region.

FIGURE 34: THE EXTENT OF SUCCESS IN PROVIDING THE TARGET GROUPS WITH THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS, IN %. PARTICIPANTS REPRESENTING PROJECT PLATFORMS (N=16)



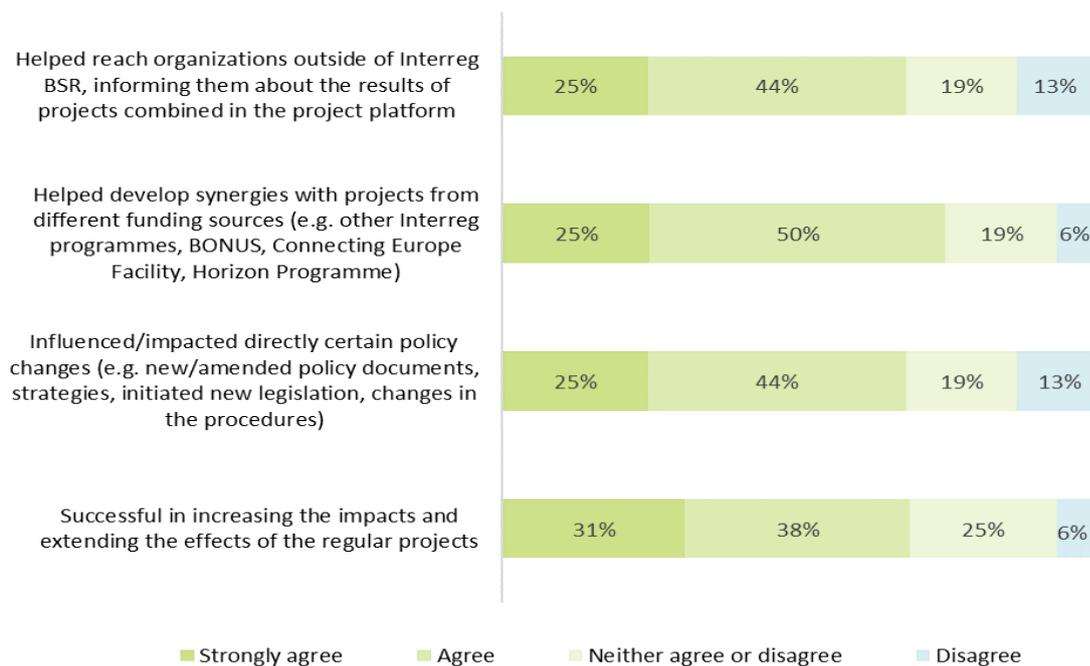
Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Moreover, according to the survey for beneficiaries, 68.75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project platform was successful in increasing the impacts and extending the effects of the regular projects (Figure 35). The project platform was seen as a great extension of previous projects, to share knowledge and extend the use of tools developed.

“The platform made it possible to make a synthesis of the results of the previous projects making the bigger picture visible and thus the policy recommendations more profound and effective. This is something that can rarely be done, and we find it very valuable.” (a beneficiary)

The reason why regular projects can rarely do it, is because there is normally lack of time for regular projects to disseminate their results after the project has ended. The project platforms were a great way for capacity building and learning by talking to other projects’ partners. It was claimed by some beneficiaries from different Priorities that there were some challenges, such as getting to know different approaches and people from various projects. Therefore, the partners needed time to understand what everyone was doing and what has been done, how to use these different outputs and solutions and bring everything together into one basket. In some cases, the project platform’s partners spent a lot of time figuring out how to unite the knowledge and approaches from different countries and projects.

FIGURE 35: THE PERCEPTION OF PROJECT PLATFORMS’ PARTNERS WITHIN THE PROGRAMME ON PLATFORMS’ IMPACT (N=16)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Taking it to the Priority level, there were some general observations of the project platforms’ interventions in capacity building process. The key element of the capacity building process of the BSR S3 Ecosystem platform (Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation”) was the set-up of a BSR S3 Ecosystem Directors’ Network, which had the aim of strengthening and building the collective capacity of all involved projects. Regarding Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” it is important to note that in water related topics, there were many project platforms, because the topics have more mature cooperation and more knowledge from different projects, therefore project platforms were needed to bring the results together. For example, BSR WATER set up a Baltic Smart Water HUB to share solutions with experts and CAMS Platform set up a database for energy audits. In case of Priority 3 “Sustainable transport”, the project platforms also played a role in increasing the efficiency of human and technical resources use. This was especially valid for the CSHIPP project which developed a long-lasting collaboration in the form of a science-to-policy network, bridging the gap between research and the business sector.

To conclude, in general the project platforms successfully managed the capacity building process among their partners and target groups by sharing knowledge, best practices and tools via workshops, webinars and meetings even with setting up networks and hubs. They shared and disseminated best practices among the key stakeholders, such as regional, national and EU policy makers as well as other practitioners and raised awareness among regional, national and EU level policy makers and experts.

INFLUENCING THE POLICY CHANGE

One of the main aims of all the project platforms was to bring together different relevant organisations to share their knowledge and expertise to eventually develop, update, or contribute to various public policies in the innovation, water management, energy, blue economy, and sustainable transport field.

The project platforms contributed to the implementation of the EUSBSR. Eight out of nine project platforms supported within the Programme were flagship of eight different EUSBSR policy areas, although in some cases two policy areas were involved in a single project platform (Table 26). Also, it should be noted that

Latvian Ministry of Economics was a partner in CAMS platform, which is one of the coordinators of the PA Energy.

TABLE 26: CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROJECT PLATFORMS WITHIN THE PROGRAMME TO EUSBSR

PROJECT PLATFORMS	A FLAGSHIP OF THE EUSBSR POLICY AREA	THE EUSBSR POLICY AREA INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT PLATFORM
#C001 BSR WATER	PA Nutri	PAs Nutri and Hazards
#C002 SuMaNu	PAs Bioeconomy and Nutri	PAs Bioeconomy (agriculture) and Nutri
#C003 Blue Platform	PA Innovation	PAs Innovation and Bioeconomy (fishery and aquaculture)
#C004 BSR Access	PA Transport	PAs Transport and Spatial Planning
#C005 ResQU2	PAs Safe and Secure	PAs Safe and Secure
#C006 CSHIPP	PA Ship	PAs Ship and Transport
#C007 BSR S3 Ecosystem	PA Innovation	PA Innovation
#C008 CAMS Platform	-	PA Energy
#C009 Capacity4MSP	PA Spatial Planning	PA Spatial Planning

Source: Analysis based on the Programme data received from the MA of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

According to the survey for beneficiaries 68.75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project platforms influenced or directly impacted a certain policy change. All the investigated project platforms had an impact to a policy change. The project platforms made it possible to make a synthesis of the results of the previous projects making the bigger picture visible and thus the policy recommendations more profound and effective. Whether the measures are national or transnational (jointly advanced), the information collected and published by projects is available as support. In terms of policy, the project platforms saw that they can influence significantly more than they could have expected.

“We did not foresee that some of the policy work would actually be adapted to regional policies during our project implementation period.” (a beneficiary)

The outcomes and practical findings of the project platforms were used to facilitate the long-term development of regional environmental policy and recommendations as well as aligned macro-regional and national environmental policies further promoting implementation of advanced measures resulting in clean, sustainable, and resilient Baltic Sea Region. This was also confirmed during the interview with the EUSBSR representatives, where it was noted that project platforms specifically do help in policy building. Also, the flagship status was pointed out as an important factor for reaching the goals and getting better access into the PA discussions.

