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Interreg Baltic Sea Region

Mid-term evaluation of Programme impact

FINAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

The main objective of the **Interreg Baltic Sea Region Mid-term Evaluation of Programme impact** is to demonstrate the impact of the Programme and its progress and contribution to achieving its objectives. Results of the evaluation will not only provide information on the progress of the Programme towards result achievement and impact, as well as input regarding any necessary improvements to the Programme for the rest of the programme period (2014-2020).

The evaluation followed a theory-based approach based on the theory of change established in the Cooperation Programme. The **methodological approach** of the evaluation involved a mix of different data gathering and analytical methods, including documentary review, analysis of project monitoring data, case studies of eight projects and project websites, interviews to programme bodies, surveys to project partners and to EUSBSR stakeholders and a survey to BSR thematic experts.

This executive summary of the final report shows the main findings and key recommendations deriving from the evaluation.

1. Impact of projects in reaching the Programme's Specific Objectives

Have the Programme interventions affected the relevant target groups? Have the project outputs and results led to institutional learning experiences among the relevant target groups? What are the specific impacts of the Programme in terms of increasing the capacity of a certain target group? In which dimensions of institutional capacity has there been a change due to the Programme?

- Analysis shows that the projects involve diverse organisations, both as project partners and as associated partners. The diversity of partner types corresponds to the different target groups envisaged by the Cooperation Programme for different Specific Objectives (SOs). One characteristic of Interreg BSR projects (and Interreg projects in general) is that the projects usually do not target only one or two target groups, but involve from a systemic perspective many different target groups and types of organisations. This responds, for example, to the triple/quadruple helix approach in the innovation policy field or the value chain/net approach when developing new services or products.
- Projects aim at improving institutional capacities in specific thematic fields. Analysis of the Application Forms (AFs), highlights that all approved projects foresee an impact on the generation of knowledge and competence in specific thematic fields. The capacity dimension 'Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence' is a general aim for all the projects. What is surprising is that most projects and all SO aim at various dimensions of institutional capacities. Projects do not focus on only one dimension and the combination of capacities supported and developed by IBSR projects even add value compared to other regional or national projects.
- Survey data shows that projects are progressing adequately towards results and expected achievements. In addition, most projects (85%) see a high probability of achieving the outputs

and results as expressed in the AFs. Only 13% of projects see a medium probability of achieving all their results and outputs.

- An overwhelming 97% of project partners estimate that they benefit as an organisation from the Interreg BSR project. The survey responses show that there are several benefits for project partners. Most responses relate to the generation and adoption of new knowledge: 'Learning from other regions/countries', 'New contacts and access to networks', 'Learning in a specific thematic field' and 'Learning with practical examples and applications'.
- 74% of project partners, including associated partners that answered the survey estimate that participation in the project has a strong or very strong effect on their organisation. 21% indicate that there is a medium-sized effect on their organisation. An effect is a prerequisite for capacity development in the target organisation.
- Most effects can be observed in the capacity 'Increased capability to work in a transnational environment' as well as 'More knowledge available'. In addition, capacities are developed in 'Enhanced institutionalised knowledge and competence', and with slightly less importance in 'Improved governance structures and organisational set-up'. The least prominent area is 'Better ability to attract new private financial resources'. Overall, it is worth highlighting that project outputs and results mean capacities are developed in all relevant areas and dimensions. The areas with a stronger impact correspond directly to areas and dimensions initially targeted by the projects. The analysis shows that there is a general pattern of perceived impact on capacities for more or less all types of organisations. However, these can differ for different types of organisation.
- The case study analysis helped to detect many examples of institutional learning and capacity-building due to participation or benefitting from IBSR projects. All analysed projects showed examples of learning, even if the projects are not yet finalised and the impact on learning should be larger once the projects are finalised and have all their results. Details of these examples are presented in Chapter 2 and the annexed case study reports.
- For the overall Programme objectives to develop and contribute to increased institutional capacities in the BSR, an additional study analysed the up-dated situation of institutional capacities compared to a 2014 baseline. The additional study carried out a survey and additional interviews with thematic experts in the BSR. There is a positive trend – with the exception of only one SO – for developing overall institutional capacities. The respondents under all but one thematic focus (based on Interreg BSR 2014-2020 SOs) show increases and appear to be on a feasible path toward reaching their target values.
- It is still too early to try to quantify the contribution of IBSR projects to the change in institutional capacities. Other factors contribute, including regional and national policies and capacity-building schemes, other mainstream ESIF programmes, other Interreg and European Programmes, as well as other macroeconomic and social factors. Projects are not finalised, so more evidence is needed to carry out a more detailed impact and contribution analysis, but this can be recommended for the final evaluation of the Programme.

