

OPERATIONAL AND IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE INTERREG VB NORTH SEA REGION PROGRAMME 2014-2020 **EVALUATION REPORT**



Final report October 2020

**OPERATIONAL AND IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE INTERREG
VB NORTH SEA REGION PROGRAMME 2014-2020 –
EVALUATION REPORT**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Key findings of the evaluation

- The Interreg North Sea Region programme is implemented **successfully and according to plan**. The programme has already **reached the performance framework targets for 2023** to a very large extent. It has **substantially contributed to reaching the specific objectives**: all output indicators have already met and considerably exceeded their targets by August 2020.
- The programme is **consequently aligned with the three EU 2020 objectives** and contributes to all three objectives:
 - **Smart growth** is supported through activities in all four Priority Axes with a special focus in the PA 1 and 2.
 - **Sustainable growth** is also strongly supported by the programme. Especially the PA 2, 3 and 4 are targeted to a more sustainable NSR region with different thematic focuses.
 - The programme also contributes with some projects to the objective of **inclusive growth**. Social challenges are especially addressed by projects in the PA 1.
- All projects result in the **“empowerment of key stakeholders”** and the **“application of knowledge and skills”**. More than 2/3 of the projects (will) also contribute to the **“activation of decision-makers”**. Based on experiences with the evaluation of similar programmes, it is extraordinary that there is such a high number of very complex projects that contribute to all three impact categories. More specifically, the impacts of the programme include contributions to the following developments:
 - Stimulation of the **adoption of products, processes and services to ‘green’ the North Sea Region**.
 - Demonstration of **methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation** and reduce overall energy use.
 - **Improved climate change adaptation**, increased resilience and improved eco-system management.
 - Design and implementation of **new methods for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems**.
 - Increase of regional capacity to **support modal shift to low-carbon transport**.
 - Increase of the capacity of **sustainable transport in the NSR**.
- The **overall added value of transnational cooperation in the North Sea Region Programme** lies in **finding common solutions for shared problems**.
- The following aspects were found to be of particularly high relevance for the successful implementation and the high effectiveness of the programme:
 - Almost all projects include **tests or pilots to validate new knowledge and try out jointly developed solutions**. The pilots are conducted in different regions in different countries which ensures testing under different circumstances by different actors.
 - Applying **target-specific means of communication** acknowledges the characteristics of the different end-users and thus ensures that the different end-users are reached efficiently.
 - For for-profit private beneficiaries the **establishment of new networks and new contacts with other organisations or experts** seems to be a key benefit of participating in the programme. Overall, participation in the NSR programme is mainly seen as a long-term investment by private beneficiaries.

- The **cooperation between the programme bodies** is in most cases **well established**. The atmosphere is characterized by a high willingness to communicate, share knowledge and work together. The **responsibilities** and tasks of each programme bodies are **clear and conducted accordingly**. The **high level of engagement** of people involved in the programme is prevalent. **Optimisation potential** was identified in the cooperation between the JS and the NCPs and between the MC and the SC.
- Communication activities have contributed to **effectively communicate the programme to relevant stakeholders and to stimulate stakeholders** to develop and deliver high quality projects.
- The **application process is well organised and elaborated**. The **support** to the beneficiaries during the application process is **very effective**. Only minor improvement possibilities have been identified.
- The **decision-making process in the programme is clear and transparent**. There is **no need for improvement** concerning the clarity and transparency of the decision-making processes.

1.2 Key recommendations of the evaluation

- Try to set **more realistic targets for the output indicators** by actively using the experience from the current funding period and continue to **clearly define the output and result indicators** and to provide the output indicators' definitions in a clear and understandable way to the project beneficiaries (fact sheet). Make sure to **support beneficiaries in the definition of targets** and in the reporting of values reached where necessary.
- Continue to **select projects of high complexity** which contribute to different impact categories and impacts in order to achieve a **high level of sustainable impact in the North Sea Region**.
- Encourage lead beneficiaries and project beneficiaries to continue **applying target-specific communication measures** in order to effectively reach out to relevant stakeholders outside the programme.
- Continue to **involve different types of partners** in the programme to **ensure a multidisciplinary perspective and a high level of innovation in the projects**. Especially, focus on sustaining a **high level of involvement of private organisations, business support organisations or network** representatives to allow for a close link to practice.
- Keep the momentum for the **further improvement of cooperation between JS and NCPs** from the joint meeting in March 2020 and engage actively in the NCP network and between the NCPs and JS to **maintain the strong levels of cooperation**. Regularly check and - if needed - update the working document setting out the roles and responsibilities of the NCPs and the cooperation with the JS.
- Make sure it is **transparent to applicants when they will receive the notification, if their project application (EoI and full application) has been approved by the programme**. The **number of characters in the EoI form could be limited even further**, to make this first step of the application process even more efficient. **Finetuning of timing could help to further improve the decision-making processes** from the programme bodies' side: Consider call periods carefully and take holidays into account; potentially combine meetings of Monitoring Committee and Steering Committee to fasten processes.

2. CONTEXT AND ASSIGNMENT

2.1 Context

The Interreg North Sea Region Programme is intended to contribute to an integrated territorial development and cooperation within the North Sea Region (NSR) through transnational cooperation projects in a broad range of topics. The strategy of the Programme directly reflects the two dimensions of Interreg B as defined in the current ETC Regulation: promotion of cooperation in Europe as well as support of the priorities of EU cohesion policy.¹ 167 million Euro ERDF funds are available to the Interreg North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020 to support these objectives.

Considering both, the wide geographical coverage of the Programme and the available funds, the Programme bodies decided to strongly focus on pooling expertise and experience from different regions and stakeholders to develop new and innovative solutions for common problems. Increased capacities of the Programme's end-user groups are expected to create a high leverage effect and therefore effectively contribute to sustainable economic growth in the North Sea Region. The cross-sectoral objective of capacity building is framed by the thematic priorities of the Programme: research and innovation, environmental protection and resource efficiency, climate change adaptation, and green transport and mobility.

Despite the fact that the Interreg B programmes have a character of their own and pursue a more specific set of objectives than the regional ESI Funds programmes, the evaluation requirements for Interreg B programmes set by the EU Commission are the same. At least once during the funding period 2014-2020, an evaluation of the funds' contribution towards each programme priority is mandatory (see Art. 56 (3) CPR). Further, the evaluations are expected to analyse a programme's contribution towards the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy and must cover each specific objective of a programme (see Art. 54 (1) CPR).

2.2 Assignment

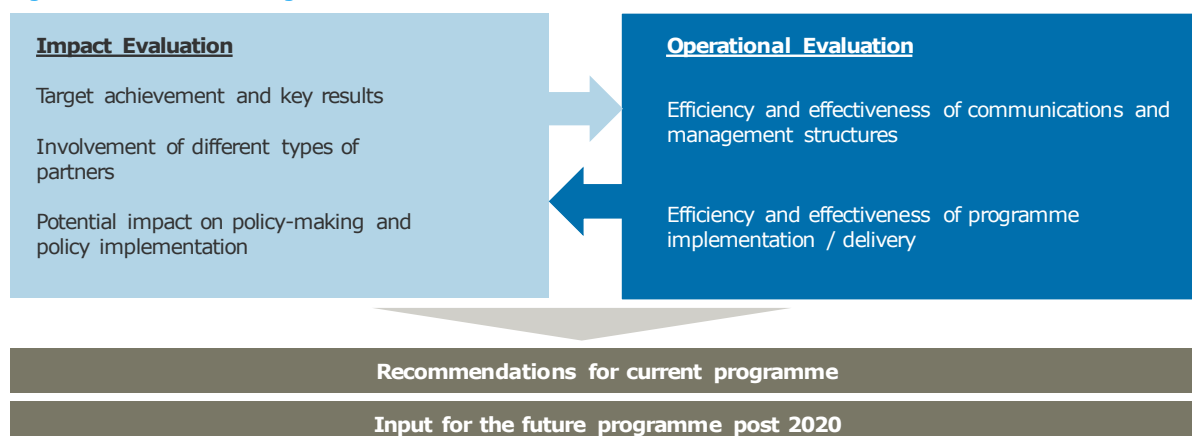
In December 2018, Ramboll Management Consulting was commissioned to carry out the Operational and Impact Evaluation for the Interreg V B Programme in the North Sea Region 2014-2020. The evaluation project was carried out between September 2019 and October 2020.

2.2.1 Objectives

The assignment consists of two tasks, namely the **impact** and the **operational evaluation** of the North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020. Both tasks are **closely connected**. The operational evaluation provides valuable insights on the structures and processes of programme implementation, management and communication, which helps explain the results of the impact evaluation. Together, the findings from the operational and the impact evaluation will feed into the development of recommendations for the future of Interreg B in the North Sea Region post 2020. The evaluation was, in line with the programme's evaluation plan, carried out as a theory-based evaluation.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.

Figure 1: Overview of assignment



Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.

We understand the evaluations to be focused on two levels of analysis. The operational evaluation focuses on the communication and management structures and the implementation of the programme. The impact evaluation focuses mainly on the Specific Objectives and the extent to which the funded projects contribute to achieving these objectives. The findings at the level of the Specific Objectives are then aggregated at the level of the Priorities and the Programme. Finally, we conclude on the contributions of the programme to the Strategy "Europe 2020".

Figure 2: Levels of analysis for impact and operational evaluation



Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.

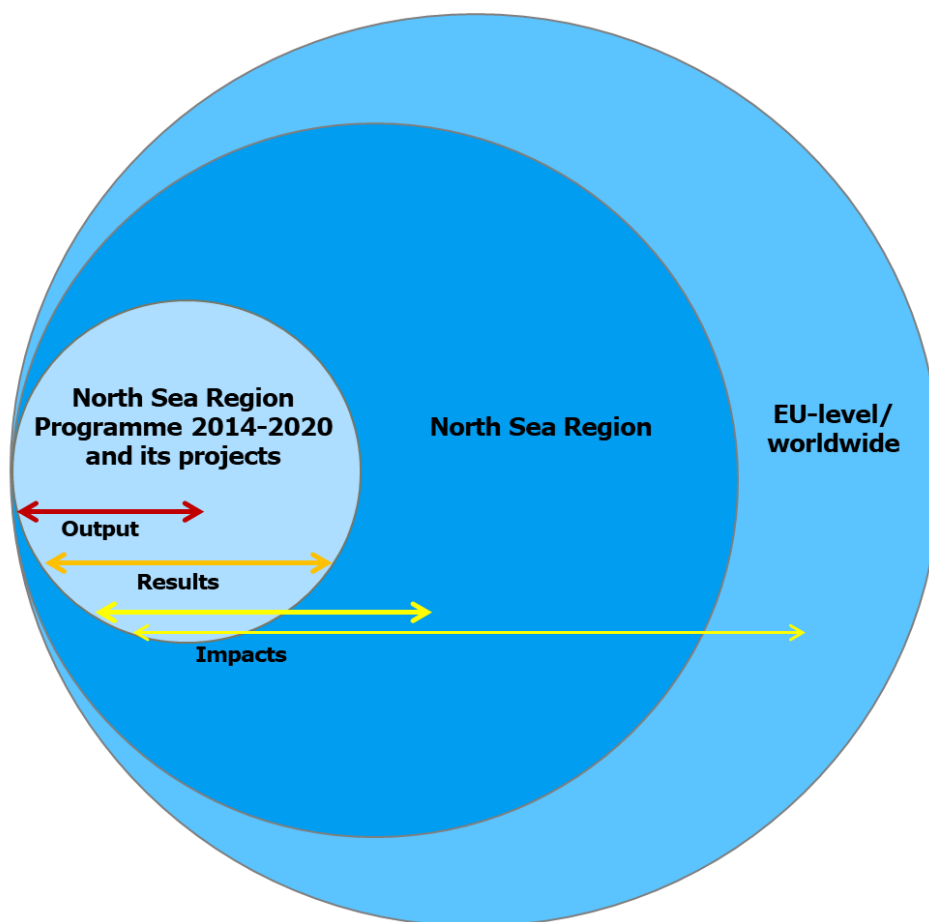
As stated above the evaluation consists of two parts, namely the operational and the impact evaluation. For each part detailed evaluation questions were defined in the programme's evaluation plan. The following figure provides an overview of the evaluation questions that are answered in this report.

Impact evaluation	
Target achievement and impact of projects in reaching the Programme's specific objectives under priorities 1-4	
1	To what extent has the programme reached the <u>performance framework</u> milestones and targets? What is the progress of the programme in reaching specific objectives and expected results?
2	Have beneficiaries effectively pooled their ideas, experience and resources to arrive at new and better transnational knowledge and proposals on the theme in question?
3	Have they validated this new knowledge through piloting and/or consultation with end-users?
4	Have the findings been effectively communicated to other members of relevant end-user groups elsewhere in the programme area?
Involvement of different types of partners	
5	In what way and to what extent does the private sector participate in the North Sea Region programme? How many projects have private sector participation as end recipients/ordinary project beneficiaries/end-users?
6	To what extent does the private sector find participation in the North Sea Region programme profitable?
7	What benefits had projects on the private sector (beside direct or indirect funding)?
8	Has transnational cooperation efficiently contributed to effective processes and workflows within public institutions, universities and enterprises?
Impact on policy-making and implementation	
9	Have any changes in laws or regulations been implemented and has the programme contributed to placing topics higher on the political agenda?
10	How has the programme demonstrated increased capacity of decision-makers (in terms of new/adopted solutions; services; products and processes) to solving current challenges?
11	Has the programme successfully contributed to aligning national and transnational priorities in political processes?
Potential impact of key results	
12	In terms of economic, social and ecological progress and development, what were the key benefits from pilots and tests applied in funded projects?
Contribution to horizontal principles and to EU 2020	
13	What has been the programme's contribution to cross-cutting themes of equality and sustainability in terms of promoting and having a practical impact in the NSR? To what extent are the horizontal principles integrated in programme management arrangements and in the activities of funded projects? Has the programme maximized its opportunities to promote cross-cutting themes?
14	To what extent has the programme contributed to the EU2020 strategy?
Priority Axis 1 – Thinking Growth	
15	To what extent has the programme built SMEs' capacity to increase innovation?
16	To what extent has the programme demonstrated innovation capacity building to deal with long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies?

Priority Axis 2 – Eco-innovation	
17	To what extent has the programme stimulated the adoption of products, processes, and services to 'green' the North Sea Region?
18	To what extent has the programme demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and reduce overall energy use?
19	How has the development and roll-out of new or improved energy technologies contributed to either an increase in renewable energy production or a reduction in energy use or loss (increase in energy efficiency?)
Priority Axis 3 – Sustainable Management of the North Sea Region	
20	To what extent has the programme demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with environmental risks?
21	To what extent has the programme built capacity for improved land management?
22	To what extent has the programme contributed to climate change adaptation, increased resilience and improved eco-system management due to NSR investment?
23	What kind of new methods for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems have been designed and implemented?
Priority Axis 4 – Green Transport and Mobility	
24	To what extent has the programme increased regional capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport?
25	To what extent has the programme demonstrated the take up and application of green transport solutions?
26	What is the increased capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR (How many more people or goods are moving via sustainable means as a result of NSR investment)?

In context of this evaluation, impacts are understood as effects which are directly or indirectly caused by the funded projects and that radiate beyond the actors directly involved in the projects. Impacts can occur during the project and the funding period and/or afterwards. This implies that at the point of time of the evaluation by far not all impacts from the current programme have occurred. But as the evaluation is carried out based on a theory-based approach, valid estimates of the expected impacts can be made.

Figure 3: Output, results and impacts in context of the North Sea Region Programme



Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.

The following questions are answered in course of the operational evaluation:

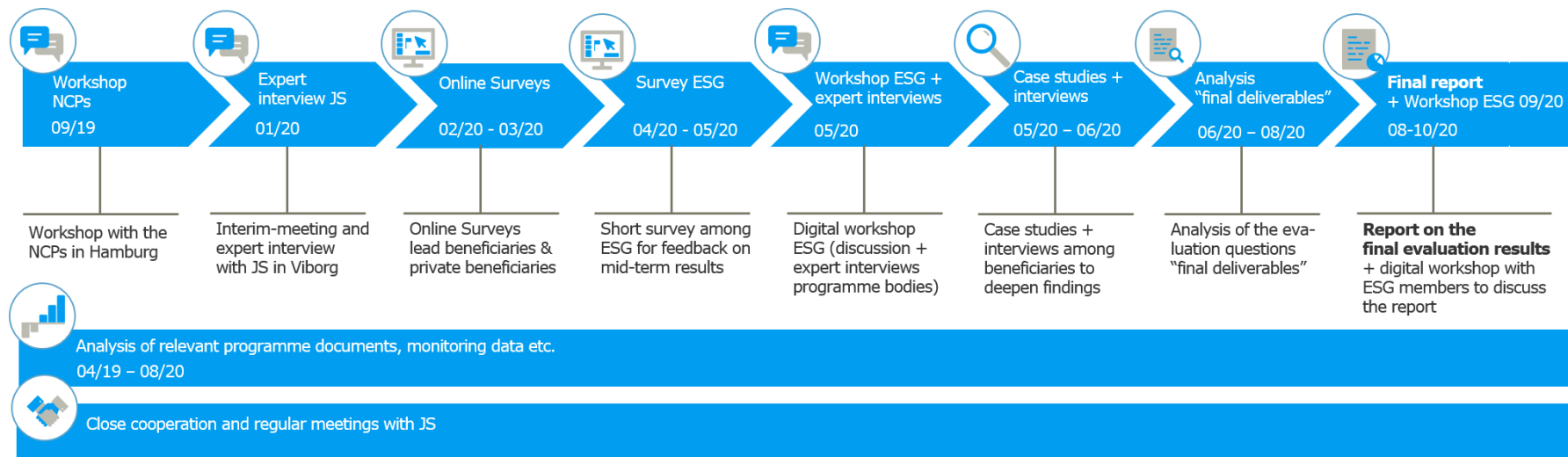
Operational evaluation	
1	How do the programme bodies complement each other in terms of management and implementation of the programme?
2	Is there a common understanding between the programme bodies about the aims and objectives of the programme and the projects expected to deliver these aims?
3	To what extent has the programme's communication strategy contributed to reaching the specific programme management objectives?
4	Does the structure and timing of calls for proposals support the delivery of the programme in the most effective way?
5	Are the decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent?
6	How effective is the coordination with other INTERREG programmes?
7	To what extent have synergies been created with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives?
8	What are the costs and benefits of transnational cooperation: What measure might be used to assess the "transnational added value" of programme activities?

2.2.2 Methodology

The methodological framework for operational and impact evaluations of ESI funds programmes 2014-2020 is provided by the corresponding guidelines of the European Commission. Additionally, the specific characteristics of transnational programmes have been taken into account throughout this evaluation to arrive at accurate and meaningful results.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the applied methods and successive work steps taken in the course of the evaluation in order to both generate and analyse the relevant data as well as answer the evaluation questions.

Figure 4: Timeline and methods of the evaluation



Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.



Analysis of relevant documents and data

Throughout the evaluation process, relevant programme documents, fact sheets and monitoring data as well as reviews and evaluations conducted by the programme administration have been analysed.



Workshops and expert interviews

In September 2019, a **workshop with the National Contact Points** (NCPs) was organised in Hamburg to discuss aspects of the operational evaluation, especially the cooperation between the different programme bodies. In the beginning of 2020, **expert interviews** were led with representatives of the **Joint Secretariat**. The Joint Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day implementation and administration of the programme and its projects.

In May 2020, a **workshop** was conducted with the representatives of the **Evaluation Steering Group** consisting of representatives from the Monitoring Committee, the Steering Committee and the NCPs. During this workshop, the expert opinions of the programme bodies were discussed in more detail regarding aspects of the operational as well as impact evaluation. Additionally, the mid-term findings were presented and discussed. In order to structure the provided feedback on the mid-term findings, a short survey among the ESG-members was conducted prior to the workshop. In June 2020, selected mid-term findings were presented to and discussed with the Programme Preparation Group for the future programme. In September 2020, another workshop with the Evaluation Steering Group was conducted to present and discuss the final evaluation report.



Online Surveys

In the beginning of 2020, an online survey was conducted among all **lead beneficiaries** of the approved projects. From the 73 projects that had been approved at the time, 35 lead beneficiaries took part in the survey.

The lead beneficiaries were asked to provide their insights and experiences regarding the application and decision-making process, conducted pilots and communication efforts as well as the impacts and effects that their projects have.

Additionally, an online survey among all for profit **private beneficiaries** of the projects was conducted. In total, 35 of 92 for profit private enterprises took part in the survey: 32 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and three large enterprises. They were asked to provide further information regarding the effects of the INTERREG projects on the private sector, as well as insights on the main benefits of participation and potential barriers for participation in transnational cooperation projects.