“Projects chosen as Flagships were and still are the most concrete way to generate value for the objectives of PA Nutri.” (EUSBSR representative)

More specifically, the only project platform under Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” created policy guidelines which presented general recommendations for implementing the BSR S3 Ecosystem in the Baltic Sea Region. The beneficiary of the project platform pointed out that they also created the basis of new platform – the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI)²⁷. Even more, it is firmly anchored in the EU policy framework, supporting the implementation of the European Green Deal, Horizon Europe, Cohesion policy

²⁷<https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pri#:~:text=PRI%20aims%20to%20test%20tools,innovation%20divide%20in%20the%20EU>

and NextGenerationEU. Regarding Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources”, the partners of Blue Platform suppose that thanks to the Blue Platform project roadmap and outputs the EU-wide mission “Ocean” has appeared. The circumstantial evidence for that is the fact that the mission refers to several projects of Blue Platform as well as to the information collected throughout the project. The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and BSR Nutrient Recycling Strategy adopted by the HELCOM was influenced and supported by many water related projects. It was also pointed out by the project partner, if asked what the most important thing they achieved was:

“I think it is the impact we had on the HELCOM BSAP. There are many measures addressing eutrophication and nutrient recycling that are in line with our project platform policy recommendations, and we feel that our project had a significant impact in communicating their need.” (a beneficiary)

Also, an energy related project platform had an influence on policy, especially related to climate change. Number of suggestions and policy recommendations from the project platform were taken up by the European Commission in a new Strategy on Adaption to Climate Change. The partners of project platform under Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” also cooperated closely with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region policy area Transport and horizontal action Spatial Planning Coordinators. Moreover, an important input to HELCOM recommendations for clean shipping in the Baltic Sea area was provided. In this regard, two policy guidance documents were elaborated: Policy guidance on scrubber wash water and Policy guidance on the development of shore power at ports. The second document also highlighted to the HELCOM working group certain policy guidance on the topic of shore power in the Baltic Sea Region. Under Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” it was also pointed out that having the EUSBSR flagship status helped them to gain access to discussions in PA. This facilitated a direct dialogue between environmental/regulatory stakeholders and researchers.

It can be considered that project platforms created the right framework and ensured the necessary premises for starting concrete efforts in order to generate certain regional policy changes in the innovation, water management, energy, blue economy, and sustainable transport sector. However, in order to eventually achieve concrete policy changes, or to materialise the new developed policies, it is of course necessary for the partners of the project platforms to continue to cooperate and allocate resources, according to the plans made and assumed within the project platforms.

UNINTENDED EFFECTS

There weren’t many unintended effects within the project platforms and according to the survey 18.75% of project platform beneficiaries found that they encountered unintended effects. However, apart from the COVID-19, one of the most important effects was the impact of project platforms on the policy change. Namely, the partners did not foresee that their policy work would actually be adapted to regional policies during the implementation period of the project platform in some cases. Beneficiaries hadn’t planned that some of the recommendations or practices are taken so high to regional recommendations and the work with results continued at the national levels (with practitioners, educators) after the finalisation of the projects. This was also seen as an unintended effect by the MA/JS during the interviews. Projects didn’t dare to promise that in applications because these processes are very long by nature.

Apart from some positive effects, like better understanding of different approaches and sources in national cultural/institutional settings, some negative aspects were also brought out. It was noted that if the project (contributing to the project platform) was still running, didn’t have results yet or had rather weak results, it was harder to disseminate the results and fulfil the aims. This aspect was also confirmed by the MC, who also pointed out that project platforms started also rather late.

“It is true that the impact of the project platforms seems limited. One reason is that they got started rather late in the programming period, and many projects finalised rather late which made it difficult to benefit from the knowledge exchange in the platforms. Hopefully that will work better in the new period.” (MC member)

Under Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” the representative from the project platform informed that new unique evidence was gathered. In addition, the gathered knowledge was of great interest to many stakeholders which was also unintended. Moreover, lead partner was invited to take a role in the I3 interregional innovation instrument – an expert group set up to help to design related instruments. Lastly, another unintended effect was that the basis of the project platform created the new initiative that was mentioned above (The Partnerships for Regional Innovation), which created a long-term legacy of the gathered and shared knowledge. No specific unintended effects were noted by beneficiaries under Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” and Priority 3 “Sustainable transport”, apart from previously discussed impact on the policy on different levels.

ASPECTS TO BE IMPROVED AND BEST PRACTICES

In general, the project platforms were successful in further exploitation of results produced by regular projects, as well as in the creation of extremely beneficial thematic networks for the coagulation and capitalisation of regional efforts in various fields. Most of the beneficiaries of the project platforms agreed that without the support provided by Interreg BSR 2014–2020, they would not have had the resources nor the ability to organise similar projects. Nevertheless, there are some aspects that can be improved to implement project platforms next time even more successfully.

It was noted that several project partners were not keen on sharing their project results and knowledge, as they felt competitive and not willing to discuss their internal findings. Such competition hindered knowledge sharing and capacity building process. Also, the overall cooperation should be thought through, as there might be overlapping interests or results. It was pointed out by a beneficiary that there should be some instruments for getting a better overview of the ongoing implementation process and the EUSBSR representative said that better incorporation is needed, at least between the PA coordinators.

“The Programme should have more instruments to monitor the ongoing implementation of the project’s goals and assess their quality level (e.g. through much more cross cutting and content-oriented conferences, elimination of overlapping or trivial results, and having more instruments to get real target groups feedback).” (a beneficiary)

“Interreg BSR priority water-smart societies is easily aligned with EUSBSR’s one of the key challenges, saving the sea. Policy area Nutri is just one of the actions under that umbrella, and partially overlaps with other actions (mainly bioeconomy and hazards, but also others). Because of the overlapping aspects, it is sometimes artificial to group some project as a PA Nutri-project or a PA Bioeconomy-project. When there are overlapping interests in a project, there should be better incorporation of several PA coordinators.” (EUSBSR representative)

It was brought out in the survey that in case of some partners the approach was too scientific as practical implementation and actions were missing. One beneficiary found that the focus of project platforms would even more be on how to make the bigger picture visible, how to connect the different results and how to communicate it effectively. This thought was also confirmed by another beneficiary, who added that the idea of the project platform is important, but it needs a lot of strategic coordination to make that work. Furthermore, it was pointed out by the MC that before investing money it should be clear what are the expected achievements. One reason, why the project platform’s impact might have seemed limited was the fact that they got started rather late in the programming period. There were opinions that the implementation period should have been longer. Also, many projects finalised rather late which made it difficult to benefit from the knowledge exchange in the project platforms. On the other hand, one beneficiary noted the opposite.

“Also, what would be highly supported is to bring a platform during the projects implementation, not after it, as it increases the sharing levels and contributes to the common learning of people from people in different spheres of occupation.” (a beneficiary)

Within the next Programme period, the public authorities could have even more central role within the project platforms, in some situations being the only organisations able to take the ownership of various outputs and results generated within the project platforms. They could primarily further support the policy

initiatives and legislative changes initiated within the project platforms, or at the institutionalisation of certain practices or the formalisation of certain collaborations established in the Programme. In this regard, public authorities at local, regional, or national level should be encouraged to apply in the upcoming Programme so that the initiatives developed in the 2014–2020 period to be further developed and/or finalised, and for the public authorities to continue to benefit from an easier access to a wide range of results coming from projects financed by EU funds. Observing the decreasing trend of the involvement of public sector partners in the Programme, it is suggested to providing them with incentives to participate in the new 2021–2027 Programme, such as additional points in the project platforms selection process. As a result of the survey, 62.50% of the beneficiaries found that having a diverse partnership structure will increase chances of the project platform to succeed. Furthermore, 68.75% of respondents agreed that having a national authority and 56.25% found that having a university as a project partner will highly increase chances of implementing a successful project. Both statements were confirmed in the interviews by the beneficiaries. One of project platform's aims was to bring the results of the projects together for synthesising them and form the results into policy recommendations. Therefore, one beneficiary pointed out that national public authorities could have been a great addition, for instance, if HELCOM initiates a change in the legislation in the region, it is up to the national public authorities to decide how it is going to be adapted in the country. It was also supported by the EUSBSR representative.