How do the relevant target groups experience institutional learning? Through which processes have Interreg Baltic Sea Region projects contributed to the institutional capacity building of the relevant target groups in selected thematic areas?

- The case study analysis revealed detailed information on the processes through which IBSR projects contribute to institutional capacity building for the relevant target groups in selected thematic areas. Examples are very diverse and cannot be easily classified. To understand the examples, it is important to see the context of the different projects and policy fields (see the case study reports, for details) Learning takes place, for example, through:
 - Pilot applications and experiments with SMEs and companies that bring insights into the profiles of the experiments, such as any alignment (or not) to regional policies, interregional research-to-Industrial Research Centre (IReC)-to-business cooperation, and potential for regional & interregional clustering (Baltic Tram project)
 - Regional Stakeholder Events such as the ‘Workshop: Offshore Wind Energy Supply Chain – future outlook for technologies and cooperation’. This highlighted business opportunities in blue growth value chains for nearly 90 participants at a Workshop on Offshore Wind Energy Supply Chain. (Smart Blue Regions project)
 - Target groups participate in a furniture fair and are provided with research results and information on how to improve designs for elderly customers. (BaltSe@nior project)
 - The first common evaluation system for efficient energy performance and sludge treatment based on the wide range of data collected in the BSR. The partnership with wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) operators, universities, associations and environmental centres will collect key figure and conduct in-depth audits to derive general audit concepts for improving both energy efficiency and sludge handling. (IWAMA project)
 - LowTEMP brings together actors in charge of urban development, energy supply and district heating systems from various municipalities and regions in the BSR, to collect data and information on existing heating supply systems. Creation of a knowledge platform that will support them in planning, managing and developing their energy supply systems. (LowTEMP project)
 - Establishing pilot mussel farms: review of mussel production equipment, optimising and monitoring mussel production, developing systems for submerged mussel farms and monitoring the effects of mussel farming on water. → Project results cover environmental monitoring and benchmarking on Mussel/fish (and algae) farming, use of best practice for mussel production, including cultivation methods, available technology, best equipment and knowledge. (Baltic Blue Growth project)
 - Pilot/demonstration activities for more efficient and reliable Inland waterway transport (IWT). → This produced knowledge on bottlenecks and potential, summarised in an ‘IWT in BSR Competitiveness Improvement Plan’ and learning about concrete practical solutions to promote inland waterway transport
 - Development of web tools such as the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) standard and regulation toolbox, the LNG bunkering map and the LNG shipping index → This led to increased knowledge and capacities of stakeholders along the whole value chain; and new ways for knowledge and competence transfer in the industry. (Go LNG project)

If no impact is observed in a target group, what is the lack of impact due to?

- Based on the analysis, there is no specific target group that reports a lack of benefit or impact on capacities. The case study analysis mentions only minor obstacles to involving relevant target groups and stakeholders, such as the lack of capacity to involve partners or language barriers to getting to target groups in different countries.

Which other factors have influenced the change in institutional capacities of the target groups? How and why?

- Other factors that influence a) project implementation, b) benefit generation and uptake by target groups and c) the change in target group institutional capacities. Factors that influence project implementation include financial capacities, project set up and contracting, administrative burden, project management and communication capacities, problems within the partnership and the commitment of partners.
- The analysis shows changing institutional capacities of target groups in general depends on the macro-economic climate and other economic factors (e.g. the oil price), cultural factors such as entrepreneurial spirit and propensity for risk, but also on language capacity. In this transnational and international environment, new knowledge is widely published in English and not all target group representatives can work with this language.

2. Involvement of different types of partners

How has the participation of for-profit private companies changed the nature of projects? Has it added value to project results? If so, how and what kind?