Case Studies

Four **case studies** were conducted in the spring of 2020, to gather further and more detailed information to answer the evaluation questions. In accordance with the Programme's Evaluation Plan, one project per priority was analysed in greater depth. In a first step, project documents and data (application, reports, website, publications etc.) were reviewed. Moreover, interviews were conducted with the respective project advisor at the Joint Secretariat (JS), the lead beneficiary of the project and other project partners such as private partners and research institutions. Additionally, representatives of the respective end-users were interviewed. In the interviews, further information about the project, the application process, the effects as well as success factors and potential obstacles was discussed. Consequently, the findings from the case studies have been used to verify and deepen findings from other sources as well as to better illustrate the evaluation findings.



Final report

The final results of the operational and impact evaluation are presented in this report, which comprises of the analysis of the gathered data and information and intends to answer the formulated evaluation questions. The structure of the final report follows the organisation of the evaluation questions provided in the terms of reference.

Assessment standard for target achievement

Throughout the analysis, target achievement is assessed based on the programme's possibilities to contribute to the development of the North Sea Region taking into account the available financial resources of the programme. For assessing the target achievement for the output and financial targets, the following assessment standard has been applied:

Figure 5: Applied assessment standard for target achievement

	Target achievement	Allocation of funding
 Very large extent	Target achievement is already assured or nearly assured.	Large progress in the allocation of funding. The allocation of funding is already completed or nearly completed.
 Large extent	Considerable progress in target achievement, reaching the targets is very likely.	Considerable progress in the allocation of funding. The complete allocation of funding is very likely.
 Some extent	First progress in target achievement, reaching the targets is possible.	First progress in the allocation of funding. The complete allocation of funding is still possible.
 Very limited extent	No progress yet in target achievement.	No progress in the allocation of funding. The complete allocation of funding is currently unlikely.

Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.

The standard is only used for assessing quantified targets (financials, outputs and results) which the programme is measured against from the EU Commission. Compared to that the standard is not used for assessing impacts because the simplification that comes with the assessment standard is not seen as adequate for assessing highly complex transnational impacts. For assessing impacts, a less quantified approach and methodology is applied (see section 3.1).

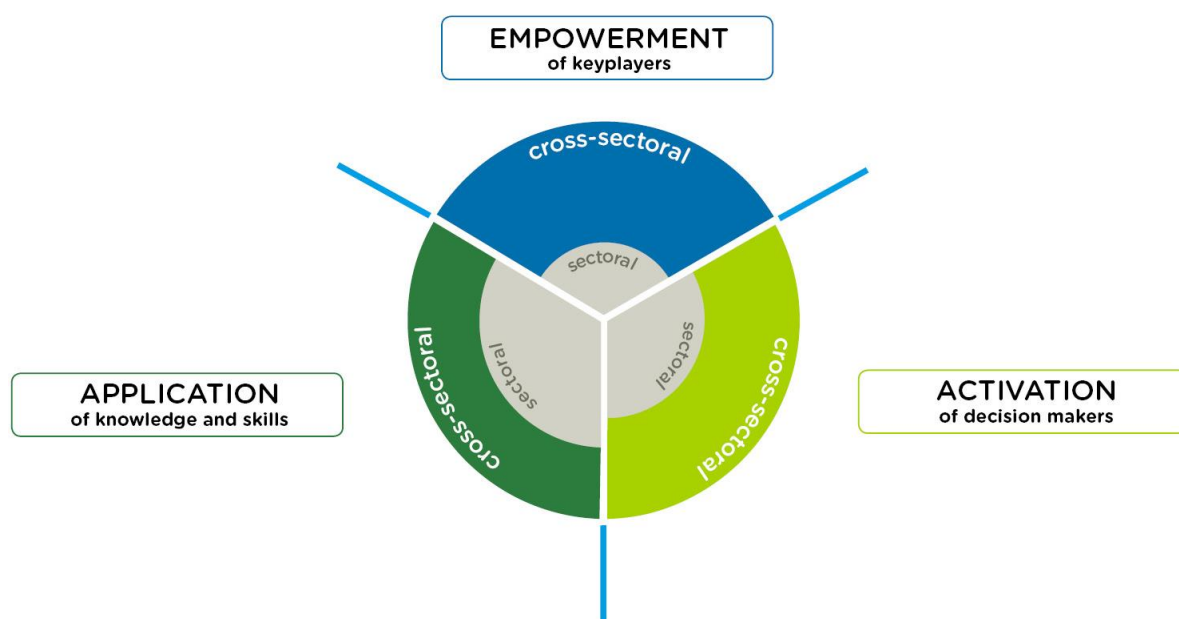
3. IMPACT EVALUATION

3.1 Theoretical framework for impact evaluation

We approached the impact evaluation of this programme with a specific **theoretical framework**, which gives insights in cross-thematic and Interreg-specific impacts. It therefore takes a step beyond the thematical impact evaluation and shows the **Interreg-specific added value** of the programme.

Over the course of the impact analyses of the four Interreg IV B-programmes in 2015-2017, we identified **three cross-thematic** impact categories for Interreg.²

Figure 6: Impact categories



Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.

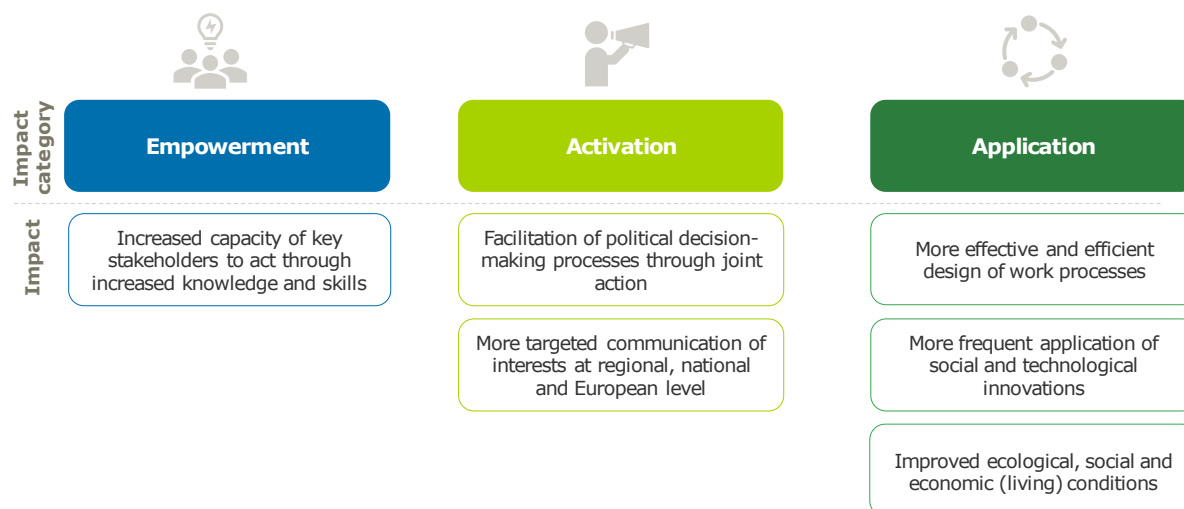
The analysis of the projects' cross-thematic impacts allows for an **elaboration of the Interreg-specific added value** of projects and for its aggregation on programme level.

- **Empowerment of key players**, that is, the knowledge and skills of the stakeholders are increased and enable them to exploit new opportunities for action.
- **Activation of decision makers**, that is, the political players, who by dint of their area of responsibility are able to create the necessary political frameworks for the subsequent implementation of targeted measures, are made more aware of the theme of the project, and are activated to support the implementation.
- **Application of knowledge and skills**, that is, concrete measures are implemented by the relevant players and tangible changes are achieved.

Each of the three impact categories includes one to three **impacts** which are shown in the following figure.

² Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (2017): Impact analysis of transnational cooperation in Interreg B.

Figure 7: Potential Impacts of Interreg B



Source: Ramboll Management Consulting.

Increased capacity of key stakeholders to act through increased knowledge and skills

As a result of the **development of their knowledge and skills**, stakeholders are **empowered to implement new opportunities for action**. Through the development of new methods, approaches and technologies, INTERREG B projects can extend the sphere of action for key players in a targeted way, as well as draw their attention to the opportunities available through awareness-raising measures. The end-users of this impact are strongly dependent on the topic at hand. Participants from politics or administration may, for example, be shown opportunities, as to how desirable developments in the region can be supported in a more focused way, or how social challenges can be addressed more effectively. The extended sphere of action frequently offers businesses the opportunity to better exploit the existing economic potential or tap into new economic opportunities. It should be stressed here that in this case the end-users are only being empowered to employ new opportunities for action. The application of knowledge and new skills gained, is a possible subsequent step, which is not covered by this impact.

Facilitation of political decision-making processes through joint action

This impact describes the **enhanced cooperation between players from politics and administration** in relevant topic areas. Joint action does not only refer to strengthened cooperation on a vertical level (e.g. through the increased participation of national and regional stakeholders in processes at EU level), but also on a horizontal level (e.g. through the greater involvement of different players and interest groups operating at national and regional level in the decision-making processes). In INTERREG B projects, this can, for instance, be achieved by the development of technical and organisational prerequisites (e.g. new strategic processes or approaches), as well as by awareness-raising measures with regard to the added value of increased transnational cooperation.

More targeted communication of interests at regional, national and European level

This impact describes the **increased influence on political decision makers and their heightened awareness** for relevant topics. The topic at hand is more prominently placed on the political agenda of relevant decision makers, and new insights are taken into account within the political decision-making process. INTERREG B projects may achieve this by establishing new or more effective channels of communication, such as transnational network forums or groups, where stakeholders join forces and pool their common interests. The communication of these joint

interests can be further supported through different types of public relations work (e.g. the creation of guides, position papers, brochures, etc.).

More effective and efficient design of work processes

This impact describes the **further development of procedures and operating methods** in both public and commercial organisations. In particular, this includes the fact that more forward-looking decisions are being made, existing processes and procedures are being further developed or standardised, as well as that new methods and approaches are being integrated into work processes. Very different groups of players profit from the more efficient and effective design of work processes: This might include ministries and authorities, but also businesses and scientific institutions. Within the framework of INTERREG B projects, these improvements may for instance be initiated by means of the direct development of new or the improvement of existing processes and procedures, as well as training measures about them.

More frequent application of social and technological innovations

This impact describes the **increase in innovative performance** by different stakeholders in the programme area. On the one hand, businesses and scientific institutions that develop and apply technical innovations can profit from this. On the other hand, this also has a benefit for players that initiate social innovations in the sense of new problem-solving focused approaches in relation to social challenges. INTERREG B projects can bring about this impact by means of an increased exchange of knowledge from players in science and industry, the production of framework conditions that promote innovation, the introduction of respective awareness-raising measures, as well as the integration of pilots and demonstrations, making the implementation of new innovations more tangible.

Improved ecological, social and economic (living) conditions

This impact describes the **direct improvement of everyday living situations** for different regionally based players. These changes can be both economic and structural, but also social and ecological. This means that potentially all actors in the targeted region(s) can benefit from these changes. Within the framework of INTERREG B projects, these improvements can be achieved for example by the (further) development of planning processes and management structures, as well as by means of concrete pilot projects. In this way, newly created social and cultural offers can promote social spatial development and strengthen social cohesion, while the ecological conditions in the region can for example be significantly improved through new management approaches.

3.2 Programme level: state of implementation and impacts

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme reached the performance framework milestones and targets? What is the progress of the programme in reaching specific objectives and expected results?

Conclusion:

- The programme reached all performance framework milestones in 2018.
- The programme has already reached the performance framework targets for 2023 to a very large extent.
- The programme has substantially contributed to reaching the specific objectives: all output indicators have already met and considerably exceeded their targets by August 2020.
- 102 percent of the ERDF funding have already been allocated by December 2019.
- It can be assumed that the programme contributes to the positive development of the result indicators.



3.2.1 Indicators and financials

Output indicators

The target achievement of the output indicators demonstrates the large progress that the Interreg VB programme has already made. The programme targets regarding the output indicators have already been achieved to a very large extent by the end of August 2020: In all Priority Axes, all output indicators exceed their target values.

The following table provides an overview of all output indicators and their status of target achievement as of August 2020.

Table 1: Overview Output Indicators

SO	ID	Indicator	Target value programme 2023	Target projects, OMS data end of 08/2020	Achieved by projects, OMS data end of 08/2020
Common Output Indicators					
All SO	CO41	Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	79	4,013	4,546
All SO	CO42	Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	80	611	1,106
All SO	0.1	Number of organizations / enterprises adopting new solutions by project end	780	5,069	3,586
All SO	0.2	Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end	7,803	120,518	573,869
Programme Specific Output Indicators					
1.1	1.1	Number of enterprises cooperating with new / improved knowledge partnerships	477	1,429	1,971
1.2	1.2	Number of improved or new innovation support measures launched for businesses	20	172	109
1.3	1.3	Number of improved or new innovation support measures launched for public service delivery	20	86	65

2.1, 2.2	2.1	Number of green products, services and processes piloted and/or adopted by the project	51	318	275
3.1	3.7	Number of new and/or improved climate change adaptation solutions demonstrated	25	81	45
3.2	3.2	Number of sites managed using new solutions supporting long-term sustainability	42	95	69
4.1, 4.2	4.1	Number of new and/or improved green transport solutions adopted	50	158	119

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 64 projects included in data set).

The considerable overperformance of all output indicators against the programme's targets indicates that the projects contribute to a greater extent to the programme's objectives than initially expected. It also gives the impression that the target values were not as ambitious as they could have been and/or that the projects are unexpectedly effective. From a programme management perspective, setting targets that can be safely achieved is understandable considering the great importance put on target achievement of output indicators, especially those included in the performance framework in the funding period 2014-2020. Additionally, the uncertainty at the time of programming on when a target is counted as "achieved" by the EU Commission has further strengthened the tendency to define not too ambitious targets (only after the start of the programme it was announced that target achievement of 75 % is sufficient). All in all, it must be stated that the new indicator system set up by the EU Commission for the funding period 2014-2020 was perceived as rather challenging by many programme bodies (e.g. common indicators, performance framework). Looking at many other ERDF programmes (regional as well as cross-border and transnational programmes) it becomes apparent that defining good indicators and setting realistic and ambitious targets has been a very challenging task that leaves room for improvement in the upcoming funding period. From an evaluation point of view, target values can only be used as a valid assessment standard for a programme's success when they are sufficiently realistic and ambitious with regard to what the programme can in fact achieve.

The achieved values for the following two output indicators are especially substantially higher than the target values initially planned by the programme:

- CO41: Productive investment: Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects
- 0.2: Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end

Programme's definition of indicators:

CO41: *Number of enterprises that cooperate with research institutions in transnational R&D projects. At least one enterprise and one research institution participate in the project. (Enterprise: Organisation producing products or services to satisfy market needs in order to achieve profit. Research institution: An organisation for which R&D is a primary activity.*

0.2: *Organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions means obtaining sufficient information to consider a change to existing practices / procedures or equipment as a result of project information activities. Requires that the enterprise / organisation has actively sought the information by e.g. attending an event, visiting a website, or requesting a publication.*

Source: Fact Sheet 23 - Indicators

There are different potential reasons for a significant overachievement of target values - concerning the overachievement of the indicators CO41 and 0.2. The following aspects have been noticeable when analysing the indicators, their definitions and the individual projects and their contributions to these indicators:

For the output indicator CO41 it is evident that the extraordinary impact of a select few projects from different Priority Axes is responsible for exceeding the programme's indicator goal. In these projects the target value for the indicator is 100 enterprises or higher. The values achieved until August 2020 in almost all projects are higher than the targets. In one project the achieved value amounts to almost 600 enterprises. To some extent these high numbers can be explained by the large variety of involved entities on each of the projects and pilot sites. However, it also seems possible that the definition of the output indicator is interpreted slightly different in the different projects and that this interpretation is not in all cases fully in line with the definition in the programme's Fact Sheet.

The output indicator 0.2 also shows a massive overachievement of the target originally set for 2023. Again, looking at the projects' contributions to this indicator it is apparent that the targets set and the values reached by many projects are considerable higher than the target value for the programme. The difference between the programme's target and the projects' contributions and the difference between the projects' targets and the values achieved in the projects are again an indication that the definition of the indicator leaves room for different interpretations of what is to be counted for this indicator regardless of the additional guidance issued by the JS on this indicator in early 2019. Furthermore, it seems to be very challenging for both, the programme management and the project partners, to define realistic targets for this indicator. For example, one project has reported to already have informed 20,976 organizations / enterprises about new solutions. The initial project's target was 6,000 organizations / enterprises. Considering that the indicator is counting organizations / enterprises reached with different means of communication, it is to some extent understandable that setting a realistic target is difficult. It nevertheless must be kept in mind that those setting the targets are usually not experts in communication and can therefore hardly estimate the reach of i.e. a post in Social Media. Additionally, in case of Social Media, but also for other means of communication, it seems difficult to prove whether the requirement set in the indicator's definition "the organizations / enterprises must have actively sought the information" is fulfilled.

Illustrated by two examples of output indicators which show a very high overachievement of targets, it can be stated that from the perspective of the evaluation, the definitions of the output indicators do

not seem to be completely clear in all cases and leave some room for interpretation. At the same time, it is fully acknowledged that measuring effects in Interreg (in this case outputs), is extremely challenging. Among other things, this is due to the enormous diversity and the high number of actors involved in the programme and within the projects, as well as to the specific characteristics of projects with a focus on a specific topic and on the transnational cooperative approach. This should always be kept in mind when defining indicators and setting targets but also when evaluating a transnational programme.

Allocation of funding

103% of the initially planned ERDF funding (for the four thematic Priority Axes) has already been allocated as of October 2020. The financial target in every Priority Axis is already secured. From the Norwegian budget, 98% have already been approved by October 2020.

Table 2: Allocation of funding (31.12.2019)

Priority Axis		ERDF funding + national counterpart 2014-2020	ERDF funding 2014-2020	Norwegian funding 2014-2020	ERDF funding approved, October 2020 ³	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	ERDF funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020
1	Thinking Growth	89,387,570 €	44,693,785 €	2,390,383 €	43,961,685 €	3,577,254 €	98 %	150 %
2	Eco-innovation	84,697,410 €	42,348,705 €	2,305,012 €	45,936,437 €	1,635,912 €	108 %	71 %
3	Sustainable NSR	88,042,490 €	44,021,245 €	1,878,158 €	44,168,066 €	745,505 €	100 %	40 %
4	Green Transport and Mobility	52,309,996 €	26,154,998 €	1,451,304 €	27,458,403 €	1,901,645 €	105 %	131 %
	PA 1-4	314,437,466 €	157,218,733 €	8,024,857 €	161,524,591 €	7,860,316 €	103 %	98 %
5	Technical Assistance	14,336,054 €	10,035,238 €	/	see footnote	/	see footnote	/

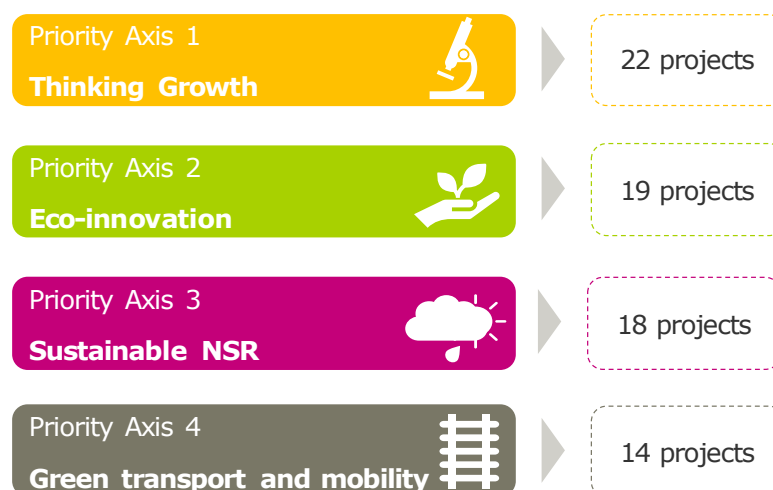
Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018), Achievements Report, information provided by Joint Secretariat.

³ The amounts take into account single lump-sum payments of € 20,000 per project for preparation costs, if applied for during the application phase.

Number of projects

By the end of February 2020, a total of 11 Calls for Expressions of Interest or Full Applications have been submitted since April 2015. In total 73 projects have been approved by the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme. In all four Priority Axes, a substantial number of projects is implemented.

Figure 8: Number of projects in PA (February 2020)



Source: Achievements Report.

Corresponding to the available budget for the Priority Axes, most projects are carried out in Priority Axis 1, with less projects being realised under Priority Axis 4. While the average financial volume of projects does not significantly differ between the four Priority Axes, the average is highest in Priority Axes 2 and 3, with a total eligible budget of 4.8 Mio €.