“We created recommendations and have sent it to the governments and ministries. When the project gets the results, there should be someone who will lobby the results and push them forward.” (EUSBSR representative)

On the other hand, the higher education/research institutions are seen as partners who have good capabilities for managing the project as well compared to business and enterprises. Thus, different relevant partners, also from different countries, should be involved in the partnership also in the future.

Another aim of the project platforms was to disseminate the results of the regular projects. Therefore, during the interviews with project partners, they all confirmed that face-to-face communication and direct approach were important in the process, and it should be kept also in the future alongside with online events. From the survey for beneficiaries, it was evident that some project platforms lacked support, as it was suggested that the Programme should provide the implementers more support and facilitation in reaching the target groups. Regarding the good practices, it was seen necessary if also in the next project platforms the partners were allowed to participate, who have also been involved in non-Interreg projects.

It was found that at least two of the project platforms conducted knowledge gap research. It is one of the useful aspects to be considered also in the future before the implementation, to first determine the information gaps. By doing so, it helped to identify where the information was still missing, and the partners were able to discuss how to collect the missing information. This enabled project platforms to think of which kind of projects they would need also in the future.

Regarding some practical solutions, it was pointed out that a good practice is to organise the project platform according to different work packages. Specifically, research and policy making was separated from the business side, as both require different approach. This helped the partners to manage all the activities and project work better and more efficiently. Also, the approach to target groups should be customised. For instance, it is important that communication materials are prepared in different formats considering the peculiarity of different sectors (e.g. separately for business sector). It was noted by many beneficiaries that each target group required different approach and they had put a lot of effort on that aspect in communication as well.

CONCLUSIONS

EQ 11. How did the capacity building process work through the platforms? Did project platforms help to reach further organisations beyond the ones of the single projects involved in the project platform? How did project platforms reach beyond the organisations of the partnerships?

The capacity building process through the project platforms worked by knowledge synthesis and discussions between different stakeholder groups. The holistic approach was seen as an important factor

in the success of project platforms as there has been cooperation with some issues for over a decade via EU funded projects, but a synthesis of all the knowledge was still missing. The project platforms allowed for an enhanced institutionalisation of knowledge and competences. The newly developed networks facilitated knowledge sharing and synthesis, extended use of different outputs and the dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, while also raising awareness among regional, national and EU level policy makers and experts. The project platforms successfully facilitated the reach of other organisations beyond the ones of the single projects involved in the project platform, often involving other entities outside the partnership in project platform's activities. The project platform's communication and networking strategy played an important role in reaching beyond the partnership (e.g., workshops, webinars) and the outreach depended on how actively the project partners interacted with project platform partners. It was pointed out that some help in finding possible new partners is also needed. Thus, networking events would help to get insights about other similar working groups to form new partnerships for cooperating within the Programme (e.g., project platform proposals).

EQ 12. What was the role of public authorities in project platforms' implementation? How could their role be strengthened?

Regarding the public authorities, their role was very important, covering mostly the policy-related role, which allowed them to provide valuable inputs to preparation of project platforms' deliverables. However, the role of public authorities varied between the project platforms and priorities, depending on the aim of the project platform. For example, regional and national authorities as project partners were responsible for elaboration of policy recommendations and they organised the discussions with target groups and networking with other stakeholders in the countries. Local authorities have had a great role in the implementation of project platforms because their work in general is persistent, therefore it was seen important by beneficiaries. The role of public authorities could be strengthened if they could be more involved in the dissemination process (e.g. introducing the findings into the daily work). For political support and dissemination, it is important that the project partners are in the respective structures, for instance, the pan-Baltic organisations, a ministry or even a coordinator of the EUSBSR.

EQ 13. What was the added value of project platforms in bringing together projects from different funding sources (e.g. Interreg programmes, BONUS, Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon Programme)?

The knowledge and expertise sharing were the main added value in bringing together projects from different funding sources. The project platforms allowed the partners to assimilate the acquired knowledge and contributed to enhancing their competences while also helped them in identifying common knowledge gaps. The project platforms also increased partners capability to work in a transnational environment. In the absence of Interreg BSR 2014–2020, the project platform partners would have had neither the resources, nor the necessary connections to integrate the knowledge and expertise from different funding sources.

EQ 14. How successful were project platforms in influencing policy changes (e.g. new/amended policy documents, strategies, initiated new legislation, changes in the procedures) e.g. with reference to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region?

All project platforms within the Programme were successful in influencing the policy change, as they contributed either to policy change or their recommendations were considered in elaborating new policy documents. The project platforms within the Programme made it possible to make a synthesis of the results of the previous projects by making the bigger picture visible and thus the policy recommendations more profound and effective. The involvement of the PA coordinators and the pan-Baltic organisations in the project platform implementation was one of the success factors for project platforms to succeed in policy building.

EQ 15. Can any possible unintended effect be detected among project platforms under Priorities 1–3? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?

One of the most important unintended effects that project platforms encountered was the impact on the policy change. Namely, the partners did not foresee that their policy work would actually be adapted to

regional policies during the implementation period of the project platform in some cases. Beneficiaries hadn't planned that some of the recommendations or practices are taken so high to regional recommendations and the work with results continued at the national levels (with practitioners, educators) after the finalisation of the projects.

EQ 16. What are the main aspects to be improved, considering the experience of implementing project platforms within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the best practices that could be further used in implementing this mechanism in the 2021–2027 Programme?

The main aspects to be improved could be that the public authorities could have even more central role within the project platforms, this applies to all level of public authorities depending on the main aim of the project platform. The role of regional authorities would mainly include elaboration of policy recommendations and national authorities should set up the implementation within the country. Also, it was noted that some project partners were not keen on sharing their project results and knowledge, as they felt competitive and not willing to discuss their internal findings. Such competition hindered knowledge sharing and capacity building process. This should be avoided.

Some good practices to keep in mind would be to keep face-to-face communication and usage of personalised approach to reach target groups were important in the process and should be kept also in the future alongside with online events. Another good thing to keep in mind is a knowledge gap analysis. It was found that at least two of the project platforms conducted knowledge gap research. It is one of the useful aspects to be considered also in the future before the implementation, to first determine the information gaps. This enabled project platforms to think of which kind of projects they would need also in the future. Lastly, as each target group might require different approach, the partners should put a lot of effort on that aspect in communication as well and build their dissemination strategy based on the target groups' peculiarities.

4.4.THE IMPACTS OF THE CHANGE TO ONLINE COOPERATION

COVID-19 pandemic started in late 2019, with first case detected in EU in 2020. The virus quickly spread all over the world, including Europe and BSR territory. Pandemic led most countries to impose quarantines, entry bans and travel restrictions, which as well affected the Programme's projects. Due to restrictions, most of the work went online, as in most cases it was not possible to meet in person. The following sub-chapter will explore how the "online-shift" affected BSR projects.