- 76% of selected project partners fall under the definition of 'public body or ruled by public law', while 24% are private bodies. Analysing priorities 1, 2, and 3, the share of projects involving at least one private for-profit partner is 49%, which is high. The initial expectations were that 2% (in Priority 1) or 1% (in Priorities 2 and 3) of project partners should be private, for profit bodies. These goals have been widely exceeded, with 7% private partners in Priority 1, 11% in Priority 2 and 14% in Priority 3.
- The share of SMEs and large enterprises in the associated organisations is 15%. It is also more evenly distributed across the three priorities.
- Private, for-profit partners bring certain benefits to a project, with the transfer of project results into practice seeming the most relevant. Other effects indicated by survey respondents are other market-related concerns, such as the knowledge of specific needs of target groups, and enabling wider distribution of project results. There were also implementation-related topics identified by the provision of practical 'on-the-ground' knowledge.
- Case Study research confirms the manifold benefits of involving private partners in projects. Moreover, some projects highlight the role of large companies and industry partners when it comes to test, develop and prepare new products, solutions or services for the market.

What are the main challenges and obstacles in the involvement of for-profit private companies in projects? How can they be solved?

- The key issues related to the difficulty in involving private for-profit partners are linked to formal factors. State aid requirements followed closely by general administrative requirements, and, to a lesser extent, reporting requirements, make up most of the explanations by respondents. In some cases, and especially for State aid, these factors are outside the Programme's control. Lack of time is also regarded as an obstacle for involving this type of partner. This suggests that cooperation between projects and private for-profit actors may be perceived as a low-priority activity, with the result of being pushed back behind 'core' tasks.
- More participation might be possible with fewer obstacles. Proposals made by project partners include reducing the administrative requirements, an exception to State aid regulations, as well as clearer guidance and definition of rules by the programme. Furthermore, proposals include providing a service for administrative support. Some respondents advanced the idea of increasing spending through the use of pre-payments which would reduce private risk and ensure sufficient capacity and commitment from the private partner.
- Many private partners participate as associated partners. This seems to be a good option to be close to a project but without the administrative burdens of a project partner.

How and why has the participation of public authorities changed compared to the predecessor programme? What effect has this had on project results?

- In the Interreg BSR 2007-2013 Programme, it is possible to estimate that public authority partners made up roughly 39% of project partners in that programming period. In Interreg BSR Programme 2014-2020 public authorities make up 27% of project partners, a sharp reduction.
- Apart from the relative participation, the absolute number of public authorities involved in the two periods has roughly halved. This might be due to different factors; sometimes, they no longer count as a 'public authority', there are fewer resources for cooperation projects in local, regional and national authorities, an increased competition for cooperation resources, a shift in the IBSR towards promoting and developing new business products and services that reduces the potential benefit for public authorities, or even cooperation fatigue to participate in 'yet another' Interreg project.
- The involvement of public authorities is regarded as key both in terms of policy orientation and quality of the overall project goals, and in terms of knowledge transmission and sharing.
- Other high impact benefits for the projects include 'upstream' knowledge transfer from the authorities to project managers. This is through insights on rules and procedures, knowledge on the needs of target groups, practical knowledge, input from experts, and, to a lesser extent, data. Contacts and access to networks, which can be used for both upstream and downstream information sharing, is the second most relevant benefit according to survey respondents.
- Thus, a reduced participation of public authorities might lead to a lower transfer of project results into public policies and narrower dissemination of project results.

How and why has the participation of research organisations changed compared to the predecessor programme? What effect has this had on project results?

- Comparing the participation of academic and research organisations between Interreg BSR 2007-2013 and Interreg BSR 2014-2020 reveals that the overall share of such partners across projects increased from 25% to 30%. There was slightly less involvement for projects under Priority 3 ‘sustainable transport’, which, in turn, has the highest relative concentration of both public authorities and private for-profit partners.
- Many programme body interviewees pointed to the over-representation of research institutions and universities as a key issue.
- In the survey of project partners, 93% of respondents confirmed that their project involves at least one research or higher education organisation. Academic and research organisations bring specific benefits to projects. In many cases, they provide new and updated knowledge, as well as evidence on general beliefs and observations for the other partners.
- Research and higher education partners are key to most projects, as they provide input from experts in the project content field through studies and research results. But academic and research partners also benefit from the projects, as they receive feedback from other types of partners (e.g. public authorities, infrastructure and service providers, private companies, business associations, companies) and feed this again into the academic research and, in particular, into education. This means that projects in general benefit from the inputs provided by academic and research experts, and also from the organisational capacities in HEI and research organisations to organise larger and transnational projects.
- At the same time, there is a risk, when too many research and academic partners are in a project, that the projects gets too expert-driven and too academic and fruitful exchange with other types of partners and feedback circles gets lost. In this sense, it is important to have a balance of different types of organisations in the project to avoid this institutional ‘lock-in’ effect.