Result indicators

The programme has one result indicator for each specific objective. All nine result indicators target **'capacity development'** in the North Sea Region (e.g. of authorities/enterprises to increase innovation in enterprises or to identify and implement solutions for reducing their environmental footprint). 'Capacity development' as measured by the result indicator is defined as 'understanding and acting on the obstacles that inhibit stakeholders in relevant end-user groups from realizing their goals, while at the same time enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results'.

Analysing the result indicators, it is important to note that it is not assumed that the Interreg NSR programme solely accounts for the respective development. The programme can contribute to the enhancement of positive development or slightly mitigate negative developments. However, there are numerous other factors apart from this funding instrument that influence the development of the result indicators in the North Sea Region.

The result indicators in all Priority Axes show a **positive development** towards the formulated target. Looking at the objectives and targets of the programme, the result indicators are suitable to grasp the results of the programme. The evaluation confirms that the projects funded in the Interreg VB North Sea Region contribute to the programme's objectives. It can thus be assumed that the programme contributes to the positive development of the result indicators.

Table 3: Result indicators and achievement toward targets (31.12.2019)⁴

SO	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value programme (2015)	Target value programme (2023)	Achievement toward target (2019)
1.1	Capacity of knowledge partnerships in the North Sea Region to deliver marketable product, service, and process innovation	Qualitative analysis of capacity/potential	2.8	3.3	3.03
1.2	Capacity of authorities / practitioners to increase the scope and quality of innovation in enterprises	Qualitative analysis of capacity/potential	2.6	3.1	2.87
1.3	Capacity of authorities / practitioners to increase the scope and quality of innovation in public service delivery	Qualitative analysis of capacity/potential	2.3	2.8	2.59
2.1	Capacity of enterprises and organisations to adopt new or improved green products, services and processes	Capacity scale	2.6	3.6	3.08
2.2	Capacity of authorities and practitioners around the North Sea to identify and implement new ways of reducing their environmental footprint	Capacity scale	2.8	3.8	3.31
3.1	Capacity of relevant authorities / practitioners around the North Sea to identify and implement solutions for improving climate change resilience	Capacity scale	2.7	3.7	3.29
3.2	Capacity of North Sea regions to improve the quality of the environment	Capacity scale	2.9	3.9	3.43
4.1	Capacity of transport and logistics stakeholders to increase the proportion of long-distance freight carried on sustainable modes in the North Sea Region	Capacity scale	2.7	3.7	3.21
4.2	Capacity of authorities and enterprises to increase the use of green transport services	Capacity scale	3.0	4.0	3.55

⁴ All result indicators target 'capacity development' in the North Sea Region, values are based on a scale from 1-5, more information in [Fact Sheet 23](#)

Source: Achievements Report.

Recommendations for indicators and financials



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the programme's indicators and finances:

- **Try to set more realistic targets for the output indicators by actively using the experience from the current funding period.**
- **Try to avoid using output indicators which even with a clear definition can potentially be misinterpreted and for which the values reported by the projects are difficult to validate (i.e. 0.2.).**
- **Continue to clearly define the output and result indicators and communicate the output indicators' definitions in a clear and understandable way to the project beneficiaries (fact sheet).**
- **Make sure to support beneficiaries in the definition of targets and in the reporting of values reached where necessary.**
- **Add a clear definition for each indicator directly in OMS, so that beneficiaries do not have to look up fact sheets but can access relevant information directly within OMS when typing in their information**

3.2.2 Interreg-specific impacts

Evaluation question:

What is the Interreg-specific added value of the projects implemented during the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020?

Conclusion:

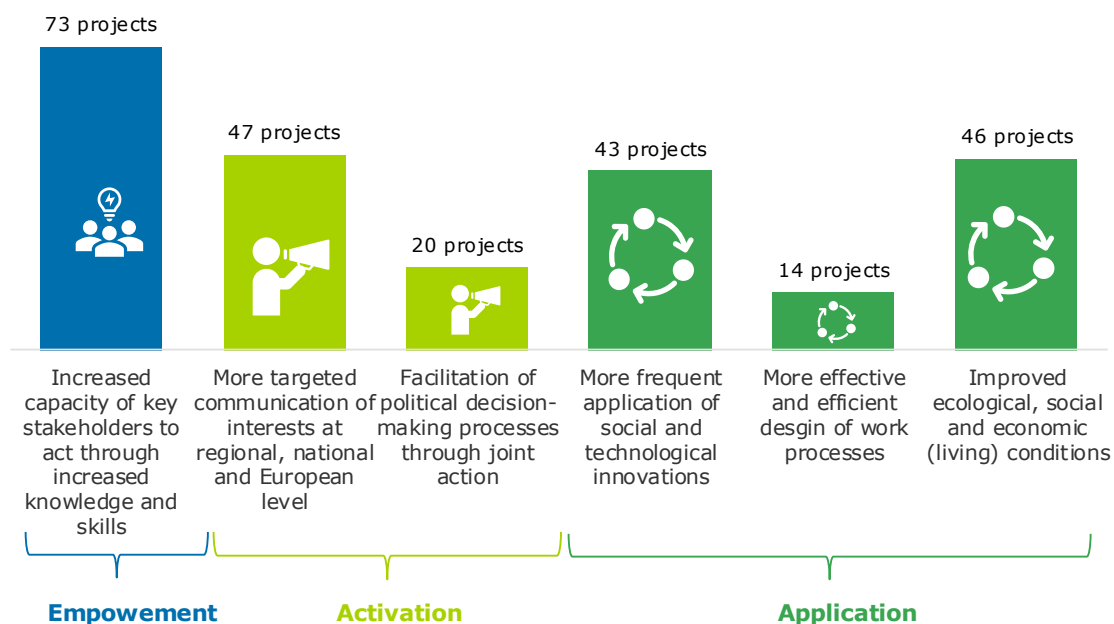
- All projects (will) lead to the impact categories “empowerment of key stakeholders” and the “application of knowledge and skills”.
- More than 2/3 of the projects (will) also contribute to the third impact category “activation of decision-makers”.
- Based on our experience with the evaluation of similar programmes, it is **extraordinary that there is such a high number of very complex projects** that contribute to all three impact categories.

As of February 2020, 73 projects were at various stages of implementation within the Interreg VB Programme North Sea Region. As one of the first steps, all project descriptions were analysed in order to get an overview to which impact categories and to which impacts the projects are expected to contribute.

Our analysis shows that the **projects are of high complexity** with regard to the activities carried out and also with regard to the actors directly involved in the projects as well as to the end-users that are addressed. According to our methodological approach it takes three steps (impact categories) to create sustainable impact in transnational cooperation (see Figure 7).

The projects funded in the North Sea Region Programme all aim at empowering key stakeholders and applying knowledge and skills. Additionally, more than two thirds of the projects also activate decision-makers. This finding is remarkable in a positive sense. It underlines the **high ambition towards the impact that is created with the programme and its projects**. It should be pointed out that projects of this high complexity in a transnational setting require **high levels of expertise from the project partners and well-functioning partnerships**. Considering the large progress in programme implementation, it can be assumed that a sufficiently high number of actors in the North Sea Region can fulfil the funding criteria that the programme management has defined for the projects. This is positive and shows that the programme has set adequate criteria for funding: they are ambitious as they result in projects of high complexity and quality and they are suitable for the potential beneficiaries. Additionally, experience shows that actors in programme areas with a long history in Interreg/transnational cooperation build up considerable capacity in cooperating transnationally. It can be assumed that this is also true for the North Sea Region Programme.

Figure 9: Contribution of projects to impact categories and impacts



Source:

OMS and project websites.

More details on the impacts of the projects will be presented in the following chapters on the different Priority Axes and on the further specified evaluation questions.

Recommendation for Interreg-specific impacts



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the Interreg-specific impacts of the current programme:

- **Continue to select projects of high complexity which contribute to different impact categories and impacts in order to achieve a high level of sustainable impact in the North Sea Region.**

3.2.3 Pilots – validation of results and key benefits

Validation of new knowledge

Evaluation question:

Have beneficiaries validated new knowledge through piloting and/or consultation with end-users?

Conclusion:

- The targets with regard to the conduct of pilots have been achieved to a **very large extent**.
- **Almost all projects** in all four Priority Axes include tests or pilots to **validate new knowledge** and try out **jointly developed solutions**.
- In some projects, the pilots have already been completed, while most projects are currently conducting pilots. Certain projects have not yet started piloting.
- The pilots are conducted in different regions in different countries which ensures testing under different circumstances by different actors.

Pilots are (regional) **test cases** in which newly developed approaches and technologies are tested under 'real-life'-conditions. Pilots validate new knowledge and conclusions. Pilots must be relevant to wider project and programme goals and must be rooted in the joint activities of the partnership. The programme clearly stresses the importance of pilots/tests for its innovative character. For the Priority Axes 2 and 3 the inclusion of pilots/tests in projects is even mentioned as an explicit aim of the funding.

Programme's statements on pilots:

PA 2: (Specific Objective (SO) 2.1 and 2.2)

- "Actions **will include**:
 - Pilots to identify resource savings through innovative industrial design and manufacturing processes
 - Pilots to experiment with new uses of renewable and locally sourced materials"
- "The **programme aims to support experimentation and pilots** to stimulate change in current patterns of production, consumption, working and living."
- "Previous projects have shown that **local and regional pilot actions can identify new approaches and build stakeholder support** for them, and that transnational cooperation can be used to improve the design and implementation of such pilots."

PA 3

- "The region as a whole is threatened by climate changes and **successful pilots are needed** to demonstrate that effective action is possible." (SO 3.1)
- "Projects that rely solely on analysing the current situation and/or making plans for future action will not be approved. It is instead **expected that projects validate conclusions with testing and pilots** which provide a sound basis for other regions and organisations to build on these results." (SO 3.2)

One of the assessment questions in the application process:

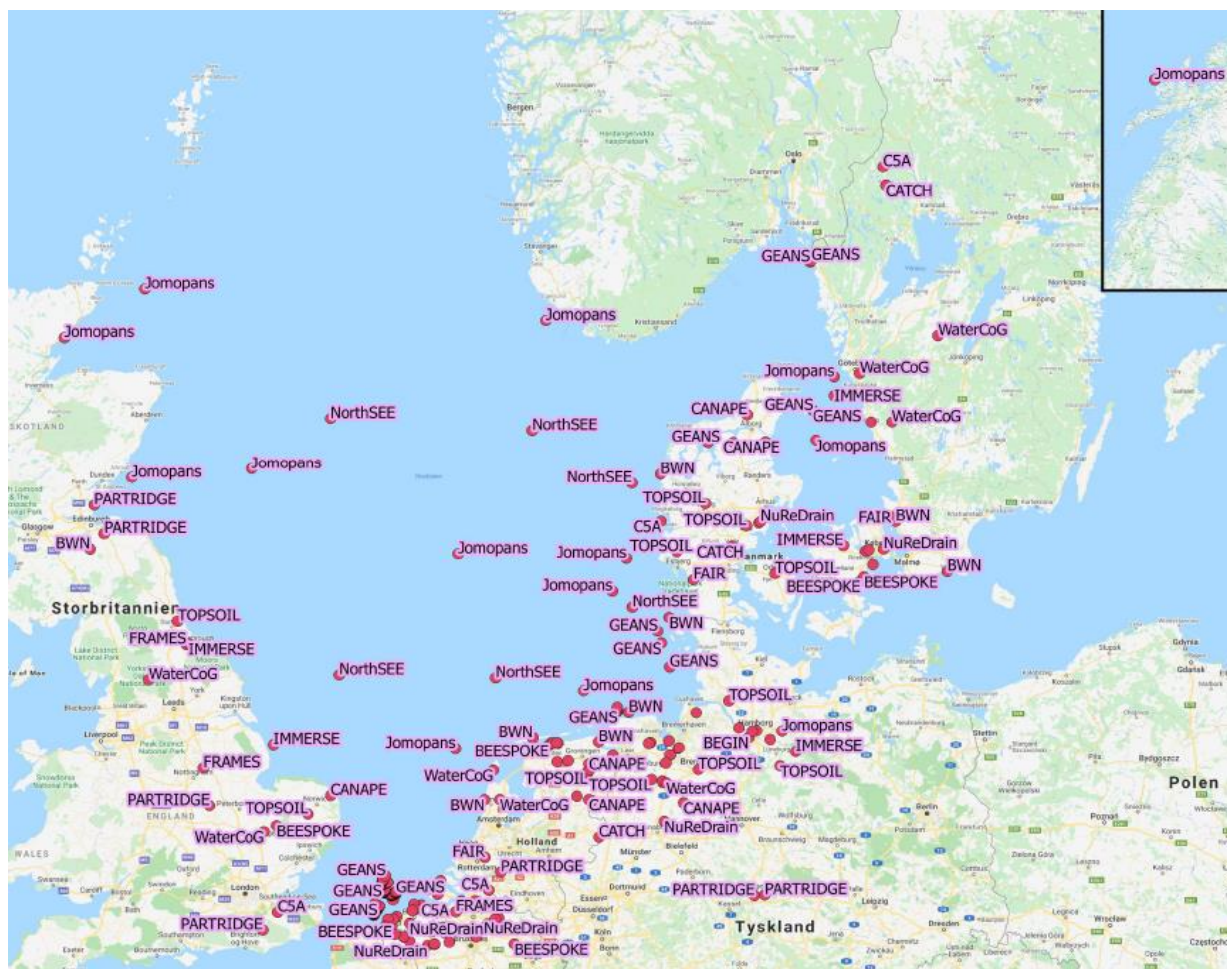
"[Does the project] **Demonstrate** new solutions that go beyond the existing practice or adapts and implements already developed solutions?"

Sources: Cooperation Programme and Fact Sheet 19 - Application Assessment Process

The analysis comes to the conclusion that the beneficiaries **have clearly validated the new knowledge** with the end-user groups through piloting. The project analysis has proven that almost all of the programme's projects include pilots, in order to validate new findings and therefore support the achievement of the programme's goals on demonstrating new solutions in pilots/tests in some form. Even in the Priority Axes 1 and 4, where pilots are not mentioned as a key element of the projects in the cooperation programme, pilots have played a significant role.

The following map shows an example of the extensive distribution of pilots among the participating regions in Priority Axis 3.

Figure 10: Pilots in Priority Axis 3



Source: Achievements Report.

Key benefits of pilots

Evaluation question:

In terms of economic, social and ecological progress and development, what were the key benefits from pilots and tests applied in funded projects?

Conclusion:

- The conduct of pilots and tests is inherently important and valuable to **test a new or improved approach** under 'real life-conditions'.
- The key benefits of pilots and tests applied in funded projects are that pilots demonstrate **concrete practical solutions** and build **stakeholder support**. Pilots significantly **support the learning process**, as they do not have to fulfil all expectations and instead allow for mistakes.

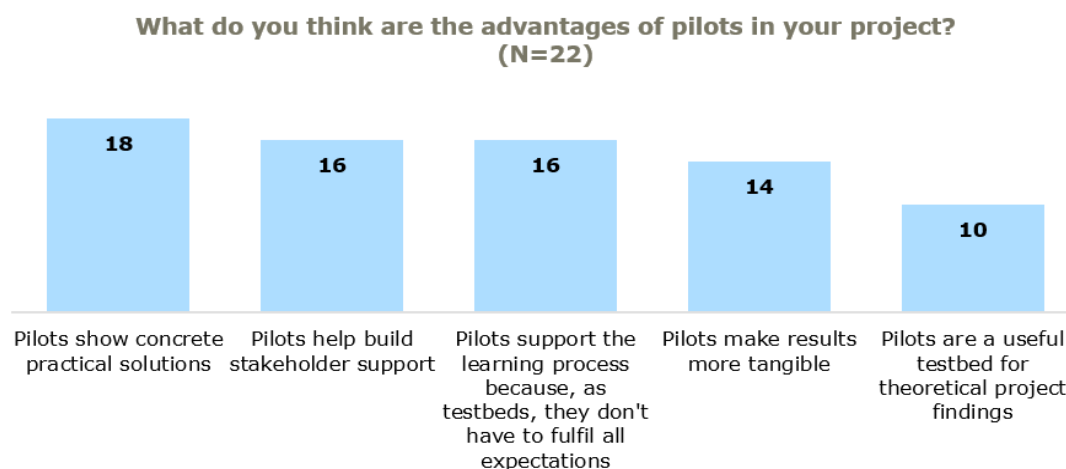
The key benefits from pilots and tests applied in funded projects were assessed by including the topic in the survey for all lead beneficiaries of the projects and by addressing the topic in the in-depth case studies conducted in all four Priority Axes.

The survey of the lead beneficiaries showed that nearly all lead beneficiaries (96 percent) assess their pilots as very **valuable**, as they **help test a new or improved approach**. Following this statement, the analysis comes to the conclusion that the pilots have **several important benefits**, some of which can be identified as the key benefits. The expectations formulated in the programme concerning the effects of pilots have been fulfilled.

According to the lead beneficiaries, key benefits of pilots are that the pilots

- demonstrate **concrete practical solutions**
- help **building stakeholder support**
- support the learnings process, as they don't have to fulfil all expectations and rather function as **testbeds** (see
- Figure 11).

Figure 11: Advantages of pilots



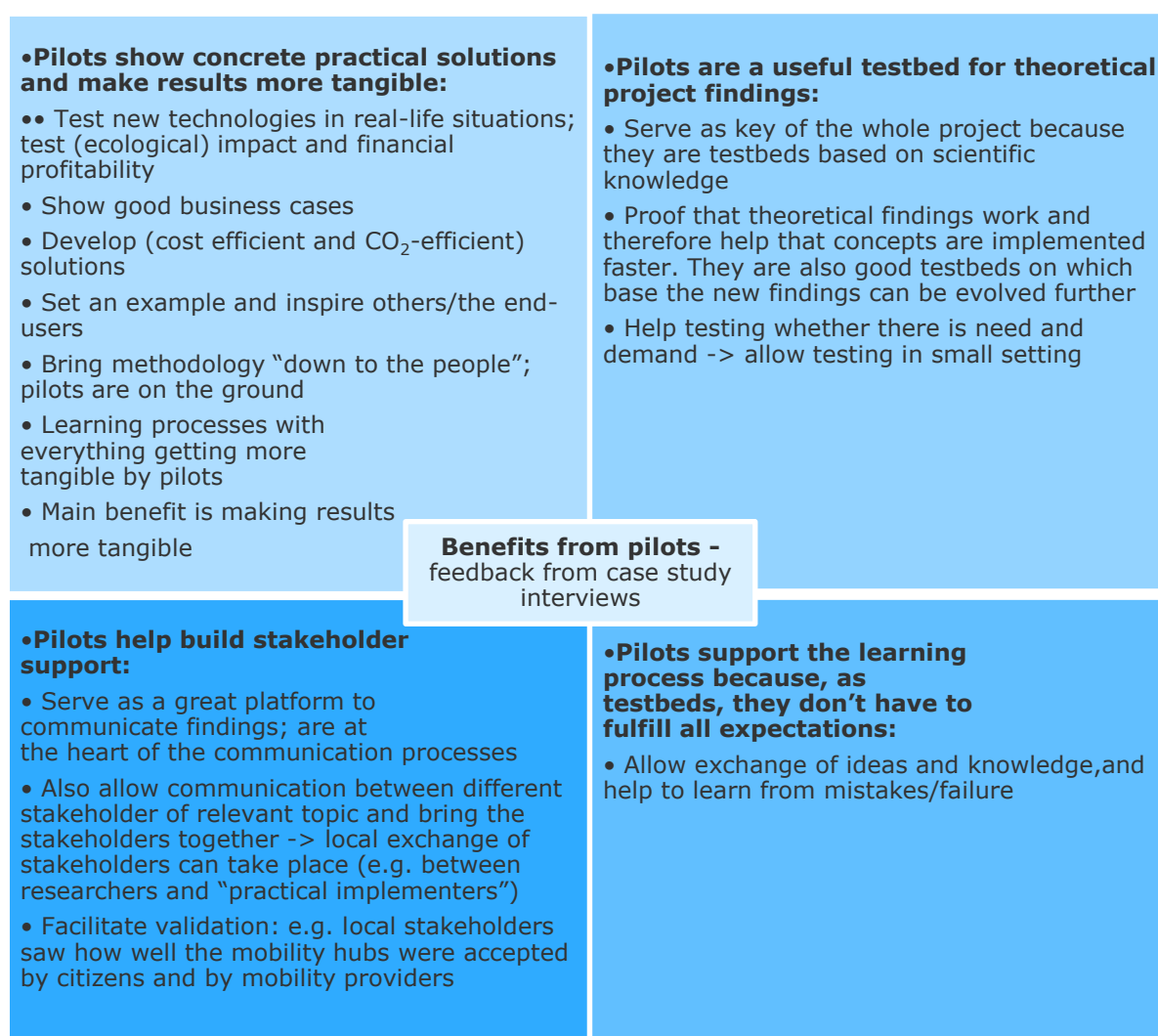
Source: Online survey lead beneficiaries, multiple answers possible.