SHIFT TO DIGITAL TOOLS AND ONLINE MODES OF COOPERATION AMONG PROJECT PARTNERS

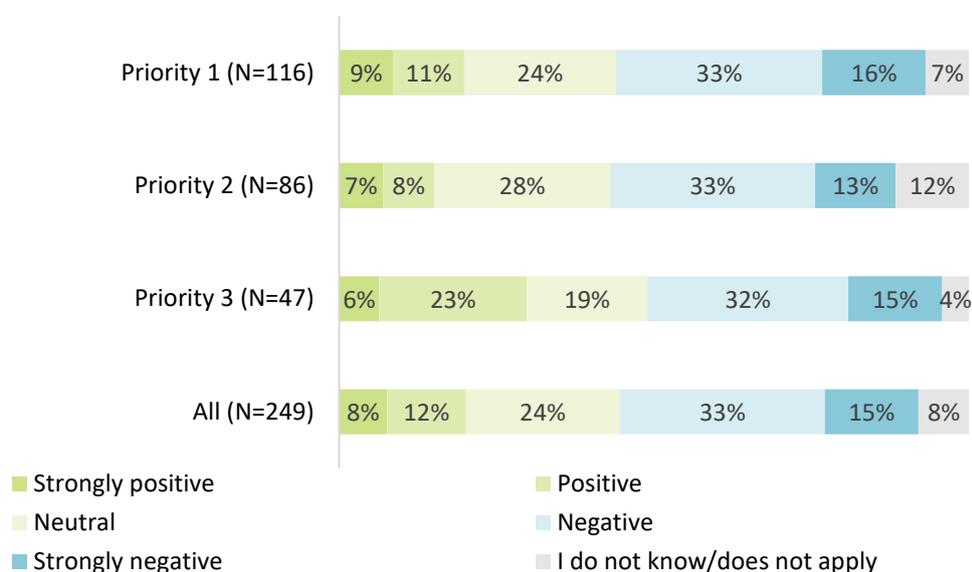
As expected, the shift to online cooperation during COVID-19 had a notable negative impact on the development of relations among project partners, negatively influencing the development of networks with other projects, stakeholders, and target audiences. Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, most partner meetings and events had to be initially postponed and then reorganised in the online space.

Out of 455 projects, 142 had already finalised the implementation of activities before the pandemic in the EU (considering January 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 was detected in the EU). Thus, 69% of projects were influenced by COVID-19 in one way or another. In these projects, the project partner amount varied from an average of 11.5 to 12.9 partners per project (Priority 1 "Capacity for innovation" – 11.5, Priority 2 "Efficient management of natural resources" – 12.9, and Priority 3 "Sustainable transport" – 11.9).

In the survey conducted, across all priorities, the beneficiaries' perception of the effects of the shift to digital tools and online mode among project partners was seen as primarily negative, which outweighs the positive by 2.5 times (Figure 36). However, it should be mentioned that proportionally more respondents in the Priority 3 "Sustainable transport" group assume that there existed a positive effect on communication (around 30% of respondents). At the same time, only 20% of Priority 1 "Capacity for

innovation” and only 15% of Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” stated that the effect was positive.

FIGURE 36: THE PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE SHIFT TO DIGITAL TOOLS AND ONLINE MODE OF COOPERATION ON NETWORKING WITH OTHER PROJECTS AND STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING PROJECT PARTNERS (N=249)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

During the interviews with project leaders and partners, Monitoring Committee and MA/JS the following positive aspects of online work have been mentioned. Several beneficiaries have noted that online communication among partners allowed more flexibility in arranging joint project partners meetings or ad hoc discussions on the implementation of tasks in smaller working groups, e.g., involving the project lead and action leaders. The same was supported by Monitoring Committee members and MA/JS. Together with that, the focus group participants have noted that the overall acceptance level of communication via online tools has increased which may benefit projects in further activities.

Nevertheless, project beneficiaries mentioned as well numerous negative effects on the cooperation. In general, online cooperation reduced cohesion and raised the threshold for cooperation. Almost no face-to-face meetings reduced the opportunity for in-depth experience exchange between partners on site. It was pointed out that, to some extent, it also had a negative impact on “project team feeling” and from time to time, activities were implemented more on an individual basis lacking the knowledge of the activities performed by other partners. During the focus group discussions, the participants have noted that online tools do not create trust that is essential for a successful project implementation. That might be one of the reasons why partners consider that digital tools did not allow them to get a full understanding of the problems, challenges, and possibilities of cooperation with the other partners. Furthermore, it was brought out by platform BSR Water that making agreements online is very easy, but doing actual work is challenging. For example, a 4-hour face-to-face meeting is doable, but 2 hours online is much harder. It is harder to reach people outside your project via email, which would make some simple tasks irrationally time-consuming. Some partners (BSR Water and CW Pharma 2) as well brought out that coffee breaks are important for the capacity-building process and cooperation. The need for coffee breaks and meeting face-to-face was also stressed by Monitoring Committee representatives. Finally, several partners in interviews have pointed out that some types of communication activities are not suitable for online mode. One such type of activity is brainstorming or active topic discussions. In that case, partners have noticed that the engagement of each participant was significantly lower while being online which might have affected the

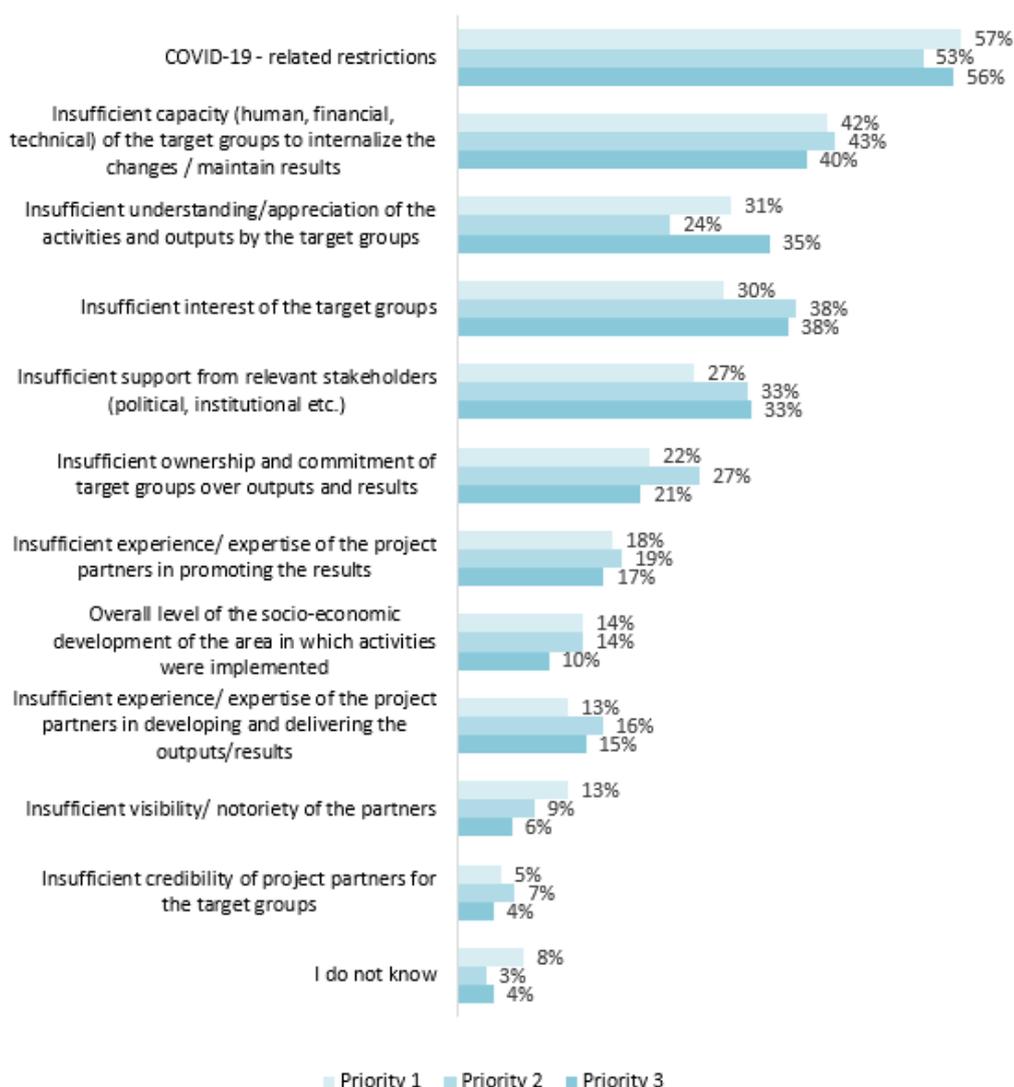
results of the whole project. This conclusion was also stated by Monitoring Committee representatives that online mode in discussions is not effective.