The following recommendations can be derived from the conclusions:

- A reduced administrative burden for private, for-profit partners could make their involvement easier.
- Local, regional and national public authorities should be specifically targeted in campaigns to attract applicants and partners. Their benefits should be pointed out to any project promoter.
- If desired, the share of academic and research organisations in a project can be limited to a degree (60%) by the Call requirements (maybe with an exception for SO 1.1 that focuses widely on large research infrastructure and universities).

3. Contribution to EUSBSR

How has the Programme, through its thematic objectives, contributed to the (successful) implementation of the EUSBSR?

- The Interreg BSR programme supports 44 of the flagship projects through programme priorities 1-3. Overall, 60% of IBSR projects are labelled as flagships or parts of flagship initiatives supporting the EUSBSR.

- Given the thematic alignment and character of IBSR projects (transnational, innovative, inviting non-EU partners), not only projects qualified as EUSBSR flagships, but most IBSR projects contribute to the implementation of EUSBSR in one or more thematic areas. Of course, EUSBSR flagships have a clear and obvious contribution to the EUSBSR, but non-flagship projects can also be relevant if they find other ways to exchange and articulate with EUSBSR stakeholders.
- The strong contribution of IBSR to EUSBSR implementation can also be observed in the increased formal communication between the two. In June 2017 a joint meeting of Interreg BSR Monitoring Committee and the EUSBSR National Coordinators (NC) took place. Corresponding jointly coordinated activities started in 2017, so the contribution of IBSR to EUSBSR even increase in the future. While this can be seen as generally positive as it increases the alignment between Programme and Strategy to the benefit of project partners and final beneficiaries, it also raises the question of EUSBSR becoming more dependent on the IBSR for its implementation and support for coordination and governance.
- In addition, the new instrument of 'project platforms' might increase the contribution of IBSR to EUSBSR implementation. These platforms will clearly support the work of EUSBSR stakeholders and facilitate knowledge management around EUSBSR implementation.
- 92% of the 50 project partners (Priorities 1-3) that responded to the survey feel that their project strongly contributes to EUSBSR. 32% of them even think that their contribution is very strong. It is noteworthy survey responses even highlight links that are not formally fixed through the status of a EUSBSR flagship. 92 % of respondents assess the effect of the project's alignment to reach to target groups as positive / very positive, with 87% mentioning the largest effect of EUSBSR alignment as the dissemination of project results. 86% of respondents mention that the definition of challenges in the policy area is another positive / very positive effect of the alignment, while 84% assessed the use of project outputs in policy-making as positive / very positive.

Are there differences in quality and achievements between EUSBSR flagship projects supported by the Programme and other projects in the Programme?

- The separation into flagship and non-flagship projects in IBSR seems to be artificial, not strict across all Policy and Horizontal areas, and ambiguous in some cases.
- Whether the flagship status makes a difference in overall regional development compared to projects with no flagship label, the analysis shows no large differences. An overall judgement is also difficult to make, as quality and achievements differ between EUSBSR flagships.
- Overall, it seems there is no structural difference in quality and achievements between flagships and other IBSR projects. All good quality projects can contribute to the EUSBSR. However, flagships seem to benefit in some areas more from their status, for example, in the preparatory project phase (better definition of larger challenges in a given policy field) and in the final and ex-post project phases (better outreach to target groups, higher visibility, including to EUSBSR PACs and HACs and stakeholders, more effective dissemination of project results and the facilitation and use of project outputs in policy-making).

Has the Programme's alignment with the EUSBSR raised awareness about the Programme?

- The analysis reveals that, overall, alignment with EUSBSR increased awareness of the Programme, even if it was known to many stakeholders from before EUSBSR existed.
- According to the analysis, EUSBSR is an important channel to raise awareness of the IBSR Programme.
- A survey of thematic experts in the BSR asked those not naturally involved with the Programme or any of its projects about their awareness and links with EUSBSR. 48% of respondents are aware or well aware of the IBSR Programme. This figure can serve as a baseline for future evaluations and studies.
- A regular update of the survey of thematic experts to check the awareness of IBSR is recommended and to be able to compare over time.