These benefits have also been confirmed in the interviews carried out in the four case studies

(feedback collected from project advisors, lead beneficiaries, private beneficiaries, universities, end-user groups). The interview partners mentioned several important benefits of pilots and stressed how important the pilots are for the impact of the programme's projects.

The case study interviews also clearly showed some examples for a **transnational added value of pilots** in the projects. One value that pilots bring about on a transnational level is the opportunity to test new solutions under different conditions and therefore learn when, why and how the new solutions work in the best possible way. The transnational exchange among those implementing the pilots helps developing the best solutions in a collaborative approach. Besides that, pilots serve as showcases for visitors from different countries, looking for successful solutions in practice. This has been pointed out as especially significant by different interview partners in the case study interviews.

Figure 12: Benefits from pilots (Soft Landing for SMEs in the North Sea Region, DUAL Ports, PARTRIDGE, SHARE-North)



•Source: interviews case studies.

Recommendations for pilots



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the validation of results and key findings through pilots:

- **Continue to focus on pilots as one component of future projects**
- **Point out the potential benefits to applicants in order to raise awareness for the benefits of pilots**

3.2.4 Communication of findings to end-users

Evaluation question:

Have the findings been effectively communicated to other members of relevant end-user groups elsewhere in the programme area?

Conclusion:

- The findings have been communicated to relevant end-user groups by using a **variety of means of communication**.
- Lead beneficiaries apply a **target-specific communication strategy** and use different means of communication.
- Applying **target-specific means of communication** acknowledges the characteristics of the different end-users and thus ensures that the different end-users are reached efficiently.

The analysis comes to the conclusion that findings are **effectively communicated to end-user groups and that lead beneficiaries use target-specific means of communication**: different communication channels are used to address different end-user groups.

The main means of communication channels used by lead beneficiaries are workshops and conferences, social media and homepages. Further means of communications that projects use are newsletters, the press as well as fairs and exhibitions. Beside the communication methods listed below, personal contacts are another effective channel.

Based on the online survey among the lead beneficiaries and the case studies, it becomes apparent that different methods of communication are used to address different end-user groups:



Websites and **Social Media** usually provide general, non-technical information about projects and their results. These two methods of communication are widely used by the lead beneficiaries to address **all end-users** equally.

The other methods of communication are specifically used to address certain end-user groups:



Workshops and conferences are especially used to address experts and to discuss findings with professionals for which the project results are relevant (higher education and research institutions, public authorities, interest groups including NGOs and SMEs).



Newsletters are especially used to address actors that are potential end-users of projects such as SMEs, sectoral agencies and public authorities.



The **press** is especially used to inform general public about the conducted projects as well as for informing public authorities.



Like workshops and conferences, **fairs and exhibitions** are especially used to address experts and business professionals from SMEs and higher education and research institutions.

In the case studies, the lead beneficiaries stressed that they consider a targeted-group-specific communication to be particularly important for effective communication. It was furthermore pointed out that it is essential to be aware of the end-user group's specific characteristics and communication habits in order to be able to choose communication methods that reach this particular end-user group. To reach SMEs for example, it is less beneficial to use social media. Instead, personal contacts and personal information have proven to be effective in informing SMEs about the project. Local networks and in addition to local media are also considered to be valuable in this regard. Moreover, directly inviting the end-users to visit e.g. local pilots has proven to be successful to inform about the project's activities, results and about best practice.

Farm walks as targeted communication measure

One example on how communication measures of the programme's projects were implemented in a very end-user-oriented way are the "**farm walks**" that have been a cornerstone of the communication efforts of the project PARTRIDGE.

One of the main end-user groups of the project were farmers of the North Sea Region. The project included 12 demonstration sites and offered **guided tours** for stakeholders such as farmers, to show how the implementation of the developed methods works **in practice**. This vastly helped making project's findings **tangible** for farmers and to convince them to implement measures on their own farms.



Recommendations for the communication of findings to end-users



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the communication of findings to the end-users:

- **Encourage lead beneficiaries and project beneficiaries to continue applying end-user-specific communication measures.**
- **Where possible, provide the beneficiaries with examples of good practices of communication to inspire them in their own communication endeavours**

3.2.5 Involvement of different types of partners

This chapter of the evaluation deals on the one hand with the participation of the private sector (for-profit) by analysing their contribution to the objectives of the programme and by scrutinizing the benefits it gains from participating. On the other hand, the chapter investigates the programme's contribution to effective work processes and workflows within public institutions, universities and enterprises.

Private sector involvement

For this evaluation the analysis concerning the private sector focusses on for-profit enterprises as a specific type of stakeholder category. For-profit enterprises can participate as project beneficiaries in the Interreg NSR programme. They however, cannot be lead beneficiary of projects.

According to the classification in the Programme's Online Monitoring System, the following beneficiaries have been classified as private sector in this evaluation:



Private Sector

For-profit oriented Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and large private enterprises.⁵

Typical benefits of private sector involvement, identified in previous similar evaluations, are the following:

Private sector involvement potentially ...	
	... helps bringing more diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives/competences together.
	... increases the variety of partnerships within the projects and the programme.
	... strengthens the programme to achieve more hands-on solutions by having "practitioners" involved.
	... enhances the level of innovation within the programme.
	... creates important links between private sector, public sector and research to support innovation.

This evaluation placed particular emphasis on analysing, on the one hand, the extent of the participation and contribution of for profit enterprises in the programme and, on the other hand, on the benefits these organisations gained from the programme. The following paragraphs include the evaluation results on these focus points.

⁵ Definition according to the classification in the North Sea Region's Online Monitoring System

Private sector organisations as project beneficiaries and as end-user group

Evaluation question:

In what way and to what extent does the private sector participate in the North Sea Region programme? How many projects have private sector participation as project beneficiaries/end-users?

Conclusion:

- The for-profit private sector is participating in the form of **project beneficiaries and as end-users**.
- In **41 of the 73 projects there is at least one for-profit private organisation** involved as a project beneficiary.
- About 11% of the project beneficiaries are for-profit private organisations.
- In PA 2, 3 and 4 the participation of the for-profit private sector as beneficiaries is as expected. In PA 1 the number of participants from the for-profit private sector is lower than expected.
- All projects address for-profit private sector organisations as an end-user group of the project outcomes in some way, but not always as their main end-user group.

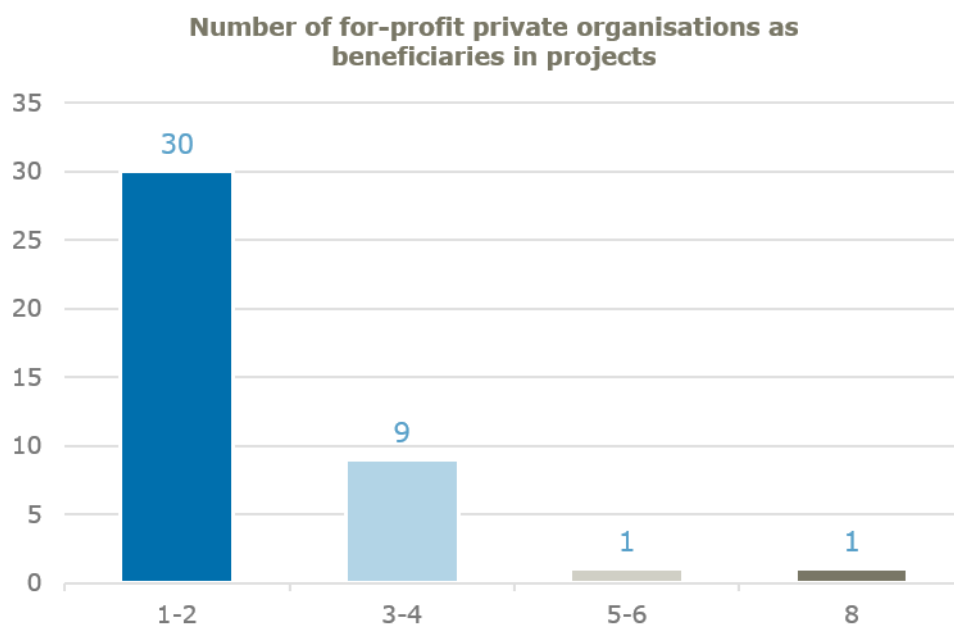
Private sector organisations as project beneficiaries

The analysis comes to the conclusions that the **private sector participates to a large extent in the programme and that all projects address private beneficiaries in their end-user group** in some way.

The analysis of the projects that has been carried out, shows that in 41 of the 73 projects, there is at least one for-profit private organisation involved within the project partnership. This means that about 56 percent of all projects include a for-profit private organisation as beneficiary. The projects with involvement of for-profit private organisations include between one and seven for-profit private project beneficiaries. 30 projects with for-profit private organisations include 1 or 2 for-profit private beneficiaries in the project consortium (73%).

Of the 751 unique beneficiaries that have participated as beneficiaries in the programme, 83 are for-profit private ones.⁶ Nine of these beneficiaries are large private enterprises, 74 of them are SMEs. This means that about 11 percent of the total beneficiaries are for-profit private organisations.

⁶ For the calculations only active project beneficiaries have been included. Each organisation has been counted only once, even if participating in more than one project.

Figure 13: For-profit beneficiaries in projects, distributed by their number per project

Source: OMS

Since the four Priority Axes all have **individual thematic focuses**, a closer look was taken into the participation of the for-profit private sector in each Priority Axis. The **results were compared with the goals** of the programme for the individual priority axis:

Priority Axis 1 Thinking Growth



- **SO 1.1:** Develop new or improved knowledge partnerships between businesses, knowledge institutions, public administrations and end users with a view to long-term cooperation (post project) on developing products and services
- **SO 1.2:** Enhance regional innovation support capacity to increase long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies
- **SO 1.3:** Stimulate the public sector to generate innovation demand and innovative solutions for improving public service delivery.

The Cooperation Programme states that “All actions of Priority Axis 1 are particularly **targeted towards support for SMEs.**” **8 out of 22** projects in PA 1 include SMEs as beneficiaries. This number could be considered **lower than expected**, given the target statement for PA 1 above. On the other hand, there are **7 additional projects** that have business support organisations as beneficiaries, which serve as multipliers for for-profit private companies.

This means that overall, **15 out of 22** projects either directly have SMEs or relevant multipliers for SMEs in their consortium. In these 15 projects the results will with a high probability be target-group oriented. The remaining 7 projects with no for-profit private organisation in the project partnership were for the most part also targeted towards SME. As few as two projects were found to be only indirectly relevant for SMEs and therefore it seems reasonable that no for-profit private organisation was directly involved as a beneficiary. The other five projects all involved SME and/or business support organisations through events and workshops or in their pilots. Even though the participation

is less intense and directly compared to a project partnership, it can be assumed that this way of private sector involvement was still beneficial for the project and its results.

Business Support Organisations as multipliers

One exemplary project in Priority Axis 1 that involves business support organisations as beneficiaries is the project Soft Landing for SMEs in the North Sea Region (Lean Landing). The goal of this project is to enhance cooperation between business support organisations in different countries and to enable SMEs to get in contact with SMEs and business support organisations in other countries. SMEs are the end-users of this project. By involving business support organisations, their multiplying function is used to provide support for SMEs which is the main objective of Priority Axis 1.



Priority Axis 2 Eco-innovation



- **SO 2.1:** Promote the development and adoption of products, services and processes to accelerate greening of the North Sea Region economy.
- **SO 2.2:** Stimulate the adoption of new products, services and processes to reduce the environmental footprint of regions around the North Sea.

Priority Axis 2 focuses on new products, services and processes to accelerate the **greening of the NSR economy** and to reduce the environmental footprint. Especially SO 2.1 aims at the greening of the NSR economy, which implies the importance of the participation of private beneficiaries as an important stakeholder group and as representatives for the economic sector.

13 out of 19 projects in PA 2 include for-profit private organisations as beneficiaries. This number shows that there is a **good amount** of for-profit private organisations involved in the projects, which is important to bring the new products, services and processes to a **more “hands-on” level**. In SO 2.2 **6 out of 7** projects include for-profit private beneficiaries. In SO 2.1 **7 out of 12** projects include for-profit private beneficiaries. Additionally, three projects include business support organisations as beneficiaries, which serve as multipliers for for-profit private companies. Therefore, also in SO 2.1 almost all projects either directly have SMEs or relevant multipliers for SMEs in their consortium.

This overall participation of for-profit private organisations and business support organisations in PA2 is **seen as a positive aspect with regard to the PA’s objective of greening the NSR economy**.

Priority Axis 3 Sustainable NSR



- **SO 3.1:** Demonstrate new and / or improved methods for improving the climate resilience of target sites
- **SO 3.2:** Develop new methods for the long-term sustainable management of North Sea ecosystems.

Priority Axis 3 aims at new methods for improving the climate resilience of target sites and at methods for the long-term sustainable management of NSR ecosystems. **9 out of 18 projects** in PA 3 include for private organisations as beneficiaries. 7 out of these 9 projects belong to SO 3.2, two projects belong to SO 3.1.

As expected the **direct involvement of the private sector in projects of the PA 3 is lower** than in PA 1 and 2. The reason for this is that SO 3.1 includes a lot of projects where local authorities and research organisations are at the core of the projects on climate resilience. SMEs are therefore not the primary end-user group. SO 3.2 has a generally wider range of beneficiaries, including among others the private sector, working on sustainable management of eco-systems.

The level of private sector involvement in PA 3 therefore is seen as **sufficient** considering the PA's objectives and the type of actions funded.

Priority Axis 4

Green transport and innovation



- **SO 4.1:** Develop demonstrations of innovative and/or improved transport and logistics solutions with potential to move large volumes of freight away from long-distance road transportation.
- **SO 4.2:** Stimulate the take-up and application of green transport solutions for regional freight and personal transport.

Priority Axis 4 focuses on innovative and/or improved transport and logistics solutions (long-distance freight) and on green transport solutions for regional freight and personal transport. **10 out of 14 projects** in PA 4 include for-profit private organisations as beneficiaries. Two out of three projects in SO 4.1 include for-profit private beneficiaries. Also, all of the three projects in SO 4.1 include business support organisations as beneficiaries which serve as multipliers for for-profit private companies. This involvement **is expected to create an added value to the projects**, since the focus in SO 4.1 lies mainly on transport and logistic stakeholders and the improvement of long-distance freight transportation.

8 out of 11 projects in SO 4.2 include for-profit private organisations. The SO4.2 has a generally broader range of beneficiaries with regional authorities as a core category and aims at strengthening the links between the private sector, the public sector and research to support innovation concerning green transport solutions. This implies that a high level of private sector involvement within the projects is **positive**.

The interviews that were carried out in the case studies identified the following special circumstances and derived recommendations for a successful participation of private beneficiaries:

Feedback from case study interviews

- One challenge for the participation of for-profit private beneficiaries is that other partners (e.g. universities and research institutes) work at different speeds, with other resources and other settings than for-profit private enterprises (funding situation is different)
- For-profit private beneficiaries have the special condition that they work with their own money and on their own entrepreneurial risk → their innovative approach makes the whole project go straighter to the target, if SMEs are on the team; ideally lead beneficiaries help participating SMEs with administrative tasks of the programme
- Especially when SMEs join an Interreg project, internal contracts (Partnership Agreements) within the project partnership can help prevent delays in the project. This sort of internal contract can e.g. include binding deadlines for the partners and options for action.
- SME involvement generally still needs more attention from the programme side as they are often less experienced in receiving funding and participating in transnational projects than other beneficiaries (if SMEs are supposed to contribute, there needs to be enhanced support from programme side to encourage more SMEs to participate and to succeed in getting more projects to include SMEs)

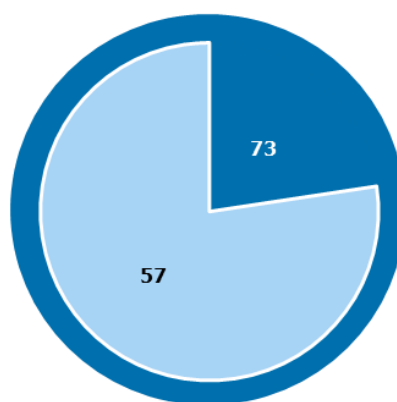
Private sector as end-users

The projects were also analysed concerning the inclusion of the private sector as their end-users – i.e. as organisations that are not part of the project partnership, but still benefit from the programme.

The analysis shows that **all projects** include the private sector as one of their end-user groups. In 57 of these projects, for-profit private organisations are even **one of the main end-user groups**. In projects, where for-profit private beneficiaries are not the main end-user group, local and regional authorities can be the projects' end-users instead.

Figure 14: Distribution of private sector as main end-user group or as one of the end-user groups

Private sector as end-user group



- Projects that have private sector as one of the end-user groups
- Projects that have private sector as one of their main end-user group

Source: OMS.

Benefits for the private sector

Evaluation question:

To what extent does the private sector find participation in the North Sea Region programme financially profitable?

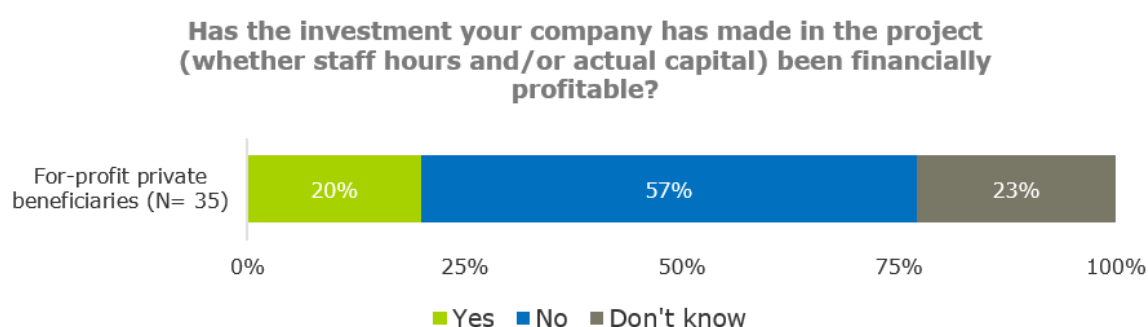
Conclusion:

- For the private sector the financial profitability does **not seem to be the main reason** to participate in the programme.
- The for-profit private project beneficiaries find the participation in the North Sea Region programme **to some extent** financially profitable. (**20 percent of them indicated that they find the participation in the North Sea Region programme financially profitable**).
- Several **other important benefits** gained from participating in the projects have been confirmed.

The analysis comes to the conclusions that participation in the programme is **financially profitable to some private beneficiaries, but that other benefits are more important to the private sector's participation**.

In the carried-out online survey among the for-profit private beneficiaries, 20 percent of these large private enterprises and SMEs stated that their investment for participating in the programme has been financially profitable. Considering the big effort required for participating in a complex transnational project, this number is higher than expected. 57 percent of the for-profit private beneficiaries in the survey stated that their investment for participating in the programme has not been financially profitable.

Figure 15: Financial profitability for-profit private sector



Source: online survey private beneficiaries.

The results from the survey lead to the assumption, that the financial profitability may **not be the main motivation** for these private organisations to join an Interreg NSR project. This impression has been confirmed in the interviews with the for-profit private organisations that were carried out in the context of the case-studies. If financial profitability is considered as a reason to become a project beneficiary, it is seen as a long-term investment, that has potential to be profitable after a longer time period. This again underlines the high relevance of the funded projects for the private sector in the North Sea Region and confirms that it is not only about joint ideas and networking but a lot about

concrete solutions, new products and services (impact category 'application', see chapter Interreg-specific impacts).

The following section analyses the main drivers for the for-profit private organisations to join an Interreg NSR project as a beneficiary.

Evaluation question:

What benefits had projects on the private sector (beside direct or indirect funding)?

Conclusion:

- The for-profit private sector has a **large variety of benefits** in their organisations in response to their project participation, which were confirmed in a **survey** that was conducted among the for-profit private organisations.
- The **establishment of new networks and new contacts with other organisations or experts** seems to be a benefit for the for-profit private beneficiaries to a **very large extent**.
- Overall, the for-profit private beneficiaries experience benefits more often that operate on a **long-term and strategic orientation** compared to short-term benefits.

The analysis comes to the conclusions that the programme provides a **large variety of benefits for the private sector** and that the private sector **often benefits in the long term**.

A remarkably high number (**88 percent**) of the for-profit private beneficiaries that participated in the online survey have experienced the '**establishment of new networks and new contacts with other organisations or experts**' as a benefit from their project participation. In addition to that, **more than 50 percent** of all for-profit private beneficiaries that took part in the survey experienced the '**gaining of know-how and skills**', '**increased capacity to work in transnational projects**' and '**increased capacity for innovation**' as benefits from their project participation.