The online work was usually done via various online platforms, such as Google Meet, and Zoom as well as some others. Partners noted that most of them already knew how to use online communication tools, thus it was not time-consuming to adapt to the new cooperation mode. Moreover, some partners and Monitoring Committee members noted that the most remarkable thing about the “online shift” is that in the future everyone already knows all the possible video conference platforms and it is not needed to send any instructions on how to use them during the next potential pandemic. This effect has also been acknowledged by the focus group participants, who stated that there appeared a better acceptance of digital tools and better use of it.

IMPACT OF “ONLINE-SHIFT” ON THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS

COVID-19-related restrictions stand out as the most important challenge affecting the capacity building process. This was observed in the survey results, conducted for the project beneficiaries. It can be also seen the COVID-19 restrictions were the affecting projects in all three priorities (Figure 37).

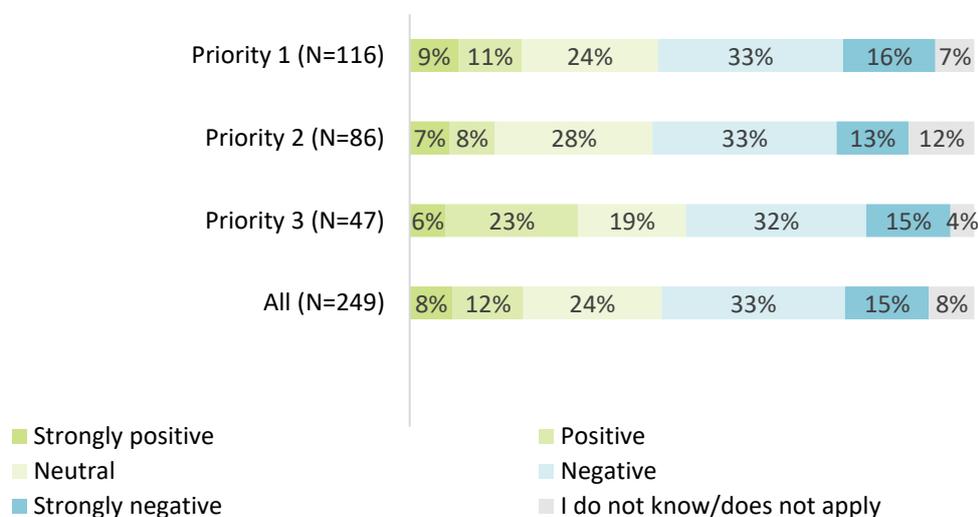
FIGURE 37: THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING PROCESS. ANSWERS SPLIT PER PRIORITY, IN % (N=258)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

Moreover, 18% of all project partners in all 3 priorities have noted that the COVID-19-related issues have affected the capacity-building processes positively (Figure 38). Interestingly, 47% of Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” respondents see the negative impact of COVID-19 issues on the capacity building while in Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” and Priority 3 “Sustainable transport” the numbers are just a bit above 40%. It has also been mentioned that only 7% of all project platform respondents assume that COVID-19 has brought at least some positive change while 60% - negative, which is the highest number. At the same time, extension-stage projects respondents see the smallest negative impact and the largest – positive.

FIGURE 38: THE PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE SHIFT TO DIGITAL TOOLS AND ONLINE MODE OF COOPERATION ON CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS, INCLUDING UPTAKE OF RESULTS (N=249)



Source: Survey on the beneficiaries of Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020

During the interviews with beneficiaries, MA/JS, EUSBSR, Monitoring Committee and focus groups the following positive effects were observed. Several stakeholders as well as focus group participants noted that online mode helped with wider exposure and dissemination activities. For example, thanks to moving to webinars and podcasts as well as some other online tools, projects could reach more stakeholders, many of which they would not have been able to engage in physical seminars. Others noted that due to online possibilities, they could reach EU-level representatives to speak at their events, which would not have worked if it all took place in person. Outreach via online events was much bigger, but the real engagement of target groups was harder in the online mode. Whilst more people were able to participate in online events, a large number of events also made people lose interest quickly. Social media etc., was already working on some projects, hence, they did not observe any change.

To proceed with online tools, the participants of focus groups have specifically noted that creativity and sustainability of online dissemination tools play a valuable role in the perception of information and the usefulness of it in the long run. For instance, during the Energize Co2Community project, an online webinar has been replaced by the video. This has had a great effect as the other project participants were able have access to the information at any time. Moreover, it was possible to better show the activities conducted in the video than via means of an online conference. According to the other participants’ opinions, the perception of the video was highly positive. This is a picturesque example of the positive effect of a sustainable and creative while appropriate method of dissemination.

Furthermore, adverse effects were established, and the results were also affected. In some cases, some activities could not be done online, but only in person. That has mainly affected the piloting which included

the involvement of a large number of people. “Online shift” was a great challenge that made the project results weaker and took more extended time. There was a more considerable challenge than expected to really learn the difference in circumstances, framework, and how the basics are done in each partner country, which took a long time. There was a significant need to really listen and understand each partner, and that was a lot harder online. However, with online activities, some projects succeeded as they eventually did, thanks to a broader scope of potential stakeholders involved or better dissemination of findings.

Moreover, in Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” partners noted that applied scientific cooperation was much harder online, as applied research, by its nature, is practical-oriented, which requires close collaboration between partners. Many projects brought out that their delays were because of COVID-19 as the communication online with stakeholders was much slower.

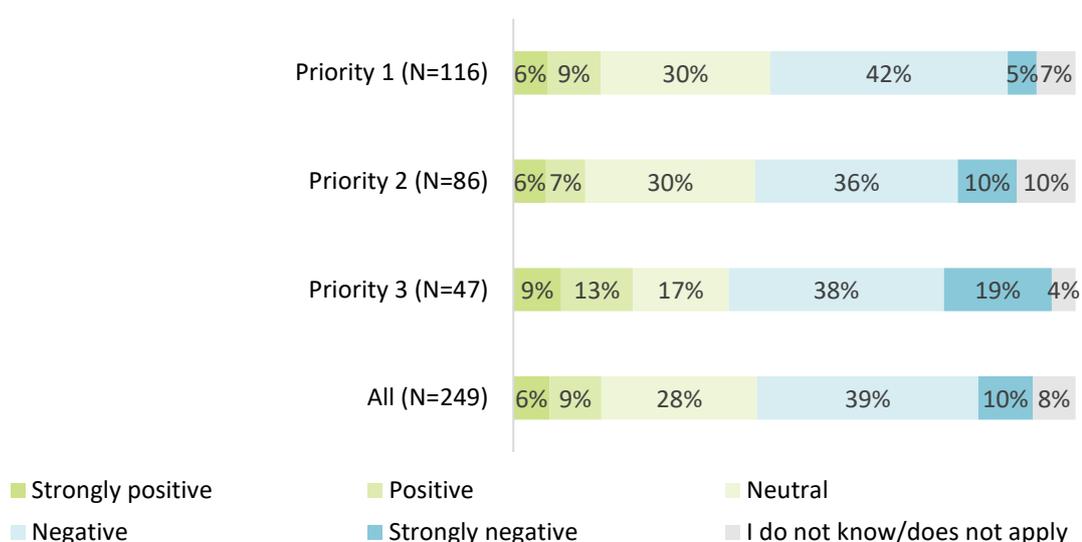
Lastly, also MA/JS and Monitoring Committee representatives informed that COVID-19 reduced project capacity to implement to projects and reach targets and objectives. However, it has been noticed that pandemics developed new ways of working, know-how to use digital tools, which has well prepared people for the next pandemic.