Are there new project partners or target groups due to the Programme's EUSBSR support?

- The analysis shows that the programme's support for EUSBSR helps reach target groups, but ambivalent in attracting 'new' partners. Most project partners indicated in a survey that alignment with EUSBSR has a positive effect on the outreach to target groups. Some project partners and MC members indicate that there are new partners due to the Programme's alignment with EUSBSR, while others think there are not. There may be an effect on the attraction of partners, but this cannot be quantified or generalised for all projects.
- One example of an effect can be seen in the case study projects for national public authorities, ERDF MAs or national and regional sectoral agencies (e.g. innovation agencies).

4. Effectiveness of programme support to EUSBSR coordination (priority 4)

How has Programme support influenced the coordination capacities of PACs/HACs? How has Programme support influenced the (improved) governance structures of the EUSBSR?

- In general, there is a notable and in some areas substantial influence of the Programme on the maintenance and on-going development of EUSBSR governance structures. EUSBSR governance structures are not dependent on the IBSR, as is stressed by many EUSBSR stakeholders. However, other representatives of IBSR and EUSBSR highlight the vital importance of IBSR support to the governance structures and activities such as communication, capacity-building, coordination in the framework of the EUSBSR and the different policy areas and horizontal areas.
- A survey of EUSBSR stakeholders confirms the usefulness of Interreg BSR Programme support to the coordination capacities of PACs and HACs. EUSBSR HACs and PACs perceive an influence of the support in many of their policy area and horizontal activity functions. The most influence is perceived in facilitating the development and implementation of actions and flagships, followed by supporting liaison and cooperation with other PACs and HACs and ensuring the communication and visibility of policy area and horizontal activity. The Interreg BSR programme facilitated policy discussions in the policy area and horizontal activity and monitoring of their progress. Alignment of funding resources and fostering dialogue with bodies in charge of implementing the programme and financial instruments seem to see less support.

- The support is generally appreciated by EUSBSR stakeholders, but the drawbacks (administrative burden) are also highlighted.
- Practical examples of this support were also given by PACs and HACs. The support is especially important as it covers costs which would have been challenging to cover otherwise, such as staff and travel costs, meeting costs, communication activities and the Annual Fora.
- For the Programme, the support to EUSBSR is valuable despite the unexpected heavy workload. The MA/JS sees clear and visible benefits for EUSBSR PACs/HACs, but there may not be a return for the Programme or for regions in the Programme area. Support from the IBSR is convenient for Member States but might weaken their commitment to the EUSBSR, delegating the support to the IBSR. Support via SO 4.2 also creates an increasing dependency of PACs and HACs on the IBSR Programme which may hamper innovative proposals for developing governance in the BSR.
- MC members confirm in interviews that alignment between the Programme and EUSBSR is positive for the whole BSR and for final beneficiaries. There is also a mutual benefit for both, IBSR and EUSBSR. Without IBSR support, many things in the EUSBSR, such as thematic networking and EUSBSR communication, cannot take place. However, the Interreg programme should not be the only funding source for the EUSBSR.
- Representatives of all programme bodies agree that support for governance and capacities of EUSBSR stakeholders can and should continue but reducing administrative burden (e.g. within the Technical Assistance budget, or as a single larger project or within a single coordination framework supporting all macro-regional strategies). At the same time, countries should show and increase their commitment, for example, by financing governance staff and capacity-building.

What types of activities have PACs/HACs needed and used the Programme funding for (in comparison to costs covered through other resources)?

- Interreg BSR Programme is in the majority of responses the most relevant funding source for PACs and HACs in their work. Its support is used mainly for covering operational costs such as staff costs and travel costs of PACs/HACs. The programme's support has also been used for covering expenses of organisational activities such as Steering Groups meetings, participation in events, seminars, workshops and conferences, but also staff and travel costs. In general, support under SO 4.2 is given to PACs/HACs and not to NCs whose work is financed by their respective ministries. 79% of EUSBSR stakeholders that responded to the survey believe that IBSR resources are highly or very highly relevant for EUSBSR coordination.
- EUSBSR stakeholders mentioned other resources for their own work and overall EUSBSR coordination. Internal resources and national funding are the main alternative sources, while ESIF and other Interreg funding also play a role. ENI programmes have also been mentioned, and the same holds for resources from foundations and NGOs. Additional sources regard direct technical assistance from the European Commission, as well as support from sub-regions, cities, universities and other institutions.
- The PACs and HACs use funding from other sources, as mentioned during the focus group by participants. These include their own organisational resources, Swedish Institute funds, the

Baltic Leadership Programme, Erasmus+, Bonus, Horizon 2020, DG ECHO and ESIF as well as Agricultural funds, however these sources are used for funding implementation of flagships and projects and not for coordination per se.