It is noticeable that the long-term benefits for business development, such as network expansion or the acquisition of know-how and skills, are confirmed more often than more short-term benefits for business development (e.g. the implementation of new products and services or the opportunity to enlarge the companies' customer base). This supports the finding that for-profit private beneficiaries do not mainly join Interreg NSR projects because they are driven by short-term financial and economic profits but consider participation as a more **long-term and strategic investment** for their business.

Figure 16: Benefits for for-profit private organisations

Source: online survey private beneficiaries, the answer option 'other' was not chosen by any respondent and is therefore not included in the figure.

The findings from the online survey have also been **confirmed in the interviews** with for-profit organisations in course of the case studies. The interviews further illustrate the large variety of benefits that were already identified in the survey and brought **more detailed examples** of benefits that were gained from the projects by the for-profit private organisations. The interviews show that the for-profit private organisations are especially attracted to the programme by the **strategic and long-term benefits** that can be derived.

The following benefits were particularly highlighted by the interviewees:

Feedback from case study interviews

Gaining know-how and skills

- Exchange and transfer of knowledge
- Increase of knowledge, e.g. by talking to and working with scientists
- Chance to get to know new perspectives
- Gain insights into the functioning of the public sector as well as further insights as a project outsider

Increased capacity to work in transnational projects

- International knowledge is brought to national level
- Collaboration with other countries becomes possible, process of learning from each other is initiated

Increased capacity for innovation

- Possibility to benefit from other competences in the project partnership, e.g. universities or other companies (other for-profit private organisations are seen as partners not as competition in the Interreg NSR context)
- Learnings from project can be important business drivers and a future advantage

Establishing new networks and new contacts with other organisations

or experts

- Developing an international network
- Opportunity to forge new contacts
- Establishment of networks (also at the national level)
- Exchange becomes possible between stakeholders from private and public entities
- Participation allows to see the "other side of the coin", an insight into the industry and practitioners from the academic side
- Allows for-profit private organisations to cooperate and establish good networks without having to sell a product

Opportunity to enlarge companies' customer base

- Increased attention and awareness, strengthening of own position and being more visible on the market
- Communication advantages: EU logo gets way more attention than a logo of a single for-profit organisation
- New orders will come in due to EU project

Implementation of new products and processes

- Access to test areas and / or new solutions

More efficient use of human and technical resources

- Participation in an Interreg NSR project considerably helps the administration in small SMEs (e.g. it is necessary to have appropriate accounting structures in place to deal with the project's financial reporting. Once established, this is something SMEs can profit from in the long-term)

Contribution of the private sector

Evaluation question:

To what extent does the private sector contribute in the form of private capital or working hours?

Conclusion:

- The for profit private sector is contributing with a combination of private capital and capital-equivalent working hours in approximately equal measure.
- The for profit private sector is contributing with a private capital of **6,758,749 € (~4.3% of the total co-financing budget)** to the programme
- The for profit private sector is contributing with **6,308,398 € working hours** to the programme.
- **Large private enterprises** are especially relevant for their **support through working hours, SMEs are contributing the highest numbers of private capital** to the programme.

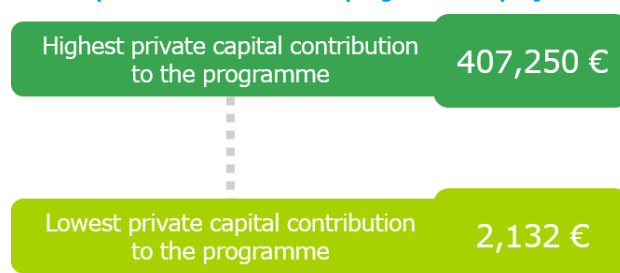
The analysis comes to the conclusion that the private sector **contributes** in the form of capital and working hours to the programme. As expected, compared to public funding, private capital comprises only a small part of the programme's overall budget.

The analysis of project data from the Online Monitoring System showed, that the for-profit private sector is contributing with a private capital of 6,758,749 € to the programme.⁷ This means that approx. **4,3 percent of all co-financing** (157,218,733 €) comes from for profit private beneficiaries. **90 percent** of the for-profit private beneficiaries with the highest contribution of private capital (>200,000 €) are **SMEs**. This is mainly because out of the 35 for-profit private beneficiaries, 32 are SMEs. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the for-profit private sector is contributing with 6,308,398 € working hours to the programme.

In **41 of the 73** projects there is at least one for-profit private organisation contributing to the project in the form of private capital and working hours. Ten for-profit private beneficiaries contribute with **more than 200,000 €** of private capital to the project. Seven of these beneficiaries are part of SO 2.1, while three are part of SO 4.2. The largest private capital investments are part of infrastructure and transport projects (e.g. shipping, energy production), even if these projects are not among those with the highest overall budgets.

Nine of these ten beneficiaries with a contribution of more than 200,000 € are SMEs, only one of them is a large private enterprise. The large private enterprises especially contribute with working hours to the projects.

Figure 17: Range of private capital contributed to the programme in projects



Source: OMS

Effective processes and workflows in public institutions, universities and enterprises

Evaluation question:

Has transnational cooperation efficiently contributed to effective processes and workflows within public institutions, universities and enterprises?

Conclusion:

- The participation in transnational cooperation projects has **significantly contributed to effective processes and workflows** in public institutions, universities and enterprises.
- Projects have especially contributed to an **improvement in internal knowledge transfer** and **further training of employees**.
- The **wide range of benefits** from participating in the programme also goes **beyond more effective processes and workflows**, e.g. new opportunities for students of academic institutions, besides the benefits for the employees working on an Interreg project directly.

⁷ The staff costs for the for private beneficiaries represent the working hours these beneficiaries have brought to the projects. The contribution in the form of private capital was calculated as the budget of the for profit private beneficiaries, excluding the amount for staff costs.

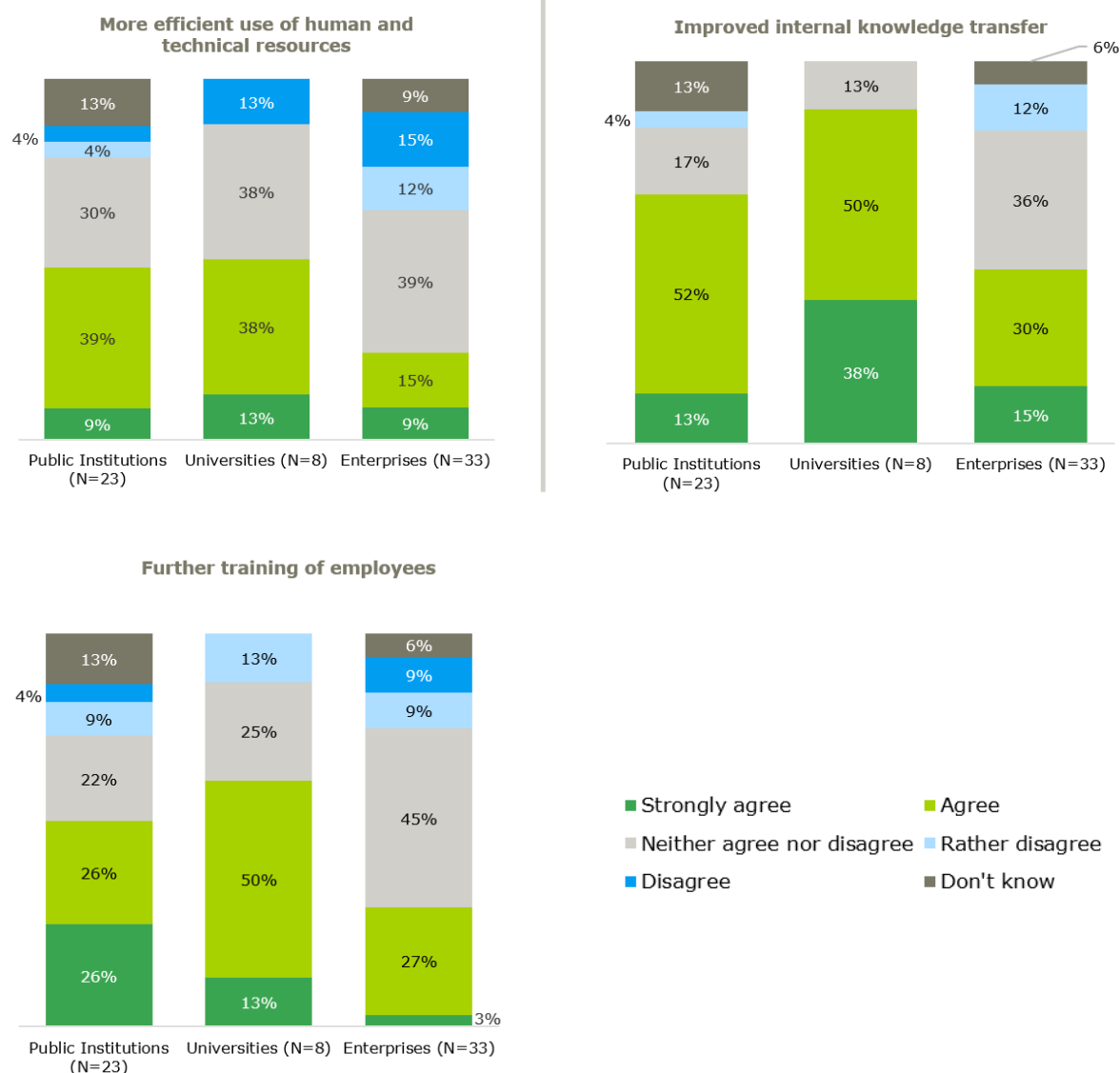
The analysis comes to the conclusion that the transnational cooperation in the programme has **clearly contributed to effective processes and workflows** in public institutions, as well as in universities and enterprises.

The following definitions of terms served as a base for the analysis of this evaluation question⁸:

	Public Institutions*	National public authorities Regional public authorities Local public authorities Infrastructure and (public) service provider
	Universities*	Higher education and research Education/training center and school
	Enterprises*	SMEs Large private enterprises
	Effective processes and workflows	<p>The following aspects contribute to effective processes and workflows in organisations and institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efficient and target-oriented use of human resources • and technical resources • well-functioning internal transfer of knowledge • further training of employees to stay 'up-to-date'

Projects have especially contributed to an **improvement in internal knowledge transfer** and **further training of employees**. The analysis shows that lead beneficiaries that are categorised as universities experienced slightly stronger effects than public institutions and enterprises.

⁸ According to the classification in the North Sea Region's Online Monitoring System

Figure 18: Contribution of the programme to more effective processes and workflows

Source: Online survey lead beneficiaries.

The interviews that were carried out as part of the case studies, **confirmed the findings from the survey** of the lead beneficiaries. They illustrate **concrete examples** on **how the programme has contributed** to better processes and workflows in the interviewed organisations (interview partners included representatives from public institutions, universities and enterprises).

Feedback from case study interviews

More efficient use of human and technical resources

- It enables business support organisations to “open up”/broaden horizon: internal processes, structures and competences were to some extent prepared for internationalisation and international networks were established.
- By participating in the programme, organisations opened up, acquired new competencies, developed international networks and are now able to support start-ups and SMEs in gaining access to international market
- By participating in the programme, the share of university facilities

between faculties has increased.

Improved internal knowledge transfer

- The international knowledge transfer helps local workflows and processes through knowledge gain.
- A competence platform was built up as a result of the participation in the programme.
- The projects sometimes result in new knowledge for university students. The programme gives students the chance to work on real-life cases and to get to know the implementation/industry side, which broadens their horizon and helps them with getting to know the “other side of the coin”.

Further training of employees

- Government bodies have actively sent their employees to visit pilot sites as best practice examples for their training.
- The programme creates new training opportunities and insights for local stakeholders from the public sector.

During the case study interviews other benefits for the academic sector from the participation in the Interreg NSR programme, besides effective processes and workflows, have been emphasized by the university representatives:

Feedback from case study interviews

Specific benefits from the programme for universities

- Programme made an enlargement of the network possible, nationally and in the NSR
- Through the participation in the Interreg NSR programme universities have a better standing when they try to influence decisions in Brussels, than when they try to do so on their own
- The programme enables universities to make their experience available to other countries
- Different views come together in the programme – from a scientific point of view this is very interesting
- Gives universities the chance to implement ideas
- Projects can also be the base for international publications
- There are even new possibilities for students (e.g. thesis topics integrated in an Interreg NSR project)

Recommendations for the involvement of different types of partners



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the involvement of different types of partners:

- **Continue to involve different types of partners in the programme to ensure a multidisciplinary perspective and a high level of innovation in the projects.**
- **The involvement of private organisations, business support organisations or network representatives, should be an integral part of the project partnerships to allow for a close link to practice. To**

increase their overall relevance, beneficiaries need to be aware of the actual demand for the products/services they want to develop within their projects.

- **Take into consideration, how a stronger focus on the impact category “application” could be incorporated into the programme (e.g. by having project partnerships include short-term benefits more prominently in their projects).**
- **Make sure to point out and effectively communicate the potential benefits of participation for the private sector, i.e. use statements from former beneficiaries in your communication measures.**

3.2.6 Impact on policy-making and policy implementation

This chapter will first analyse how the programme has contributed to increasing the capacity of decision-makers (in terms of new/adopted solutions; services; products and processes) to solving current challenges. Subsequently, the chapter demonstrates, how the programme has contributed to any changes in laws or regulations, as well as to placing topics higher on the political agenda.

Increased capacity of decision-makers

Evaluation question:

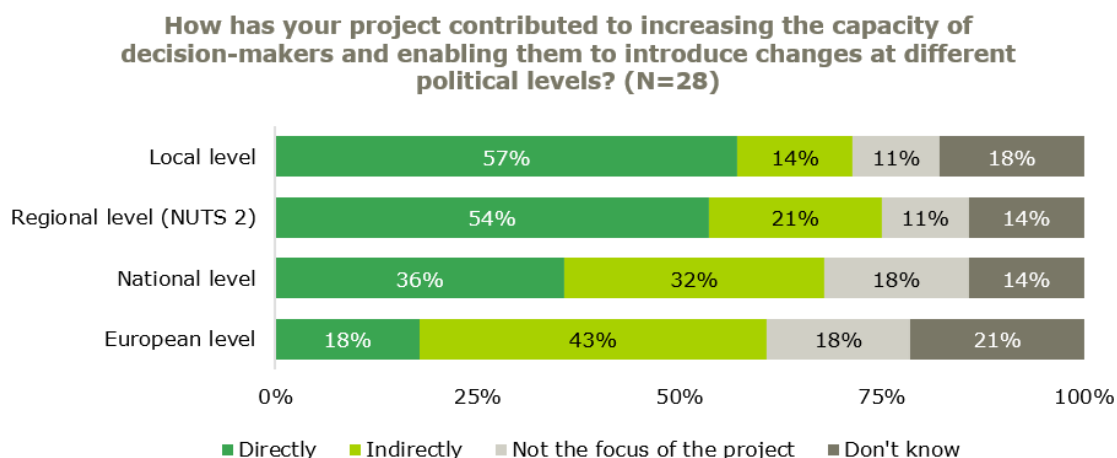
How has the programme demonstrated increased capacity of decision-makers (in terms of new/adopted solutions; services; products and processes) to solving current challenges?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **contributed to increasing the capacity of political decision-makers** and has enabled them to introduce changes at different political level through
 - Informing them about project goals, progress and outcome and by
 - Involving them in the process of the project

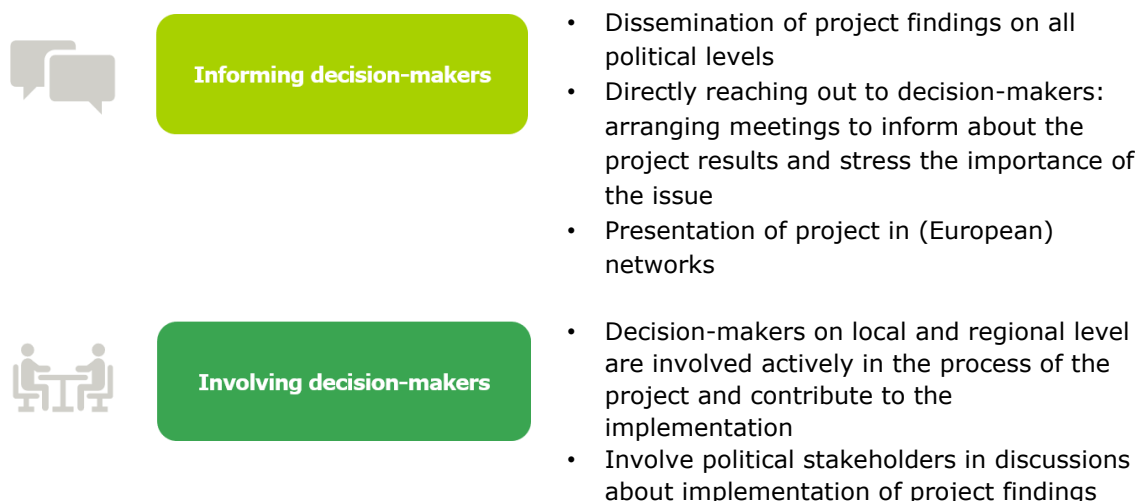
The survey of the lead beneficiaries showed that the **majority of the respondents have experienced that their project has contributed directly or indirectly to increasing the capacity of political decision-makers** and enabled them to bring about changes at the political level (e.g. by acquiring know-how or learning about best-practice example from others that are transferable within a certain field). At **local and regional level** in particular, the projects have contributed directly to increasing the capacity of decision-makers. This is to be expected, as local and regional decision-makers can usually be addressed and informed quite directly and easily by the beneficiaries. Some local decision-makers were even directly involved in the projects.

On the European level, projects had a rather indirect effect on increasing the capacity of decision-makers. This is to be expected given the complex multi-level governance system in Europe and is not considered a negative finding in the evaluation.

Figure 19: Increase of capacity of decision-makers and enabling to introduce changes by projects

Source: Online survey private beneficiaries.

The projects have contributed to increasing the capacity of political decision-makers and enabled them to bring about changes by:



To further support the analytical results on this evaluation question, the case study interviews included questions about how the projects specifically contributed to an increase in capacity among decision-makers and where challenges were experienced by project beneficiaries:

Feedback from case study interviews

- **International/European level:**
 - Projects are reaching out to other countries to align their projects' approaches internationally → several policy influencers from outside the NSR joined a one-week "exchange trip" organised by one of the programme's projects
 - Projects are part of European conferences and have direct contact with European politicians
- **National level:**
 - National politicians visit pilot sites in several projects

- More public awareness would help the projects to reach out to the national political level
- **Local level:**
 - Links with the local political level were established through many pilot areas
 - Local decision makers (e.g. city councils) work closely together with projects (more integration and cooperation are happening)
 - New approaches from Interreg projects can be eye-openers for local municipalities
 - Reports developed by the projects are published to specifically influence policy makers on the local level

Implementation of changes in laws or regulations

Evaluation question

Have any changes in laws or regulations been implemented and has the programme contributed to placing topics higher on the political agenda?

Conclusion:

- Yes, the programme has **successfully contributed** to the implementation of laws and changes and has contributed to placing certain topics higher on the political agenda.
- The lead beneficiaries confirmed that their projects are having direct impacts on laws and/or regulations on different levels.
- 50 out of 73 projects contribute to the relevant impact category of 'activation'.
- The changing of laws and regulations is rather long-term oriented, and the successful awareness-raising is right now a more dominating achievement of the programme, which can then be the base for long-term law or regulation changes.

The analysis comes to the conclusion that the transnational cooperation in the programme has **clearly contributed to changes in laws or regulations and to placing topics higher on the political agenda**. The changes in laws or regulations have **to be considered as rather long-term effects** of the projects and therefore have not been experienced as a result of all projects (yet).

Several findings led to this overall evaluatory result:

Some lead beneficiaries have experienced and therefore confirmed in the online survey, that their projects even had a direct impact on national laws and/or regulations. The lead beneficiaries' assessment on the impact that projects have on national laws and/or regulations shows a mixed picture. Some lead beneficiaries have experienced that the projects impacted national law and/or regulations by providing good examples from within the project partnership or by recommending new legislation that initiated a political process. There are also lead beneficiaries that stated that they experienced additional funds being allocated to the topic of their project to ensure continuing funding for new projects. Furthermore, they have experienced that the project had an impact on national legislation in certain participating countries (but not in all).

Moreover, a number of lead beneficiaries expect their projects will have an impact on national law and/or regulation in the future. To this date, this however cannot be confirmed because some projects have just started or are not yet progressed enough to have such a direct impact.