IMPACT OF “ONLINE-SHIFT” ON PILOTING ACTIVITIES

Piloting activities can be considered as one of the most important parts of each project which is acknowledged by the majority of various level stakeholders of the projects in the Interreg Baltic Sea region program, including the focus group participants.

In the survey, the vast majority of respondents assume that the “online-shift” has negatively affected piloting and other similar project activities (Figure 39); however, positive opinions about the issue have also been expressed – 13%–22% of respondents depending on the Priority do observe the positive impact. Platform project participants feel the most minor negative (40%) about the “online shift” while the extension stage projects - are the most negative (64% see a negative impact). This might be connected to the fact that during the platform project, partners work more with previous project materials but do not create new material that must be validated.

FIGURE 39: THE PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE SHIFT TO DIGITAL TOOLS AND ONLINE MODE OF COOPERATION ON CARRYING OUT PROJECT ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PILOT ACTIVITIES (N=249)



Overall, during conducted interviews with project beneficiaries, MA/JS, the Monitoring Committee and in the focus groups, it was stated that most projects have succeeded in adapting, but it took an enormous time and effort to do that and change. Moreover, the online mode had a different impact on different aspects of piloting. For instance, thanks to online cooperation, the costs of piloting could be lower while the ease of communication – higher. The capacity-building process, which was done by creating toolkits and/or informational materials, was the same, as partners worked online most of the time, even during the pre-covid times, thus, the final goal of the project remained the same because of COVID-19. However, the projects whose main goal was to develop the prototype or actively involve the target group to reach some goal had to postpone piloting activities or switch them to the online mode completely, which was not possible in some cases. Furthermore, due to COVID-19, the scale and timing of pilots were different in different regions due to the restrictions. On some rare occasions, partners have conducted proper piloting during the extension stage of the project already.

Regarding the “online shift” of activities, representative of [Baltic Sea Food](#) as well as the focus group participants stated that COVID-19 has heavily impacted them, as they could not organise events or meetings as well as the pilots on site in many of the regions, which was a lot bigger problem. Since their target groups were restaurants and cafes, in some cases, it was legally impossible to participate. Thus, they had to wait for restrictions to be lifted. However, the restrictions were never lifted entirely during the project implementation, thus, piloting was on a smaller scale, and not everyone could participate. Due to that, they had to change the target groups in the pilot for the pilot to be helpful. As a result, they attracted more shops and stores than restaurants which were the project’s initial target group. The negative effect of COVID-19 on pilots was also stated by MA/JS. Representatives and the focus group participants informed that in some projects, it was rather hard to conduct pilots online as they have not received the expected output. Even though some projects have managed to deal with the situation, it is still much preferred to have pilots onsite and face-to-face. Moreover, MA/JS noted that instead of transnational pilots, lots of projects had to conduct their pilots locally, nationally. It affected the projects results, but in most cases project partners adapted.

SUCCESSFUL “ONLINE-SHIFT” CHANGES

Partners, in general, noted that “online-shift” was more negative than positive but recommended having a balance between online and in-person meetings and activities. Moreover, it has been noted that in some cases, online dissemination events can widen the scope of potential stakeholders and reach bigger audiences, for example, thanks to moving to webinars and podcasts, one project could reach those stakeholders whom they would not have been able to engage in physical seminars. Thus, it could be beneficial to organise different online activities from time to time. Also, it is a way to make impromptu team meetings or information exchange meetings.

One of the modes of cooperation has been suggested by representatives of [CAMS platform](#). They concluded that there should be at least 5–8 full working days of physical meetings at the start of the project to understand each other’s context and then build the activities on that. Without in-person meetings, some invisible barriers exist between the partners, which do not allow them to cooperate as they should, which decreases capacity building. Moreover, some of the beneficiaries noted that the outcome of project activities turned out very different than initially planned, admitting that it would be more effective and attractive, though more expensive if the activities had happened in a person-to-person format. However, online project and team management meetings proved to be financially advantageous for the beneficiaries of the projects, who made considerable savings due to no travelling expenses and the much lower expenses.

The “online-shift” came with the option of extending the implementation of the projects by up to 6 months, while the MA/JS (with the approval of the Monitoring Committee) also allowed the revision of the project implementation plans and budget reallocation, helping the beneficiaries throughout this process. Nevertheless, the MA/JS ensured a flexible cancellation policy for planned physical events within all

projects. However, if it was decided not to postpone piloting but to organise it in the online environment, then the pilots could be organised not on the local level, but internationally, which provided a wider view and tested the external validity of the instrument/tool/etc.

Furthermore, MA/JS introduced the possibility of using the electronic signature for the reporting and project documents. Against the background of possible further outbreaks of COVID-19, and/or other possible challenges that could negatively affect the implementation of activities, it is recommended to keep the good practices regarding the use of electronic signatures together with the flexible cancellation policy for physical events by MA/JS. Also, in order to achieve further financial savings within projects, it is suggested to keep the management activities within the projects in a hybrid or even online format, as well as all the technical activities which face-to-face organisation would not bring a concrete benefit, in relation to the expected results of the projects.

UNINTENDED EFFECTS OF THE “ONLINE-SHIFT”

According to the case study interviews, most unintended effects were caused by COVID-19 restrictions and the “online shift”. 24% of respondents across all priorities assume that unintended effects were unforeseen in the beginning. These were partially determined by the COVID-19-related restrictions, for example the faster uptake of digital meeting tools, not only for the project team, but also for the target groups (residents, including senior citizens). This helped transition dialog and outreach activities to digital methods which the beneficiaries consider they will be more mainstream in the future.

The share of those who think so is among Priority 1 “Capacity for innovation” respondents (21%), while the highest (28%) – is among Priority 2 “Efficient management of natural resources” respondents. The relative share of respondents that see the unintended effects to those who do not is the highest in Denmark, while the lowest is in Germany and Latvia. Also, the share of respondents representing extension-stage projects who assume there were unintended effects (36%) is more significant than in platform (19%) and regular (24%) projects.

Unintended effects were both positive and negative. As a positive unintended effect, partners and focus group participants have noted that even though most of the work shifted to online mode, it enabled to reach even wider audiences through dissemination. For example, it allowed project partners to reach delegates outside of BSR countries who otherwise would not be able to participate in the project activities, therefore widening the professional knowledge of the project. One of the examples is reaching people in the Adriatic and Alpine regions throughout one of the projects via workshops. One partner in the survey has noted that thanks to webinars, they managed to save up money and increase the overall number of events and also have a wider reach of audience. In addition, another partner noted that online work through Zoom opened doors to other and further away delegates, which would not have worked before COVID-19. Some survey respondents noted that pilots and other activities were recorded and then published, which were seen as an additional source of exposure and communication of the results in a long-term, as the information was published online and could be re-watched at a later stage. Moreover, that has made the project results more sustainable.