How has Programme support to PACs/HACs influenced the involvement of the Programme's non-EU partner countries in the EUSBSR?

- EUSBSR stakeholders do not have a clear opinion on the involvement of non-EU partner countries in EUBSSR. 20% of HACs, PACs and NCs that answered the survey think there was a high or very high influence of the Programme on the involvement of non-EU partner countries in EUSBSR. 36% of respondents found that programme support to EUSBSR coordination moderately influenced the involvement of non-EU partner countries in EUSBSR, 28% found that it has a very low influence, and 16% a low influence.
- What is recognised is that the programme has supported projects with the involvement of partner states and has positively influenced the involvement of non-EU member states, however, for some respondents this is not through Programme support to EUSBSR coordination but rather through projects.

5. Evaluation of the communication strategy

Which communication activities have proven most useful in communicating the Programme?

- According to the survey of project partners, the most useful Programme communication activities are the project websites and Programme events. 66% of respondents believe that the website is useful or very useful, as can be seen in the figure below. Only slightly less useful are the events (62%). A high level of usefulness is also seen for the programme newsletter and the project library.
- Social media channels and tools are generally seen as less useful. However, the usefulness of dissemination tools is more differentiated when looking at the different types of partner organisations that use them. For example, SMEs and Enterprises see events as the most useful tool, while they think that the website and newsletter are less useful. Interest groups/NGOs and international organisations have to follow many different information channels and appreciate the usefulness of Twitter and Facebook much more.
- Projects make an important contribution to communication for the Programme. The survey shows that most project partners are broadly satisfied with the tools. Asked about communication support tools and activities, people are mostly satisfied with the Communication Seminars, individual consultations and the communication toolbox. On the other hand, some tools are not so well known or not used by project partners, such as the online forum for communication managers on LinkedIn.
- Recommendations to improve include *'in the second half of the project a further 'communication seminar', for example, about how to transfer project results in an optimal way; exchange experiences; direct questions; networking; looking forward to new calls and changes (from outside the programme)'*. Interviews indicate that specific support for communicating results and making achievements visible in certain thematic fields may be required (e.g. networking with

similar projects, exchange with other projects and other programmes, outreach to other levels of decision-makers (local or national).

Has there been an increase in awareness of the Programme among its target groups?

- The surveys of both project partners and thematic experts in the BSR, suggest there is more awareness of the Programme compared to the past. 84% of project partners feel there is more awareness among target groups due to their projects. The survey and interviews with thematic experts in relevant policy fields in all BSR countries also indicate a high level of awareness of the Programme. 48% of the thematic experts know the Programme (very well). Only 21% indicate that they are not really aware of it, and 5% are absolutely not aware at all that the Interreg BSR Programme exists. The lack of a baseline for this question hampers assessment of any increase in awareness among thematic experts or not.
- The evaluators recommend using this assessment as a baseline for future assessments and evaluations. Additional studies could also help to establish a more differentiated baseline about awareness of the Programme among different target groups.

What has been the impact and added value of implementation of the Programme's communication strategy?

- Interviews with the MA/JS confirm a general effectiveness of communication tools and the communication strategy from their point of view. MA/JS highlights that communication is getting more professional within the Programme. However, communication could be improved with more resources and more professional support.
- The communication strategy has not defined intermediary steps and specific indicators at the level of communication fields that could help with monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the different communication objectives and aims. This limits any evaluation of specific communication impact to analysis of secondary sources and qualitative assessments.
- The level of communication strategy effectiveness is high with regard to its indicators as defined in the Coordination Programme within the Technical Assistance axis. Many current achievements already exceed the targets set for 2023, i.e. a level of effectiveness of over 100%. Two indicators show reasonable progress (56% and 68% of target value achieved). Only the indicator 'Number of other events attended by MA/JS staff' has a low achievement with 28%. Overall, this is a good result and shows very effective communication by the Programme. For management purposes, an adjustment of the target values for 2023 would be helpful to continue to monitor meaningful progress over the next years.
- From the perspective of the project partners that answered the survey, the Programme is widely effective or even very effective in achieving its general communication objectives
- The analysis shows that evaluability of the efforts for communication can be further improved through an improved communication strategy.