Activation

Facilitation of political decision-making processes through joint action

More targeted communication of interests at regional, national and European level

These findings from the survey are further supported by the following insights:

The impact categories that have been used as a general theoretical framework for the impact evaluation allow further insights in the influence that projects had on the political decision-making processes and on placing topics higher on the political agenda.

All projects have therefore been analysed concerning their contribution to the impact category "activation". The analysis shows that **in all Specific Objectives there are projects that contribute to** this impact category. In total **50 of the 73** projects contribute to the activation category. Further, the project analysis showed that policymakers are also mentioned as an end-user group in almost all projects.

Some priority axes and their projects have a stronger focus on contributing to changes in laws or regulations and on placing topics higher on the political agenda than others. It is in a positive sense remarkable that for example even the projects in PA 1, where “activation” is less of a focus than in other Priority Axes, 12 out of the 14 projects contribute to this impact category.

One reason that some projects were more successful in contributing to changes in laws or regulations can be seen in the topicality of the project’s focus area. Experience from other analyses shows that a project is much more likely to directly influence laws or regulations if it addresses a topic that is already on top of the political agenda. Then the project partners do not have to convince decision-makers of the high relevance of their topic but can gain automatically easy and direct access to them. With their expert knowledge and future-oriented results, project partners are often seen as relevant stakeholders by decision-makers. When this is the case, it is likely that a project has an influence on changes in laws or regulations. But it should be pointed out that it is not always clear whether a project will contribute to changes in laws or regulations, regardless of the project’s quality. During project implementation unforeseen external developments can occur (e.g. the current Corona pandemic) which suddenly add or remove topics from the political agenda and thus facilitate or hinder the contribution to changes in laws or regulations.

One concrete project example from the programme that has already successfully influenced laws and regulations is the project **SHARE-North**. It was one of the aims of the project from the beginning to place shared mobility higher on the political agenda and this approach evolved to a very large extent in the course of the project:

Influenced by the project, Bremen was the first state in Germany to pass an own carsharing law. The project also contributed to the West Yorkshire regional mobility strategy and one of the beneficiaries supported Flemish local governments in setting up shared mobility action plans.



The achievements report of the programme also confirms these findings and states that the programme clearly contributes to EU, national, regional and local-level policies. The report emphasizes that the projects from the programme contribute to policymaking and political implementation at all levels, but also points out that depending on the project’s objectives and the topic, the contribution differs. The following two projects show concrete examples on how the programme contributes to the implementation of laws/regulations on the European level.

One concrete project example from the programme that has successfully contributed to the implementation of EU laws and regulations is the project **PARTRIDGE**. The project focused on increasing biodiversity indicators by 30% at their pilot sites and connected hunters, farmers, conservationists, researchers, civil servants, and local volunteers to support this common goal.



The project was highlighted by the European Commission in its [brochure](#) published to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the EU Birds Directive for its remarkable efforts to reverse the decline of farmland birds in the participating countries and for this contribution to the EU Birds Directive.

Another concrete project example from the programme that has successfully contributed to the implementation of EU laws and regulations is the project **JOMOPANS**.

It is specifically required by the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, that sound sources, sound transmission, and the distributions of vulnerable species in the North Sea are topics that have to be tackled transnationally.



The aim of this project JOMOPANS was therefore to develop a framework for a fully operational joint monitoring programme for ambient noise in the North Sea in a transnational partnership. The monitoring scheme the JOMOPANS project developed directly supports member states' implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and helps support policy makers' decision-making processes to protect marine environment and ecology.

Additional examples on how the projects of the programme successfully help implementing EU laws can be found in the programme's Achievements Report.

Recommendations for the impact on policy-making and policy implementation



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the impact on policy-making and policy implementation:

- **Continue to directly involve local and regional authorities and their decision-makers in the programme to ensure a direct link to policy-making and implementation.**
- **Keep a high focus on future-oriented topics in the programme in order to link projects to ongoing political debates and thus make use of the momentum for a certain topic.**

3.2.7 Impact on aligning national and transnational priorities

Evaluation question

Has the programme successfully contributed to aligning national and transnational priorities in political processes?

Conclusion:

- There are **certain projects where the projects' results have led to the introduction of regulations and laws** on national level and therefore aligned different priorities (e.g. TOPSOIL).
- Several projects had an impact on **national legislation and/or regional policies** in some participating countries as a result of INTERREG cooperation.
- A number of projects expect that they will further influence national laws and priorities in the years after project closure by means of policy recommendations and further dissemination of the project outcomes.
- Overall, the **possible impact of the programme on national and transnational policies must be regarded as limited**. Decision-making processes are extremely complex and influenced by numerous factors and actors, the programme can realistically only support already ongoing initiatives or further push certain topics which are already high on the agenda of political decision-makers.

The analysis concludes that the transnational cooperation in the programme has through some projects **contributed to aligning national and transnational priorities in political processes**.

The interviews with different project beneficiaries and the additional research in course of the case studies proved, that common challenges were approached jointly and that the projects' actions resulted (among others) in placing these topics on the different regional and national political agendas. By addressing common challenges and lifting the topics on political agendas in several regions and countries at the same time, the programme had an impact on aligning the political priorities in the different parts of the North Sea Region. The 'State of Play report' of the programme confirms these findings from the evaluation. The report states that by developing solutions to joint challenges of the North Sea Region, the programme sets a base for adopting and implementing policies and strategies on shared topics.

One concrete example is the project TOPSOIL, which aimed at exploring the possibilities of using the topsoil layers to solve current and future water challenges in the context of climate change. The project also focused on the framework that different legal requirements create and, on the opportunities, offered by optimal governance settings in this thematical area.



Within the project, partners from different countries shared experiences and inspired each other on legislation for groundwater flooding. Experiences from the Netherlands were used on a political level to change legislation in Denmark. In this specific example, the project clearly contributed to aligning different national laws on common challenges by sharing experiences among the project's beneficiaries.

Regardless of these positive impacts found in some projects, it must be kept in mind that political processes, especially on the national and the transnational level, are extremely complex, influenced by numerous factors and steered by a vast amount of actors. It cannot be expected that the programme alone has an impact on aligning political priorities. Again, it is important that the programme and its projects address topics of high relevance for the participating regions and countries in order to get the chance to have an impact on the political agenda. This can in some cases be anticipated in the programme planning but is in other cases simply a pure coincidence (i.e. a major event takes place and is directly related to an ongoing project).

Recommendations for aligning national and transnational priorities



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the impact on aligning national and transnational priorities:

- **Continue to directly involve local and regional authorities and their decision-makers in the programme to ensure a direct link to policy-making and implementation.**
- **Keep a high focus on future-oriented topics in the programme in order to link projects to ongoing political debates and thus make use of the momentum for a certain topic.**

3.2.8 Contribution to cross-cutting themes of equality and sustainability

Evaluation question:

What has been the programme's contribution to cross-cutting themes of **equality and sustainability** in terms of promoting and having a practical impact in the NSR? To what extent are the horizontal principles integrated in programme management arrangements and in the activities of funded projects?

Conclusion:

- The programme ensures that the projects address the cross-cutting themes by having them consistently included over the course of the projects, from the **application and the project approval process to the reporting of the projects**
- The **programme management arrangements are contributing** to the themes of equality and sustainability in a variety of ways.
- **The Priority Axes of the programme directly include the cross-cutting theme of sustainability; the cross-cutting theme of equality is included in the Priority Axes rather indirectly.**
- The approved projects **clearly contribute** to the cross-cutting theme of **sustainability**.
- The approved projects are **mainly neutral concerning** the topics **equal opportunities, non-discrimination and the equality between men and women**.

The analysis concludes that the programme has **clearly contributed to the cross-cutting theme of sustainability**. The **contribution to the cross-cutting theme of equality is limited** due to the thematic focus of the programme on innovation and sustainability.

Cross-cutting theme of sustainability

Strategic framework

In the cooperation programme it is emphasized, that the programme pursues sustainable development with very high ambitions and standards. Particularly the ecological and the economic aspect of sustainability are in the focus of the programme.

Especially Priority Axis 3 (Sustainable NSR) and Priority Axis 4 (Promoting green transport and mobility) tackle the challenges of ecological sustainability: The PA 3 focuses on the threats caused by climate change and on preserving the environment considering these severe challenges. This can address a large variety of sectors, such as for example agriculture, urban development or (marine) ecosystems. The aim is to develop and use innovative methods and strategies to protect existing structures from negative impact and to support climate resilience. PA 4 targets the mobility and transport sector and aims at transforming them in a more sustainable and future-oriented way. To achieve the goals of the PA 4, aspects such as green logistics, efficient public transport and the development of innovative and environmental-friendly new transport modes are at the centre of attention.

The programme also aims at a transition towards a green economy and therefore focuses on the economic aspect of sustainability as well. This requires an improvement of products, a change in consumer patterns, the exchange of information on paths to resource efficiency between various partners to prevent waste, promote innovation and create new markets. These aspects are

specifically promoted under Priority Axis 2 and have also been an important factor in the other priorities of the programme.

Contribution by programme management arrangements

The programme management has the principle of sustainability integrated in the management arrangements in different ways. One example is the approach to communicate via digital formats on a regular basis. Digital meetings as an alternative to in-person-meetings have been even further prioritized during the Covid-19 situation in 2020. The programme management tries to further increase the number of digital meetings to avoid unnecessary travels of committee members, which would result in emissions, caused for example by air travel. Furthermore, the Joint Secretariat is currently developing a “sustainability strategy”. This will put an even stronger emphasis on the topic of sustainability from the programme management side in the future. In addition, other institutions/organisations involved in the programme management, for example at the national level, are working on including sustainability measures in their practice. The individual contribution by each institution/organisation is highly relevant when working in a programme with such a variety of participating bodies.

Moreover, the programme management already sets the framework for the topic of sustainability to be included in the individual projects of the programme:

The cross-cutting theme of sustainability is included in the approval process of the programme’s projects. All project applicants have to describe how their project contributes to the sustainable development of the North Sea Region. The input that is provided by the applicants is part of the assessment, which results in the recommendation for the Steering Committee who decides on approval or rejection of the projects’ proposals.

Contribution of projects

The projects approved clearly succeed in contributing to the sustainable development of the North Sea Region.

One concrete example is the contribution of the 18 projects in Priority Axis 3, which **all contribute** to either climate change adaptation, increased resilience and/or improved eco-system management. All these contributions support the sustainable development of the North Sea Region. Projects of other Priority Axes have successfully contributed to the sustainable development of the North Sea Region as well (see the results of several evaluation questions for the different Priority Axes in this evaluation).

Cross-cutting theme of equality

Strategic framework

The programme is committed to the aim of promoting equal opportunities and preventing discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The cooperation programme furthermore states that organisations involved in the programme need to contribute to a positive environment for the active pursuit of equal opportunities and the prevention of deprivation, exclusion and discrimination in all forms. However, these challenges are primarily targeted indirectly by the programme.

The programme further states that gender equality needs to be addressed by the programme’s projects in order to help continue and strengthen positive trends in the region. Projects should therefore ensure that gender perspectives are taken into consideration in all aspects of project development and implementation and make certain to promote gender equality and the gender

dimension throughout all priorities. It is furthermore expected from the projects to take direct action where they can have an immediate impact - for example by taking account of the need to promote gender balance in decision-making.

Moreover, a gender balance in evaluation panels and in bodies such as advisory groups and expert groups is expected to be ensured.

The Priority Axes of the programme do not explicitly tackle the challenges of equal opportunities, non-discrimination and gender equality. However, these challenges are often indirectly included in the Priority Axes of the programme. One example is the contribution to improve sustainable public transport services, also in remote areas, which helps the social inclusion of non-drivers.

Contribution by programme management arrangements

The programme management has integrated the cross-cutting theme of equality in the management arrangements in different ways.

One example is the gender distribution in the programme bodies. In the Joint Secretariat for example, the gender distribution is approximately one third male and two thirds female (October 2020). In the Joint Secretariat's job application process, decisions are not based on the gender of the applicants. The diversity in the programme body is supported by the fact, that there is a large distribution of ages among the team. This diversity helps by combining long-term experience with new innovative ideas and results in a more balanced work-environment.

The cross-cutting theme of equality is also included in the approval process of the programme's projects. All project applicants have to describe how their project contributes to equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as to equality between men and women. The input which is provided by the applicants is furthermore part of the assessment, which is the recommendation for the Steering Committee who decides on approval or rejection of the project proposals.

Contribution of projects

The projects approved are largely neutral concerning the topics equal opportunities, non-discrimination and the equality between men and women. However, projects of the programme express their commitment to equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Moreover, project partners address the obligation to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women.

3.2.9 Contribution to EU 2020 strategy

Evaluation question

To what extent has the programme contributed to the EU2020 strategy?

Conclusion:

- The North Sea Region programme is **consequently aligned with the three EU 2020 objectives**.
- **Smart growth** is supported through activities in all four Priority Axes with a special focus in the PA 1 and 2.
- **Sustainable growth** is also strongly supported by the programme. Especially the PA 2, 3 and 4 are targeted to a more sustainable NSR region with different thematic focuses. Many projects contribute directly or indirectly to the Europe 2020 sustainability targets of reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions and resource use.
- The programme also contributes with some projects to the objective of **inclusive growth**. Social challenges are especially addressed by projects in the PA 1.

The EU 2020 strategy is the main strategic guidance for the North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020. It defines three overarching European strategic objectives:

- **Smart growth**: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation
- **Sustainable growth**: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy
- **Inclusive growth**: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.⁹

As laid out in the cooperation programme document, the North Sea Region programme is **consequently aligned with the three EU 2020 objectives**. This was also widely confirmed by the European Commission's approval of the Programme's Annual Report 2018.

Smart growth is especially supported through activities to strengthen the knowledge economy through more and/or better education and training, innovation and research, and better use of research outputs. Innovation as well as building up knowledge are topics addressed in all four thematic priority axes of the programme with a **special focus in the PA 1 and 2**. Among others **joint training programmes** are developed, models for **shared research infrastructures** are implemented and **analyses on the need for new products and services** to address common challenges are carried out. The evaluation findings confirm that these activities are implemented successfully. It can thus be assumed that the programme contributes to smart growth in the North Sea Region.

Sustainable growth is also a topic at the core of the programme. In **PA 3 the funded projects are targeted towards improved risk management, more efficient use of natural resources and ecosystem management**. PA 4 with the focus on **green transport and mobility** is also clearly targeting towards sustainability. Additionally, the PA 2 is focused on **eco-innovation** and is therefore also directly supporting a more sustainable growth in the North Sea Region. Many projects are successfully carried out and **contribute directly or indirectly to the Europe 2020**

⁹ European Commission 2010: Communication from the Commission. Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Available under: <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>





sustainability targets of reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions and resource use. For example, new uses of renewable and locally sourced materials are developed, approaches to change behaviour and increase awareness of opportunities to save energy are implemented and long-term strategies for the sustainable management of the North Sea and its landscapes are developed and implemented. The evaluation therefore finds a great contribution of the North Sea Region Programme to the objective of sustainable growth in the region.

Inclusive growth is also addressed by the programme. Even though it might at the first glance be **less visible and prominent** compared to the objectives of smart and sustainable growth, the evaluation shows that the programme also **contributes with some projects to this EU 2020 objective.** Especially in **PA 1** some projects directly address **social challenges** in the North Sea Region. New services and better solutions are developed for promoting social inclusion and prevent loneliness, **health services** are improved and new approaches for **elderly care** are tested and implemented. It can thus be stated that the programme contributes to a more inclusive growth in the North Sea Region.

3.3 Priority Axis 1: Thinking Growth: Supporting growth in the North Sea Region economies

Priority Axis 1 focuses on supporting economic growth in the North Sea Region, more specifically on strengthening research, technological development and innovation in the programme area.

There are three Specific Objectives included in Priority Axis 1 with different focus areas:

Priority Axis 1: Thinking Growth			
 Specific Objective 1.1	 Specific Objective 1.2	 Specific Objective 1.3	
Develop new or improved knowledge partnerships between businesses, knowledge institutions, public administrations and end users with a view to long-term cooperation (post project) on developing products and services.	Enhance regional innovation support capacity to increase long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies.	Stimulate the public sector to generate innovation demand and innovative solutions for improving public service delivery.	
Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CC • EXSKALLERATE • Lean Landing For Micro SMEs • PERISCOPE • PROWAD LINK 	Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COM³ • FBD • GrowIn 4.0 • Inn2POWER • Inno-Quarter • Northern Connections • REFRAME • RIGHT • SHINE 	Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BLING • CORA • CUPIDO • I2I • In For Care • Like! • NorthTick • SCORE 	

Source: Cooperation Programme.

3.3.1 State of implementation

Number of projects

By the end February 2020, in total 11 calls for Expressions of Interest and Full Applications have been opened since April 2015. In Priority Axis 1, 22 projects in total have been approved by the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme.



Source: Achievements Report.

Output indicators

The target achievement of the output indicators for Priority Axis 1 shows that great progress has already been made: by the end of August 2020, the programme targets for all output indicators in this Priority Axis had already been exceeded.

The following table provides an overview of all output indicators for Priority Axis 1 and their target achievement as of August 2020 (64 projects total included in the OMS data set, 19 out of 22 projects from the PA1).

Table 4: Target achievement Output Indicators Priority 1

SO	ID	Indicator	Measure- ment unit	Target value programme 2023	Target projects, OMS data end of 08/2020	Achieved by projects, OMS data end of 08/2020
1.1, 1.2, 1.3	CO41	Productive investment: Number of enterprises participating in cross- border, transnational or interregional research projects	Enterprises	29	1,635	1,612
1.1, 1.2, 1.3	CO42	Productive investment: Number of research institutions participating in cross- border, transnational or interregional research projects	Organi- zations	19	236	403
1.1, 1.2, 1.3	0.1	Number of organizations / enterprises adopting new solutions by project end	Organi- zations/ enterprises	220	2,340	2,059
1.1, 1.2, 1.3	0.2	Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end	Organi- zations/ enterprises	2,190	37,145	471,021
1.1	1.1	Number of enterprises cooperating with new / improved knowledge partnerships	Enterprises	500	1,429	1,971

1.2	1.2	Number of improved or new innovation support measures launched for businesses	Measures	21	172	109
1.3	1.3	Number of improved or new innovation support measures launched for public service delivery	Measures	21	86	65

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 64 projects included in data set).

Allocation of funding

The allocation of funding in Priority Axis 1 is nearly complete: 98 percent of the planned ERDF funding was already allocated by October 2020. The financial target in this Priority Axis is nearly secured. Taking the approval of 5% over allocation in each PA by the EU Commission into account, there is still nearly 3 million euros ERDF grant remaining in October 2020 for Priority Axis 1. At this stage, 150% of the initially planned Norwegian funding was already approved.

Table 5: Allocation of funding of Priority Axis 1 (October 2020)

Priority Axis		ERDF funding + national counterpart 2014-2020	ERDF funding 2014-2020	ERDF funding approved, October 2020 ¹⁰	ERDF funding approved, October 2020	ERDF grant, October 2020
1	Thinking Growth	89,387,570 €	44,693,785 €	43,961,685 €	98 %	+2,966,789 €

Priority Axis		Norwegian funding 2014-2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian grant, October 2020
1	Thinking Growth	2,390,383 €	3,577,254 €	150 %	/

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and Achievements Report, information provided by Joint Secretariat.

Result Indicators

For Priority Axis 1 three result indicators are defined. All three indicators show a **positive development** towards the formulated target. Looking at the objectives and targets of the Priority Axis, the result indicators are suitable to grasp the (intended) results.

The analysis confirms that the projects funded in Priority Axis 1 contribute to the priority's objectives. It can thus be assumed that the programme also contributes to the positive development of the result

¹⁰ The amounts take into account single lump-sum payments of € 20,000 per project for preparation costs, if applied for during the application phase.

indicator. Please note: there are numerous factors beyond this funding instrument that influence the development of the result indicators in the North Sea Region.

Table 6: Result Indicators Priority Axis 1

SO	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value programme (2015)	Target value programme (2023)	Achievement toward target (2019)
1.1	Capacity of knowledge partnerships in the North Sea Region to deliver marketable product, service, and process innovation	Qualitative analysis of capacity/potential	2.8	3.3	3.03
1.2	Capacity of authorities / practitioners to increase the scope and quality of innovation in enterprises	Qualitative analysis of capacity/potential	2.6	3.1	2.87
1.3	Capacity of authorities / practitioners to increase the scope and quality of innovation in public service delivery	Qualitative analysis of capacity/potential	2.3	2.8	2.59

Source: Achievements Report.

3.3.2 Impacts

Capacity building to increase innovation

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme built SMEs' capacity to increase innovation?