Furthermore, as negative unintended effects, in the survey partners of course noted that due to shift to online, some audiences and target groups could not be reached, another project did not yield the output they had expected/hoped for, and another project noted that they understood that their concept had to be adapted in different countries differently. In addition, MA/JS also noted that even though online mode allowed to reach bigger audience, the engagement level decreased significantly.

Together with that, many stakeholders do reply that the pandemic has increased the awareness of the concrete tools that can be used. Monitoring Committee representatives also have noted that people are ready for the next pandemic. It has brought some project ideas for the new programming period, where some tools are developed in telemedicine and education. Many have understood that the level of digitalisation before pandemic was relatively low. People are now better prepared for the pandemic or any similar event from the digitalisation perspective and should now think more about bringing it to different areas and fields.

Thus, future projects should continue to support this tendency, integrating digital cooperation into the capacity-building process whenever possible, as it is a great way to save budgets for some other activities and a more effective tool in some particular cases like information dissemination. This involves relying more on digital solutions both within the partnership (for internal communication), and across the activities related to the capacity-building process (strengthening the use of digital solutions whenever possible in the capacity-building process, and in the communication of the projects' results).

Regarding Priority 3 "Sustainable transport", it is possible to identify two unintended effects caused by the "online-shift" and the COVID-19 pandemic based on the literature review and the conducted interviews. The first one refers to an even increased need for institutional cooperation and capacity building in the transport sector which was one of the most affected sectors throughout the pandemic. The second refers to the enhanced digitalisation of cooperation in the transport sector and the need to integrate this phenomenon into the capacity-building process.

ONLINE COOPERATION IMPROVEMENT ASPECTS

COVID-19 has affected the majority of the projects. In some cases, the reason was connected only to the difficulties in online cooperation, while in other cases, it was not possible to conduct piloting or get into the laboratory. Some of the problems could be solved on the project level by adjusting several activities; however, in other cases, the state regulations significantly impacted the work, which could not be solved in any way.

Based on the surveys and interviews with the stakeholders and the focus group participants, it can be concluded that a balance between online and offline interaction and activities would benefit any project; however, in-person should be a priority. In contrast, online dissemination activities presented positive opportunities to attract a wider audience, even outside of BSR and the EU.

Moreover, beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the outreach that the online shift made possible. Online events were a great way to disseminate, as they presented positive opportunities to attract a wider audience, even from outside of BSR and outside of the EU. However, it was noted that at some point there were too many online events at once and it was tiring for everyone. Thus, some beneficiaries concluded that the next steps would be to improve the strategy of online events, tools, and activities, to not burden the audience, and to deliver the main points as effectively as possible. In that sense, national events should be held alongside international events to better reach target groups within a country.

On the other hand, beneficiaries were not so satisfied with their own cooperation when it remained online for too long. For example, there were even situations when project partners have yet to meet each other throughout the project due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore, the beneficiaries under Priority 2 found that physical meetings should be kept for the next program, but online cooperation should be integrated with it, for instance, for ad hoc meetings or smaller working group meetings. It was noted that there should be some standard tools provided by MA/JS for the projects.

CONCLUSIONS

EQ 17. What was the impact of the shift to digital tools and online mode of cooperation on the cooperation among project partners? How did the online cooperation within the partnership work? What were the core impacts, challenges, but also advantages for the project partnership?

In all three Priorities, the shift to online cooperation had a strong negative impact on the cooperation among project partners. The shift to digital tools limited the development of cooperative relations within projects and negatively influenced the development of networks with other projects or stakeholders, especially in the case of platforms. Project beneficiaries, Monitoring Committee, MA/JS and focus group participants concluded that online mode allowed for effective quick exchange of the information; however, the project representative team feeling, and trust could not be developed online. In addition, the partners consider that digital tools did not allow them to get a full understanding of the problems, challenges, and possibilities of cooperation with the other partners. Moreover, online mode is not effective in long discussions; here meetings must be done in-person.

EQ 18. What was the impact of the “online-shift” on the capacity building process, including the piloting activities in the projects? Can some recurrent pattern of impacts be identified?

At the project level, an accelerated partner's online interactions and decreased capacity-building process could be observed, especially in the networking activities. Although this process was constrained by the COVID-19-related restrictions, being indispensable for the further implementation of the projects, it generated more robust digital knowledge and skills among project beneficiaries. Moreover, the online dissemination events helped projects reach new and broader audiences and increased the projects' visibility, it is easier to bring in more people to meetings. In addition, focus group participants noted using digital means, such as video tools also helped to have sustainable capacity building, as these materials can be re-watched later numerous times. In general, as the main recommendation regarding the “online-shift” is to have a balance between online and in-person activities, including capacity building processes, such as networking and others.

EQ 19. Which changes due to the “online-shift” turned out as successful, advantageous for projects and could be considered as good practices to keep in the future?

First, project beneficiaries stated that having dissemination events online could widen the scope of potential stakeholders and reach wider audiences, for example, by reaching people outside of BSR and Europe. Second, being online allowed for a quicker information exchange among project partners and allowed to make impromptu team meetings, when necessary. Third, online meetings allowed to significantly decrease project costs due to savings in travelling expenses. Lastly, it was noted that electronic signature and flexible cancellation policy for physical events by MA/JS was also seen as beneficial and should be as well kept in the future. In general, it has been seen that a balance between online and in person meetings, activities and events should be kept.

EQ 20. Can any possible unintended effect be detected among interventions under priorities 1–3 regarding the “online-shift”? If such effects occurred, what was the context and mechanisms that generated them?

All project stakeholders have stated that most unintended effects were caused by COVID-19 restrictions and the “online-shift”. The unintended effects include faster uptake of digital meeting tools by project partners, target groups and other stakeholders. This allowed to, for example, to reach even wider audiences through dissemination. For example, it allowed project partners to reach delegates outside of BSR countries who otherwise would not be able to participate in the project activities, therefore widening the professional knowledge of the project. Furthermore, survey respondents noted that pilots and other activities were recorded and then published, which were seen as an additional source of exposure and communication of the results in a long-term, as the information was published online and could be re-watched at a later stage. However, also negative unintended effects were detected, for example, certain target groups could not be reached due to COVID-19 restrictions.

EQ 21. What are the main aspects to be improved, considering the change to online cooperation in the projects within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region 2014–2020 and what are the best practices that could be used in the 2021–2027 Programme?

Considering the change to online cooperation in the projects, the main conclusion which was drawn across all project stakeholders was to enforce balance between online and offline activities, with offline being the priority. The balance should be found across all project activities, including project partner meetings, implementation activities, dissemination, and others. For example, online change was beneficial for dissemination activities, however it was noted that at some point there were too many online events at once and it was tiring for everyone. Moreover, it was thoroughly also stated that for capacity building in person meetings should definitely established, at least at the start of the project to ensure trust and good connection. In person should be a priority and online cooperation should be integrated with it, for instance, for ad hoc meetings or smaller working group meetings. It was noted that there should be some standard tools provided by MA/JS for the projects. Lastly another best practice which should be kept, as noted by project stakeholders, is to keep electronic signature and the flexible physical event cancellation policy.