The following recommendation can be derived:

- For management purposes, it is recommended to adjust some strategy target values for 2023 in order to facilitate meaningful monitoring and evaluation in the future.
- For the next programming period, a more thorough communication strategy and intervention logic for communication is recommended, with intermediate objectives, and measurable ('SMART') output indicators, regular monitoring with more specific identification and monitoring (on 'awareness') of target groups and multipliers.

6. Performance of the MA/JS

Has the MA/JS managed to implement all its assigned tasks? Are the tasks implemented to a sufficient level of quality?

- In general, document review shows that the MA/JS carries out all the assigned tasks. Implementation seems to be of sufficient quality.
- The internal operational evaluation can be seen as a valuable tool for quality assurance within the MA/JS. It gives a complete overview of MA/JS tasks and functions and the Programme. Evaluations covering 2016 and 2017, found satisfactory management of the MA/JS and the Programme. Where smaller problems were detected, lessons learned were identified and follow-up measures proposed and implemented.
- A few recommendations can be made for internal operational evaluations: a) content-related monitoring of project progress and the related task of ensuring relevant monitoring data for upcoming evaluations could be more adequately covered, b) if feasible, more effort should be put on assuring data availability for regular quality checks to make internal evaluation more effective.
- In addition, a recommendation from the ex-ante evaluation is being reiterated: to put more efforts and ensure adequate measures so projects commit to disseminating results and effects after project finalisation, through measures such as conferences and articles.

How effective is the MA/JS in providing support to its clients?

- Interviews with MC members confirmed their effective and highly-professional work. MC Members are generally very satisfied with the work of the MA/JS. Members of the Monitoring Committee regard the MA/JS as very professional and competent.
- In general, support to applicants by the MA/JS and feedback in form of satisfaction and concept notes as well as the number of applications can be considered adequate. The work with applicants seems to be highly effective.
- The support of the MA/JS to projects can be considered highly useful and effective. Project partners are widely satisfied with their work.

How efficient is the MA/JS in using its resources?

- Analysing the resources available and spent by the MA/JS for management and implementation of the programme in comparison to the achievements and results of its work on management and communication, the MA/JS is efficient in spending its resources.
- Overall, the high level of effectiveness seen in the achievements of the MA/JS confirms that the resources are spent in an efficient way.
- The analysis shows that assessment of concept notes and applications is a resource-intensive activity for Project Officers and financial officers. Other resource-intensive activities are clarifications in the contracting process as well as the support on State aid.
- The programme should offer more support to stimulate the dissemination and transfer of results. Demand for communication increases with new and modern communication tools (social media, storytelling, etc.). New demands can be faced with more staff dedicated to communication, or more funds for external communication professionals, to deliver high-quality work in the future, in particular, for the dissemination of project and programme results.

The analysis leads to the following recommendations:

- The annual internal operational evaluation is a very good instrument to summarise and reflect what has been done. To increase the usefulness of internal evaluations, an external expert/moderator could be considered. The external expert could, for example, review the methodology for internal evaluations, raise points for further analysis and reflect together with the MA/JS in a workshop on relevant issues. This would help to further improve the work of the MA/JS.

7. Overview of main conclusions and key recommendations

| Evaluation Task | Main conclusion | Key recommendation |
|---|---|--|
| Task 1 Monitoring the state of institutional capacities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, a consistent path towards achieving the targets established in 2014 is underway. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the next update measurement, work with a larger database of thematic experts. • Add questions about the level of influence of the IBSR Programme as one factor that contributes to changes in institutional capacities. |
| Task 2.1 Impact of projects in reaching the Programme's Specific Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most projects aim at various dimensions of institutional capacities. Projects do not focus on only one dimension. The capacities supported and developed by IBSR projects add value compared to other regional or national projects. • 97% of project partners estimate that they benefit as an organisation from an Interreg BSR project. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to increase efforts on monitoring and collecting project 'learning experiences' as key project results and a valuable input for the final evaluation. |