Conclusion:

- Despite the relatively low number of SMEs as project beneficiaries, the programme has **clearly contributed** to building SMEs' capacity to increase innovation.
- **Projects in all four Priority Axes contribute to capacity increases in SMEs**, especially projects in Priority Axis 1.
- The project analysis, the online survey among the SMEs and the case study indicate that the projects contribute to capacity-building by
 - Making new and/or improved technologies and processes available for SMEs especially by **establishing new networks and contacts**.
 - Making SMEs aware of these new methods and technologies and enabling them to use them, by **establishing new networks and contacts** and **improving know-how and skills** within the SMEs.
 - Raising awareness for new ways of thinking and other markets: start-ups internationalised and opened up as a result of the project and benefited from the exchange of experience and knowledge with international partners.

'Capacity building' in the context of the North Sea Region programme is defined in the Cooperation Programme:

Figure 20: Definition of capacity building



Definition of Capacity building

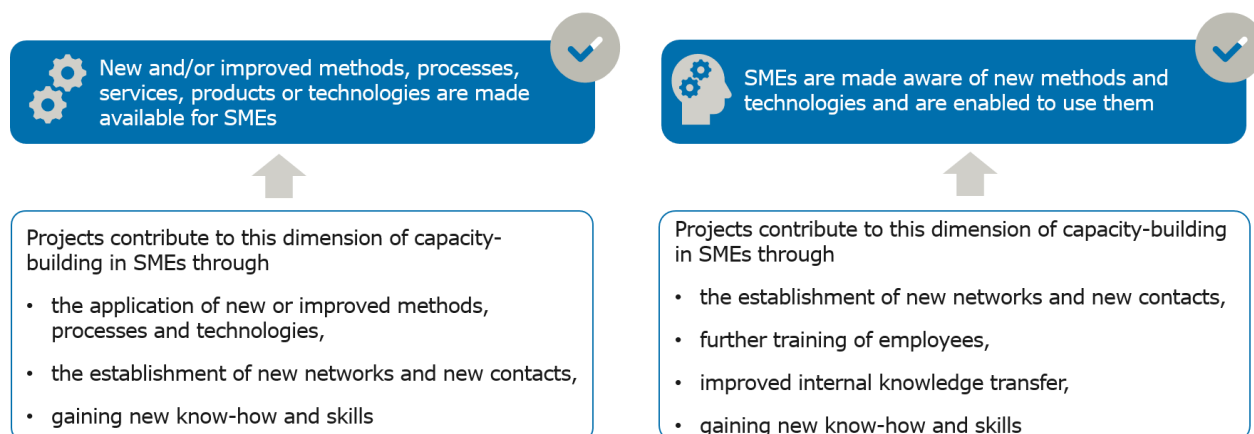
'Improved capacity will therefore involve two components.

- Firstly, it requires that **new and/or improved methods, processes, services, products or technologies** are made available.
- Secondly, it requires that potential users are **made aware of these new offers** in such a way that they can adopt them.

Progress on the results therefore includes both improving the **potential to act** and effectively **raising awareness** of the new potential.'

Source: Cooperation Programme Interreg VB NSR, p. 48

The analysis of the projects that are funded by the programme shows that the projects **contribute to both components of capacity-building as defined in the programme document**. As to be expected, especially projects in Priority Axis 1 pursue the goal to enhance innovation capacity on SMEs. Additionally, also projects in all other Priority Axes contribute to capacity-building in SMEs.

Figure 21: Contribution of the programme to the two components of capacity building

Source: online survey private beneficiaries

The following projects **show concrete examples** for new and/or improved methods, processes, services, products or technologies for SMEs:

Examples for **new and/or improved methods, processes, services, products or technologies that are made available for potential users:**

- **Future by Design (FDB):** The project works with SMEs in each partner region on sharing knowledge, ideas and regional experiences to support SMEs to become more **data-driven and better informed** about the economic, technological, policy and supply chain changes that will shape the future. They therefore create a **virtual transnational horizon-scanning and knowledge transfer (HSKT) hub** for SMEs.
- **REFRAME:** A challenge for all food chain related SMEs are the changing consumer and citizen demands. The project **strengthens the support infrastructure** for food related SMEs, develops new smart specialization strategies focusing on the changing demand and creates **data** on current volumes and quality of regional food supply and urban demand.

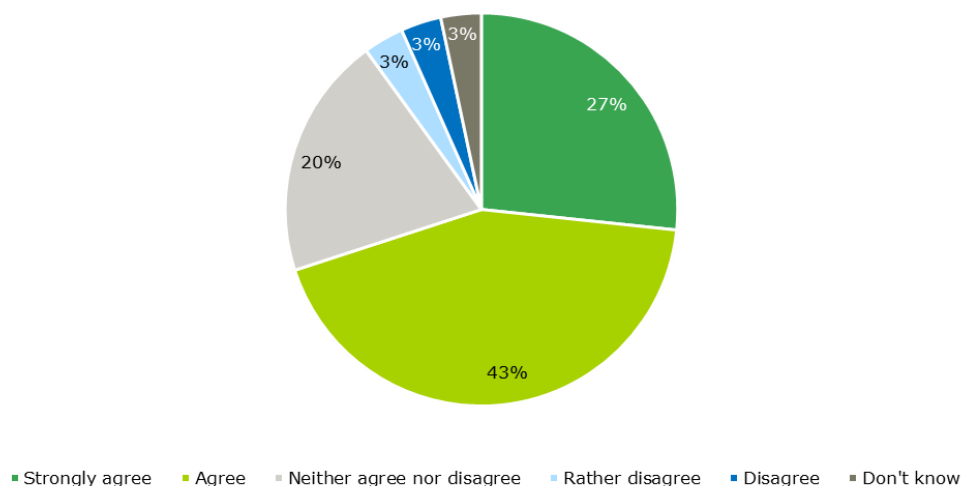
Examples on how projects **made SMEs aware of new methods and technologies and enabled them to use them:**

- **EXSKALLERATE:** The project focuses on accelerating the adoption of exoskeletons into construction and industrial manufacturing SMEs, where heavy physical work leads to severe health issues. Improved exoskeleton benefits are validated in end-user pilot sites and **informative workshops with SMEs and exoskeleton experts** are carried out.
- **GrowIn 4.0:** The project focuses on pooling knowledge on the manufacturing industry and Industry 4.0. main challenges and solutions. They for example carry out the **"Transition Industry 4.0 workshop"** to stimulate a mindset of change in SMEs, with focus on building strategies for the industry 4.0 business future.

The online survey conducted among SMEs that participate as project beneficiaries in the programme supports these findings: more than half of the SMEs (70 percent) that participated in the survey stressed that they **increased their capacity for innovation as a result** of their participation in the transnational cooperation project (see Figure 22)Figure 22.

Figure 22: Increased capacity for innovation among SMEs

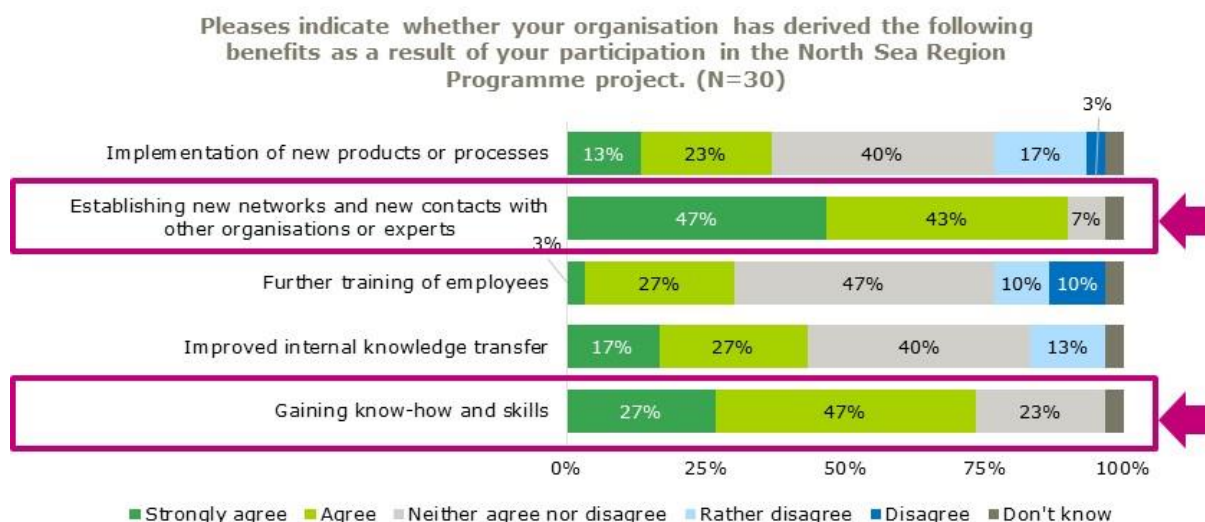
Please indicate whether your organisation has derived the following benefits as a result of your participation in the North Sea Region Programme project: Increased capacity for innovation (N=30)



Source: online survey private beneficiaries.¹¹

SMEs especially profited from the projects in terms of developing new networks: 90 percent of the SMEs indicated in the online survey that the **establishment of new networks and new contact** with other organisations of experts was a concrete benefit from their project. Furthermore, the majority of SMEs (74 percent) **acquired know-how and skills** by participating in the transnational cooperation project (see Figure 23).

¹¹ Projects in all four Priority Axis contribute to capacity-building in SMEs. Thus, responses from all SMEs that are project beneficiaries have been analysed.

Figure 23: Main benefits of participation in the project for SMEs

Source: online survey private beneficiaries.¹²

An in-depth analysis of the project Soft Landing for SMEs in the North Sea Region further deepened the findings and provided detailed exemplary insights into the effects of the programme. For the case study, the application of the project, project reports and the project's website were analysed and four interviews (project advisor, lead beneficiary, project beneficiaries and end-user group) were conducted.

 CASE STUDY: Soft Landing for SMEs in the North Sea Region	  European Regional Development Fund EUROPEAN UNION
Project Info:	PA 1, Specific Objective 1.1, Call 1 28 Partners, Countries: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom
Challenge:	Very few SMEs are successful in their export activities in the long run, very few launch other kinds of cross-border co-operations and internationalisation than export, and very few of the non-internationalised SMEs are planning on starting such activities.
Approach:	The project implements a cooperation between 6 North Sea countries and micro SMEs, business incubators, knowledge institutions and public business development funders in each of the six participating countries. The project follows a hands-on approach and organises partner and customer meetings for SMEs. That way, companies get a fast feedback from potential customers or partners and can test the potential of their products and services in a new

¹² Projects in all four Priority Axis contribute to capacity-building in SMEs. Thus, responses from all SMEs that are project beneficiaries have been analysed.

European market.	
Activities to increase innovation capacity in SMEs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement and enhance cooperation between business incubators; creating profit-enhancing knowledge partnerships between SMEs • Exchanging SMEs between the incubators; End-user group: 250 SMEs • Results are made publicly accessible and will be translated into a blueprint for future networking and knowledge sharing between incubators and policy makers in EU
Effects on end-users in terms of increased innovation capacity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced awareness for new ways of thinking and other markets: start-ups internationalised and opened up as a result of the project • Start-ups entered new markets, built partnerships and networks abroad • Start-ups benefited from exchange of experience and knowledge with international partners which gave a boost to their innovation

Regional innovation capacity and smart specialization strategies

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated innovation capacity building to deal with long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed to enhancing regional innovation capacity building**
- **All nine projects** in Specific Objective 1.2 (Enhance regional innovation support capacity to increase long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies) contribute to **creating better framework conditions** to enable innovation activities.
- The measures and approaches taken differ among the projects. All three impact categories are addressed by the projects since the activities include
 - the empowerment of key stakeholders,
 - the activation of decision-makers and
 - the application of know-how and skills

'Regional innovation support capacity' in the context of the Interreg programme is defined in the Cooperation Programme:

Figure 24: Definition of regional innovation support capacity



Definition of Regional innovation support capacity

Regional innovation performance depends on a range of factors such as educational levels, the amount of research carried out, private sector R&D budgets and intellectual assets and patenting.

Regions can influence these factors to encourage people to start new businesses and support firms as they grow, as well as help them engage in innovation and expand into international activities.'

Source: Cooperation Programme Interreg VB NSR, p. 40

The analysis comes to the conclusions that the programme has **clearly contributed to enhancing regional innovation capacity building**.

All nine projects in Specific Objective 1.2 (Enhance regional innovation support capacity to increase long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies) contribute to **creating better framework conditions** that enable innovation activities. The measures and approaches taken differ among the projects. The activities include the **empowerment of key stakeholders**, the **activation of decision-makers** and the **application of know-how and skills**.

Examples include the following:



Empowerment

Key Stakeholders are empowered by

- enabling SMEs to take part in innovation: improve **access to data** and the **ability to analyse data** to drive innovation and improved results (Futures By Design)
- establishing a **strong partnership** among SMEs in the same

industries to **pool knowledge, new or improved methods and tools** (GrowIn 4.0)

- **enabling local and regional authorities to create dynamic environment for innovation**, e.g. through developing a training & coaching model and a set of regulatory, finance and security guiding measures & training (Building COMpetencies for COMpetitive COMPanies)



Activation

Decision-makers at the regional level are activated by

- building **capacity and transnational relations** for sustainable energy **clusters** and develop **broader political backing** to create coherence between political ambitions and cluster potential for innovation support (Northern Connections)



Application




Know-how and skills are applied by

- **implementing integrated business models** for the healthcare economy based on the regions' smart specialisation strategy and by **scaling up best practices** (SHINE)

3.4 Priority Axis 2: Eco-innovation: Stimulating the green economy

Priority Axis 2 deals with the challenges of high resource consumption levels and high carbon emissions in the North Sea Region. The aim of Priority Axis 2 is therefore to stimulate a green economy, on the one hand by protecting the environment by adopting existing processes, products and services and on the other hand by supporting new innovation to reduce the carbon emissions of the NSR.

Priority Axis 2 consists of two Specific Objectives:

Priority Axis 2: Eco-innovation		
 Specific Objective 2.1	 Specific Objective 2.2	
Promote the development and adoption of products, services and processes to accelerate greening of the North Sea Region economy.	Stimulate the adoption of new products, services and processes to reduce the environmental footprint of regions around the North Sea	
Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIOCAS • Carbon Farming • Circ-NSR • COBEN • NON STOP • OESA • ProCirc • SalFar • SCALE-UP • SMARTGREEN • SOILCOM • WASP (Wind Assisted Ship Propulsion) 	Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2imprezs • ACCESS • DecomTools • DUAL Ports • EMPOWER2.0 • INDU-ZERO • Stronghouse 	

Source: Cooperation Programme.

3.4.1 State of implementation

Number of projects

By the end February 2020, in total 11 calls for Expressions of Interest and Full Applications have been opened since April 2015. In Priority Axis 2, 19 projects in total were approved by the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme.



Source: Achievements Report.

Output indicators

The achievement of the output indicators for Priority Axis 2 shows that great progress has already been made: by the end of August 2020, the programme targets for all output indicators in this Priority Axis had already been overachieved.

The following table provides an overview of all output indicators for Priority Axis 2 and their target achievement as of August 2020 (64 projects are included in the total OMS data set, 17 out of 19 projects from the PA2).).

Table 7: Target achievement Output Indicators Priority 2

Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measure-ment unit	Target value programme 2023	Target projects, OMS data end of 08/2020	Achieved by projects, OMS data end of 08/2020
2.1, 2.2	CO41	Productive investment: Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Enterprises	28	1,350	1,539
2.1, 2.2	CO42	Productive investment: Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Organizations	19	133	234
2.1, 2.2	0.1	Number of organizations / enterprises adopting new solutions by project end	Organizations/ enterprises	208	1,076	263
2.1, 2.2	0.2	Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end	Organizations/ enterprises	2,087	40,484	40,945
2.1, 2.2	2.1	Number of green products, services and processes piloted and/or adopted by the project	Enterprises	51	318	275

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 64 projects included in data set).

Allocation of funding

The allocation of funding in Priority Axis 2 is complete: 108 percent of the planned ERDF funding had already been allocated by the end of October 2020. The financial target in this Priority Axis is already secured. 71% for the initially planned Norwegian funding had already been approved by October 2020.

Table 8: Allocation of funding of Priority Axis 2 (October 2020)

Priority Axis		ERDF funding + national counterpart 2014-2020	ERDF funding 2014-2020	ERDF funding approved, October 2020 ¹³	ERDF funding approved, October 2020	ERDF grant, October 2020
2	Eco-innovation	84,697,410 €	42,348,705 €	45,936,437 €	108 %	-1,470,297 €

Priority Axis		Norwegian funding 2014-2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian grant, October 2020
2	Eco-innovation	2,305,012 €	1,635,912 €	71 %	/

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and Achievements Report, information provided by Joint Secretariat.

Result Indicators

Priority Axis 2 contributes to two result indicators. Both indicators show a **positive development** towards the formulated target. Looking at the objectives and targets of the Priority Axis, the result indicators are suitable to grasp the (intended) results.

The analysis shows that the projects funded in Priority Axis 2 contribute to the priority's objectives. It can thus be assumed that the programme contributes to the positive development of the result indicator. Please note: there are numerous factors beyond this funding instrument that influence the development of the result indicators in the North Sea Region.

Table 9: Result Indicators Priority Axis 2

SO	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value programme (2015)	Target value programme (2023)	Achievement toward target (2019)
2.1	Capacity of enterprises and organisations to adopt new or improved green products, services and processes	Capacity scale	2.6	3.6	3.08
2.2	Capacity of authorities and	Capacity scale	2.8	3.8	3.31

¹³ The amounts take into account single lump-sum payments of € 20,000 per project for preparation costs, if applied for during the application phase.

	practitioners around the North Sea to identify and implement new ways of reducing their environmental footprint				
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Source: Achievements Report.

3.4.2 Impacts

Adoption of products, processes and services

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme stimulated the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed** to stimulating the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region.
- The target for the output indicator has already been exceeded: by the end of August 2020, 275 products, services or processes have been piloted and/or adopted by the approved projects.
- All 12 projects in the Specific Objective 2.1 explicitly pursue the goal to develop or implement new green products, services or processes.

The analysis comes to the conclusions that the programme has **clearly contributed to stimulating the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region.**

One output indicator captures precisely the number of green products, services and processes piloted and/or adopted as a result of the projects in Priority Axis 2.

Output Indicator	Target value programme (2023) (SO 2.1 and 2.2)	Target Projects, OMS data end of 08/2020 (SO 2.1 and 2.2)	Achieved in projects, OMS data end of 08/2020 (SO 2.1 and 2.2)
2.1 Number of green products, services and processes piloted and/or adopted by the project	51	318	275

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 11 out of 12 SO 2.1 projects and 6 out of 7 SO 2.2 projects included in data set).

The analysis of the output indicator shows that the programme's target value has already been **exceeded** at the end of August 2020: until then, 275 green products, services and processes have been reported to be piloted and/or adopted by the projects of the North Sea Region programme. The programme requires 'green' products, services or processes to provide a demonstrable reduction in carbon and other emissions and/or in resource use (for more information see Fact Sheet Indicators).

The analysis of the funded projects further indicates that all 12 projects in Specific Objective 2.1 ("Promote the development and adoption of products, services and processes to accelerate greening of the North Sea Region") **pursue the goal to develop or implement new green products, services or processes.** While they pursue the same goal, the projects have different thematic focus areas. Examples of projects stimulating the development or implementation of new green products, services or processes are:

- **SMARTGREEN:** Using novel Big Data analysis of climate and production data to pinpoint unnecessary energy use in greenhouse production of fruit and vegetables and to improve the climate control
- **SOILCOM:** Designing and producing tailor-made composts based on biological wastes to transform 'waste' to 'resource'
- **Ocean Energy Scale-up Alliance:** Developing new services to support and increase the deployment of ocean energy parks in the North Sea Region

One further project funded under Specific Objective 2.1 is exemplary presented in more detail to illustrate how the programme stimulates the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region.

SalFar (Saline Farming):



Challenge:

- Resource consumption and carbon emissions are major drivers of climate change that can be reduced by applying alternative ways of production in agriculture.
- Agriculture can contribute significantly to developing green business strategies and fostering environmental protection, alongside economic growth

Approach:

- Promote resource efficiency by (re)using degraded farmland and reducing freshwater consumption
- Open field labs ('living labs') are set up to demonstrate innovative methods of farming on saline soil with natural adaptation processes in plants and crops and conduct experiments with the salt tolerance of crops
- Develop training modules for farmers on saline farming and creating business strategies

Examples for the stimulation of the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region:

- New crops are being tested on the fields
- The number of test fields in the different partner regions meanwhile exceeds the original target of 10.
- Transnational cooperation enables even those partners, who do not have test fields in their own region, to make use of the facilities of other beneficiaries or in other regions of their country
- More and more restaurants on the islands or in the coastal areas are interested in fresh products from the test fields

Renewable energy generation and reduction of energy use

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and reduce overall energy use?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and reduce overall energy use.
- All 7 projects in the Specific Objective 2.2. **include pilots/tests** in some form and demonstrate methods and techniques.
- The projects of SO 2.2 have already significantly contributed to the relevant output indicator 2.2: by the end of August 2020, 35 products, services or processes with a focus on methods and techniques for renewable energy generation and for a reduction of overall energy use had been piloted and or adopted in the context of the approved projects.