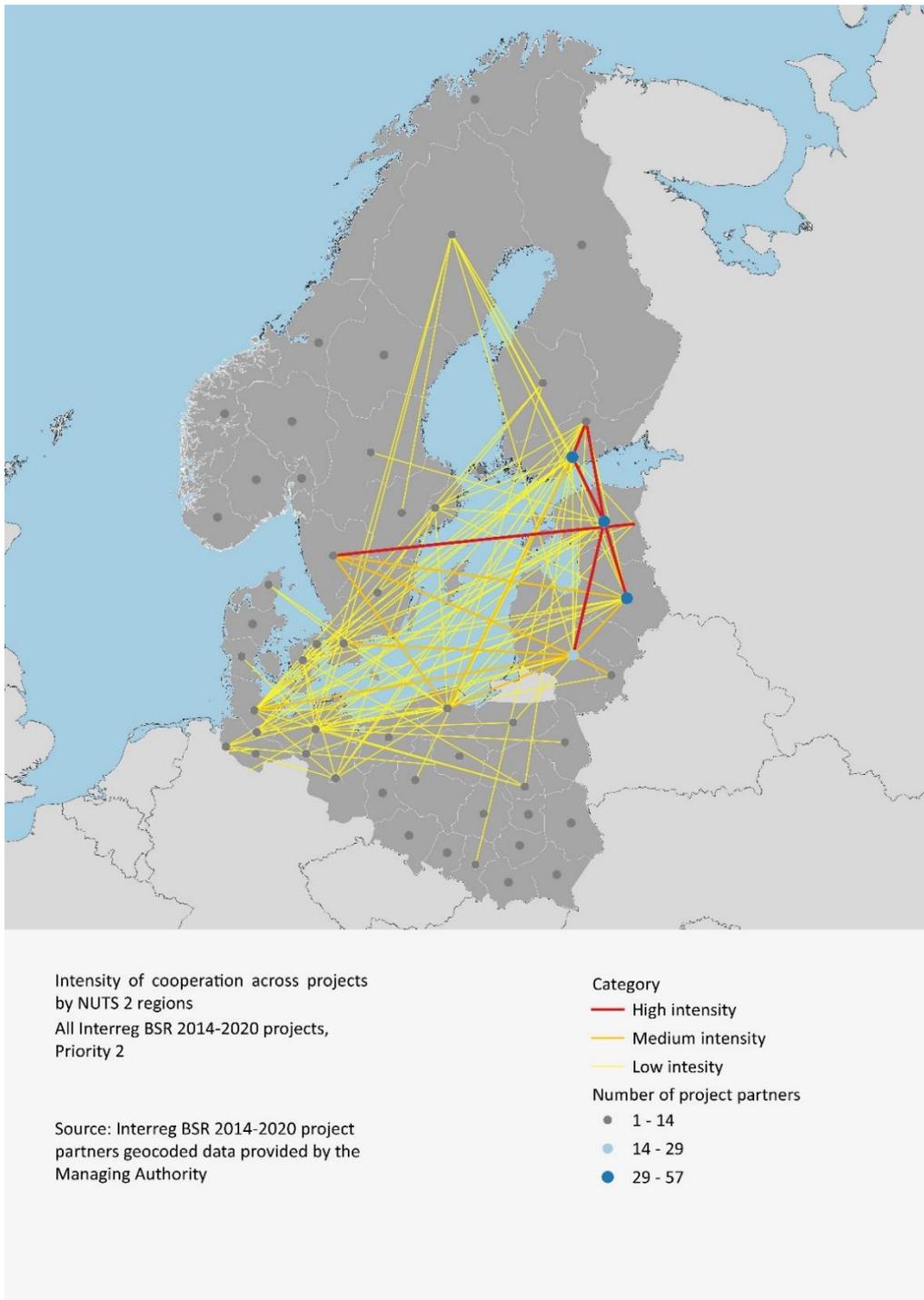
APPENDICES

MAP 5: INTENSITY OF COOPERATION ACROSS PROJECTS WITHIN PRIORITY 1



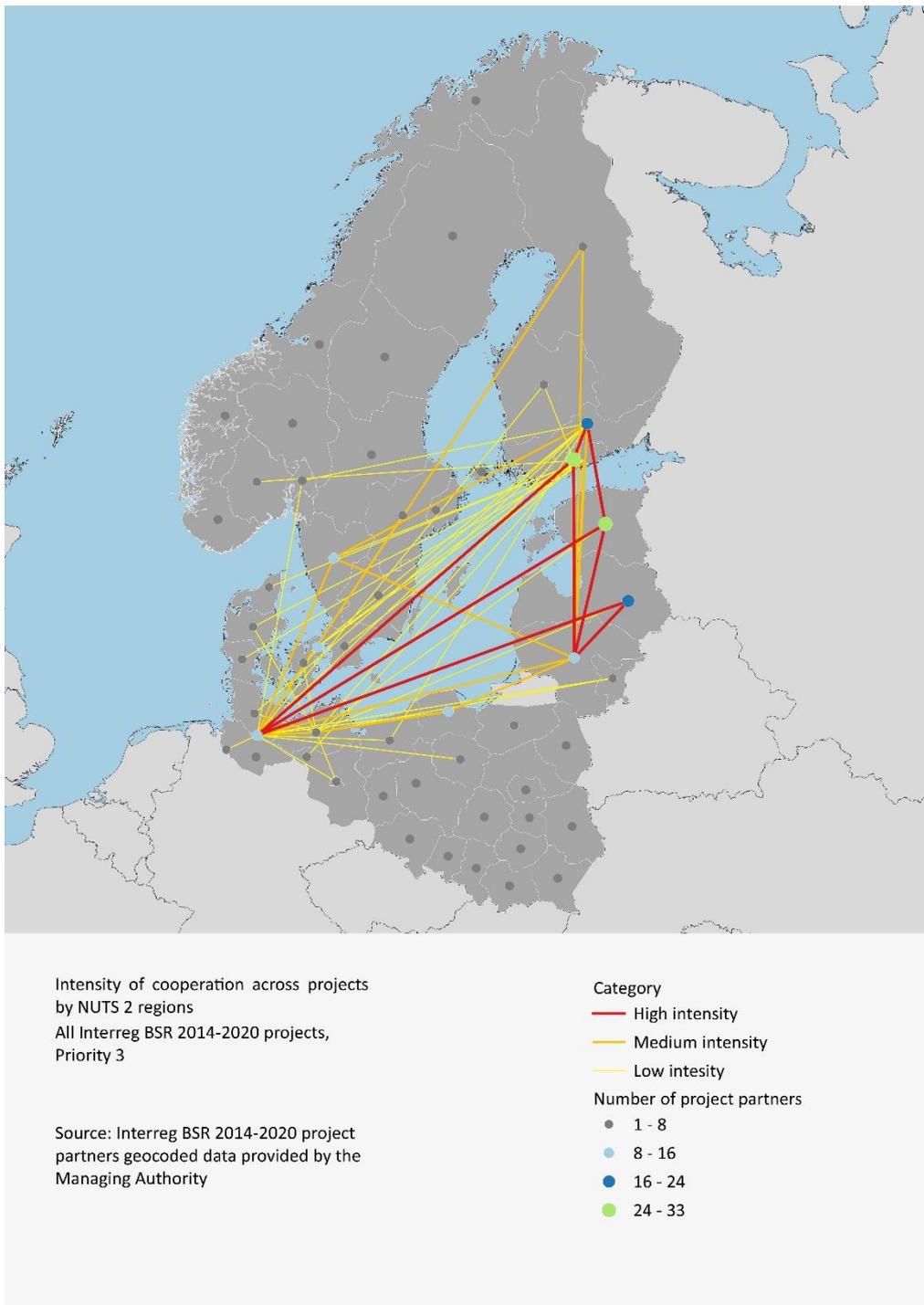
Source: Interreg BSR 2014–2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS

MAP 6: INTENSITY OF COOPERATION ACROSS PROJECTS WITHIN PRIORITY 2



Source: Interreg BSR 2014–2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS

MAP 7: INTENSITY OF COOPERATION ACROSS PROJECTS WITHIN PRIORITY 3



Source: Interreg BSR 2014–2020 project partners geocoded data provided by the MA/JS