| Evaluation Task | Main conclusion | Key recommendation |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main benefits of participating in Interreg mentioned by project partner are almost all related to the generation and adoption of new knowledge: "Learning from other regions/countries", "New contacts and access to networks", "Learning in a specific thematic field" and "Learning with practical examples and applications". | |
| <p>Task 2.2 Involvement of different types of partners</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The initial expectations were that 2% (in Priority 1) or 1% (in Priorities 2 and 3) of project partners should be private, for profit bodies. These goals have been widely exceeded, with 7% private partners in Priority 1, 11% in Priority 2 and 14% in Priority 3. A low level of involvement of private, for profit partners in Priority 1 cannot be interpreted as leading to a lower quality or effectiveness of projects under Priority 1. Projects in general benefit from the inputs provided by academic and research experts. At the same time, there is a risk, when too many research and academic partners are in a project that the projects gets too expert-driven and too academic. In this sense, it is important to have a balance of different types of organisations in the project to avoid this institutional 'lock-in' effect. The participation of public authorities is lower than in the previous Programme. Possible reasons: they no longer count as a 'public authority', there are fewer resources for cooperation projects in local, regional and national authorities, an increased competition for | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reduced administrative burden for private partners could make their involvement easier. Local, regional and national public authorities should be specifically targeted in campaigns to attract applicants and partners. Their benefits should be pointed out to any project promoter. If desired, the share of research and academic partners in a project can be limited to a degree (60%) by the Call requirements (maybe with an exception for SO 1.1 that focuses widely on large research infrastructure and universities). |

| Evaluation Task | Main conclusion | Key recommendation |
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| | <p>cooperation resources, a shift in the IBSR towards promoting and developing new business products and services that reduces the potential benefit for public authorities, or even cooperation fatigue to participate in 'yet another' Interreg project.</p> | |
| <p>Task 2.3 Contribution to EUSBSR</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The separation into flagship and non-flagship projects in IBSR seems to be artificial, not strict across all Policy and Horizontal areas, and ambiguous in some cases. • Alignment with EUSBSR increased awareness of the Programme, even if it was known to many stakeholders from before the EUSBSR existed. • The IBSR should not be the only funding source for the EUSBSR. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regular update of the survey of thematic experts to check the awareness of IBSR is recommended and to be able to compare over time. |
| <p>Task 2.4 Effectiveness of programme support to EUSBSR coordination (priority 4)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support is generally appreciated by EUSBSR stakeholders, but the drawbacks (administrative burden) are also highlighted. • The support is especially important as it covers costs which would have been challenging to cover otherwise, such as staff and travel costs, meeting costs, communication activities and the Annual Fora. • Countries should show and increase their commitment, for example, by financing governance staff and capacity-building. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for governance and capacities of EUSBSR stakeholders can and should continue but reducing administrative burden. |
| <p>Task 2.5 Communication Strategy</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most useful communication activities of the Programme are the project websites and the Programme events. A high level of usefulness is also seen for the programme newsletter and the project library. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For management purposes it is recommended to adjust some strategy targets for 2023 in order to facilitate meaningful monitoring and evaluation in the future. • For the next programming period, a more detailed |

| Evaluation Task | Main conclusion | Key recommendation |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media channels and tools are generally appreciated as less useful. • The level of communication strategy effectiveness is high. | <p>communication strategy and intervention logic for communication is recommended, with intermediate objectives, and measurable ('SMART') output indicators, regular monitoring with more specific identification and monitoring (on 'awareness') of target groups and multipliers.</p> |
| <p>Task 2.6 Performance of the MA/JS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MA/JS carries out all the assigned tasks. Implementation seems to be of sufficient quality. • Monitoring Committee members regard the MA/JS as very professional and competent. The support to projects can be considered as highly useful and effective. • The MA/JS is efficient in spending its resources. The programme should offer more support to stimulate the dissemination and transfer of results. • The annual internal operational evaluation is a very good instrument to summarise and reflect what has been done. | <p>Proposed improvement with regard to the internal operational evaluations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To carry out regular satisfaction surveys to project partners, applicants or specific target groups, independently from the external evaluations. • Hiring an external expert/moderator to accompany internal evaluation processes. The external expert could, for example, review the methodology for internal evaluations, raise points for further analysis and manage an internal reflection process (workshop). |