The analysis comes to the conclusions that the programme has **demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and reduce overall energy use.**

As described above, one output indicator captures the number of green products, services and processes piloted and/or adopted by the projects in Priority Axis 2. The programme requires 'green' products, services or processes to provide a demonstrable reduction in carbon and other emissions and/or in resource use (see Fact Sheet Indicators). Like the projects in SO 2.1, the projects of **SO 2.2**, which focus on the demonstration of methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and the reduction of the overall energy use, also report on this output indicator.

Output Indicator	Target value programme (2023) (SO 2.1. and 2.2)	Target Projects, OMS data end of 08/2020 (SO 2.2)	Achieved in projects, OMS data end of 08/2020 (SO 2.2)
2.1 Number of green products, services and processes piloted and/or adopted by the project	51	47	35

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 6 out of 7 SO 2.2 projects included in data set).

The analysis of the output indicator shows that the projects of SO 2.2 have already **significantly contributed** to the programme's target value (51), which was set for both, the projects from SO 2.1 and the projects from SO 2.2. Until August 2020, 35 green products, services and processes with a focus on renewable energy generation and reduction of energy use were reported to be piloted and/or adopted by the projects of the North Sea Region programme. This data does include projects that are still in progress and one of the projects from SO 2.2 is not yet included in the data set, which means that the number is still expected to grow in the next reporting phases.

The strong focus on the demonstration of methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and the reduction of overall energy use becomes apparent when analysing the funded projects in SO 2.2: all 7 projects include some form of pilots or tests and most projects include local pilot cases in the participating countries.

Examples for pilots or tests that are conducted in the projects are:

- **INDU-ZERO:** the objective is to develop a blueprint for a production facility that can produce NSR wide suitable renovation packages for houses at high volume and low cost.
- **2impress:** joint energy saving programme, tested in different NSR school environments and conditions and replicable in and beyond the NSR.
- **DUAL Ports:** the goal is to decarbonize Regional Entrepreneurial Ports; technologies and processes that tackle emission and pollution sources will collaboratively be piloted and managed.

Renewable energy production and reduction in energy use

Evaluation question:

How has the development and roll-out of new or improved energy technologies contributed to either an increase in renewable energy production or a reduction in energy use or loss (increase in energy efficiency?)

Conclusion:




- Different approaches are adopted to develop or roll-out new or improved energy technologies.
- All 7 projects in the Specific Objective 2.2. contribute either to an increase in renewable energy production and/or a reduction or loss in energy use.

The analysis comes to the conclusions that **different approaches are adopted to develop or roll-out new or improved energy technologies**. All seven projects either contribute to an increase in renewable energy production and/or to a reduction or loss in energy use.

To better illustrate those often rather complex and different projects, they are they are briefly described below:

- **ACCESS**: supports the transition towards renewable energy generation in local entities (examples include **local energy community hubs** or **peer-to-peer energy trading models**).
- **2impress**: fosters both **behavioural and technical efficient energy saving measures** in schools.
- **EMPOWER 2.0**: accelerates the **empowerment of citizens** to become active energy citizens through development of new solutions and adoption of new, emerging and existing solutions for energy ownership; the objective being an increase in **energy awareness and renewable energy production**.
- **INDU-ZERO**: develops a **blueprint for a production facility** that can produce NSR wide suitable renovation packages for houses.
- **Stronghouse**: adjustment and redesign of current support measures for **homeowners** for energy renovation.
- **DUAL Ports**: aims to **decarbonise Regional Entrepreneurial Ports'** resources through the development of sustainable utilities and abilities.
- **DecomTools**: develops eco-innovative concepts for the **decommission of offshore wind turbines** to reduce the decommission cost and the environmental footprint of offshore wind turbines.




An in-depth analysis of the project DUAL Ports in the North Sea Region further deepened the findings and provided detailed exemplary insights. For the case study, the application of the project, project reports and the project's website were analysed and four interviews (project advisor, lead beneficiary, project beneficiaries and end-user group) were conducted.

 CASE STUDY: DUAL PORTS	  EUROPEAN UNION
Project Info:	PA 2, Specific Objective 2.2, Call 1 17 Partners, Countries: Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden
Challenge:	Ports are expected to contribute to identifying and locally implementing low carbon visions and concrete solutions to stimulate eco-innovation
Approach:	The project brings together 10 harbour authorities and public/private sector organisation and aims at the decarbonisation of Regional Entrepreneurial Ports (REPs)' resources through a shared eco-innovation port programme that minimises their environmental footprint
Activities to support an increase in renewable energy production and reduction of energy use or loss:	Smaller projects and pilots are implemented in different harbours to develop a variety of energy efficiency measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEAT: optimising the production of rest-energy from wind, solar and sea-based power systems by integrating it to the local heating system • WAVE: tests the suitability of special technical wave and tidal energy generation equipment with the aim to supply clean power, whose surplus could possibly be later transformed into hydrogen to serve local transport and shipping needs • SAIL: creates sailcargo hubs in small ports and harbours giving local businesses direct access to ethically transported goods.
Approaches to increase renewable energy production /reduce energy use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete new solutions and technologies are tested and implemented in 'real -life cases' on the ground • These new solutions and technologies either lead to an increase in renewable energy production or a reduction in energy use (or both) • Pilots within the project serve as inspiration and provide examples for other ports (end-users) • The implementation of new solutions and technologies leads to an increase in the production of renewable energy or the reduction in energy use, both in the participating ports and in ports beyond the project.

3.5 Priority Axis 3: Sustainable NSR: Protecting against climate change and preserving the environment

Priority Axis 3 focuses on the threats caused by climate change and on preserving the environment in the face of these severe challenges. The activities in PA 3 address a large variety of sectors, such as agriculture, urban development or (marine) ecosystems. The aim of the Priority Axis is to develop and use innovative methods and strategies to protect existing structures from negative impact and to support climate resilience.

Priority Axis 3 consists of two Specific Objectives:

Sustainable Management of the North Sea Region		
 Specific Objective 3.1	 Specific Objective 3.2	
Demonstrate new and / or improved methods for improving the climate resilience of target sites	Demonstrate new and / or improved methods for improving the climate resilience of target sites	
Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BEGIN • BWN • C5A • CATCH • FAIR • FRAMES • TOPSOIL 	Projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NorthSEE • BEESPOKE • CANAPE • GEANS • IMMERSE • Jomopans • NSW • NuReDrain • PARTRIDGE • Sullied Sediments • WaterCoG 	

Source: Cooperation Programme.

3.5.1 State of implementation

Number of projects

By the end February 2020, in total 11 calls for Expressions of Interest and Full Applications have been opened since April 2015. In Priority Axis 3, 18 projects in total were approved by the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme.



Source: Achievements Report.

Output indicators

The achievement of the output indicators for Priority Axis 3 shows that great progress has already been made: by the end of August 2020, the programme targets for all output indicators in this Priority Axis had already been overachieved.

The following table provides an overview of all output indicators for Priority Axis 3 and their target achievement as of August 2020 (64 projects are included in the total OMS data set, 17 out of 18 projects from the PA3).).

Table 10: Target achievement Output Indicators Priority 3

Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measure-ment unit	Target value programme 2023	Target projects, OMS data end of 08/2020	Achieved by projects, OMS data end of 08/2020
3.1, 3.2	CO41	Productive investment: Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Enter-prises	12	744	1005
3.1, 3.2	CO42	Productive investment: Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Organi-zations	24	166	334
3.1, 3.2	0.1	Number of organizations / enterprises adopting new solutions by project end	Organi-zations/ enter-prises	220	1,279	857
3.1, 3.2	0.2	Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end	Organi-zations/ enter-prises	2,197	16,888	36,202
3.1	3.7	Number of new and/or improved climate change adaptation solutions demonstrated	Solutions	21	81	45
3.2	3.2	Number of sites managed using new solutions supporting long-term sustainability	Sites	35	95	69

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 64 projects included in data set).

The considerable overperformance of almost all output indicators is clearly evident in Priority Axis 3. This indicates that the projects in this Priority Axis contribute to a greater extent to the objectives than initially expected.

Allocation of funding

100 percent of the planned ERDF funding for the Priority Axis 3 had already been allocated by October 2020. The financial target in this Priority Axis is already secured. Taking the approval of 5 percent over allocation by the EU Commission in each PA into account though, there is still 2.054.241 € ERDF grant remaining in October 2020 for Priority Axis 3. At this stage, 40% for the initially planned Norwegian funding had already been approved.

Table 11: Allocation of funding (October 2020)

Priority Axis		ERDF funding + national counterpart 2014-2020	ERDF funding 2014-2020	ERDF funding approved, October 2020 ¹⁴	ERDF funding approved, October 2020	ERDF grant, October 2020
3	Sustainable NSR	88,042,490 €	44,021,245 €	44,168,066 €	100 %	+ 2,054,241 €

Priority Axis		Norwegian funding 2014-2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian grant, October 2020
3	Sustainable NSR	1,878,158 €	745,505 €	40 %	/

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and Achievements Report, information provided by Joint Secretariat.

Result Indicators

The Priority Axis 3 contributes to two result indicators. Both show a **positive development** towards the formulated target. Looking at the objectives and targets of the Priority Axis, the result indicators are suitable to grasp the (intended) results.

The analysis shows that the projects funded in Priority Axis 3 contribute to the priority's objectives. It can thus be assumed that the programme contributes to the positive development of the result indicator. Please note: there are numerous factors beyond this funding instrument that influence the development of the result indicators in the North Sea Region.

¹⁴ The amounts take into account single lump-sum payments of € 20,000 per project for preparation costs, if applied for during the application phase.

SO	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value programme (2015)	Target value programme (2023)	Achievement toward target (2019)
3.1	Capacity of relevant authorities / practitioners around the North Sea to identify and implement solutions for improving climate change resilience	Capacity scale	2.7	3.7	3.29
3.2	Capacity of North Sea regions to improve the quality of the environment	Capacity scale	2.9	3.9	3.43

Source: Achievements Report.

3.5.2 Impacts

Methods and techniques for environmental risks

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with environmental risks?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed** to demonstrating methods and techniques to deal with environmental risks.
- The target for the relevant output indicators has already been **exceeded**: by the end of August 2020, 45 new and/or improved climate change adaptation solutions have been reported to be demonstrated and 69 sites have been reported to be managed using new solutions supporting long-term sustainability.
- All 18 projects in PA3 include pilots/tests in some form to make sure the methods and techniques are directly demonstrated.

There are two output indicators that denote the demonstration of new methods and techniques dealing with environmental risk in Priority Axis 3, namely the output indicator OI 3.7 and the output indicator OI 3.2:

Table 12: Output indicators OI 3.7 and OI 3.2

Output Indicator	Target value programme (2023)	Target Projects, OMS data end of 08/2020,	Achieved in projects, OMS data end of 08/2020,
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3.1: Number of new and/or improved climate change adaptation solutions demonstrated (SO 3.1)	21	81	45
3.2: Number of sites managed using new solutions supporting long-term sustainability (SO 3.2)	35	95	69

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, all SO 3.1 projects and 10 out of 11 SO 3.2 projects included in data set).

The analysis of these output indicators shows that the programme's target values for both output indicator have already been **exceeded** at the end of August 2020.

In addition to this positive status quo of the indicators, an analysis of all the Priority Axis 3 projects was conducted, checking the projects' applications and websites to see if the projects in Priority Axis 3 have included pilots or tests. The inclusion of pilots or tests indicates that new methods and techniques have been directly **demonstrated** by a project.

The analysis shows that **all 18 projects from Priority Axis 3 include pilots/tests** in some form and most of these projects include **local pilot cases** in participating countries. This again confirms that these projects have indeed implemented the demonstration of new methods and techniques.

The following projects show concrete examples for pilots/tests that demonstrate methods and techniques dealing with different environmental risks:

- **BEGIN:** The 10 pilots of the project demonstrate how BGI (Blue Green Infrastructure) can generate effective climate change adaptation solutions.
- **C5A:** The project includes 7 pilots to test methods dealing with flood risk.
- **NuReDrain:** The project researches filtration systems for the removal of N and P from agricultural water both on lab scale as well as in 6 pilot field tests.
- **Sullied Sediments:** The project includes pilots with innovative spore technology to remove selected WL chemicals at waste-water treatment plants in order to bring about a reduction in hazard levels.

Capacity building for improved land management

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme built capacity for improved land management?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed** to building capacity for improved land management.
- The project analysis indicates that 12 of the 18 projects in PA3 and **all 7 projects in SO3.1** contribute to both dimensions of capacity-building concerning land management.
 - Making new and/or **improved methods, products and programmes** available to their individual end-users.
 - Making their end-users aware of these new offers and enabling their adaptation by

demonstrating the new offers, by establishing new networks and by empowering the end-users.



Definition of Land management

Land management is understood as the **process of managing the use and development of land resources to ensure climate adaptation and working ecosystems**.¹⁵




Capacity building on the other hand consists of **two components**, as explained previously: on the one hand, the requirement that **new and/or improved methods, processes, services, products or technologies are made available** and on the other, the requirement that **potential users are made aware** of these new offers in such a way that they can adopt them (see section 3.3.2).




















Figure 25: Project mapping concerning capacity building for improved land management

To analyse whether capacity building for improved land management was taken up by the projects, project applications, reports and websites of the projects in PA3 were scanned and a project mapping was developed (see figure on left side).

The mapping shows that **several, but not all projects focus on building capacity for improved land management**.

Five of the projects directly address the topic, 7 other projects tackle closely related challenges (e.g. management measures for estuaries or flood resilient areas). Especially in SO 3.1, all projects contribute to building capacity for improved land management.

	Directly builds capacity for improved land management
	Indirectly builds capacity for improved land management
	Does not build capacity for improved land management

		Land management
BEESPOKE (3.2)		
BEGIN (3.1)		
BWN (3.1)		
C5A (3.1)		
CANAPE (3.2)		
CATCH (3.1)		
FAIR (3.1)		
FRAMES (3.1)		
GEANS (3.2)		
IMMERSE (3.2)		
Jomopans (3.2)		
NorthSEE (3.2)		
NSW (3.2)		
NuReDrain (3.2)		
PARTRIDGE (3.2)		
Sullied Sediments (3.2)		
TOPSOIL (3.1)		
WaterCoG (3.2)		

Source: Project documents.

The following projects **show concrete examples** for contributions to building capacity for improved land management:

New and/or improved methods, processes,

- **BWN: Creates a joint transnational monitoring programme** as a result from living laboratories, to create a

¹⁵ See Cooperation Programme Interreg VB NSR Annex, p. 48

services, products or technologies that are made available for SMEs in the field of land management

monitoring network to prevent coastal erosion land management.

- **CANAPE:** Develops methods for the regeneration of lake edge and reed beds, for bog restoration and for fen restoration to improve the resilience of lowland peatland ecosystems and works on the **development and demonstration of cutting-edge methods for land management** of peatland ecosystems.

Make SMEs aware of new methods and technologies and enabled their adaptation in the field of land management

- **PARTRIDGE: Demonstrates new and improved management solutions** for increasing biodiversity and ecosystem services at two sites per partner country; distributes new methods from the project in membership newsletters to **build awareness** among end-user groups across the NSR.
- **TOPSOIL: Tests and develops technical methods** in 16 pilots; **implements new management technique through pilots** and provides inspiration to others; the project specifically wants to empower water managers across NSR with the knowledge and expertise that was accumulated by the transnational exchange between the project partners.

Climate change adaption, resilience and eco-system management

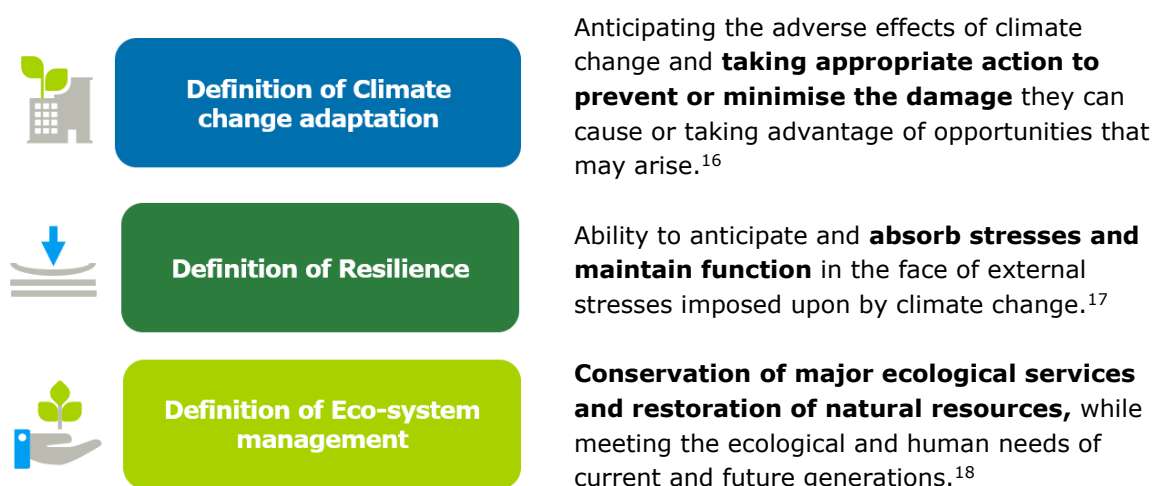
Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme contributed to climate change adaptation, increased resilience and improved eco-system management due to NSR investment?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to climate change adaptation, increased resilience and improved eco-system management
- All 18 projects address one or more of these topics:
 - **7** projects contribute to **climate change adaptation**
 - **9** projects contribute to **increased resilience**
 - **12** projects contribute to an improved **eco-system management**

To answer the question, the three topics “climate change adaptation”, “resilience” and “eco-system management” were analysed individually and a project mapping, based on project applications and websites was conducted.



The analysis shows that **all goals are effectively addressed** by successfully implemented projects of the programme, especially the goal to improve eco-system management; a pattern based on the specific objectives is obvious.

Figure 26: Contribution of the projects in PA3 to the three different topics, project mapping

	Climate change adaptation	Resilience	Eco-system management
BEESPOKE (3.2)			
BEGIN (3.1)			
BWN (3.1)			
CSA (3.1)			
CANAPE (3.2)			
CATCH (3.1)			
FAIR (3.1)			
FRAMES (3.1)			
GEANS (3.2)			
IMMERSE (3.2)			
Jomopans (3.2)			
NorthSEE (3.2)			
NSW (3.2)			
NuReDrain (3.2)			
PARTRIDGE (3.2)			
Sullied Sediments (3.2)			
TOPSOIL (3.1)			
WaterCoG (3.2)			

Source: Project documents.

Seven projects contribute to the topic of **climate change adaptation**, all of which belong to SO 3.1. The following project is a concrete example for the programme's contribution to climate change adaptation:

- **FAIR** – works on **reducing flood risk** across the NSR by showcasing climate change adaptation solutions to improve the performance of flood protection infrastructure.

¹⁶ Definition based on: European Commission. Adaptation to climate change. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/adaptation_en

¹⁷ Definition based on: Holling, C. S. 1973. Resilience and stability of ecological systems. *Annu Rev Ecol Syst* 4:1-23.

¹⁸ Definition based on: Brasseur, P. et al. 1998. Ecosystem management: what is it really?

Nine projects contribute to the topic of **resilience**, which includes all projects in SO 3.1 and two projects from SO 3.2.

The following project is a concrete example for the programme's contribution to increased resilience:

- **BEGIN** - demonstrates at target sites how cities can improve **climate resilience with Blue Green Infrastructure**.

Twelve projects contribute to the topic of improved **eco-system management**. Eleven of these projects are part of SO 3.2, one project belongs to SO 3.1.

The following project is a concrete example for the programme's contribution to an improved eco-system management:

- **Sullied Sediments** - tests new tools to better **assess, treat and prevent contamination from certain pollutants** that can be found in the sediments in waterways.

Long-term sustainable management of ecosystems

Evaluation question:

What kind of new methods for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems have been designed and implemented?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to designing and implementing new methods for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems
- The methods the projects have designed and implemented differ from project to project: the methods include
 - new methodology for data source management and a risk assessment methodology
 - habitat management guidelines
 - „Citizen Science“ data collection approach
 - interactive communication tools (forum)




The analysis that was carried out concludes, that the projects have **designed and implemented different kinds of new methods** for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems.

The following projects show examples of various new methods that have been developed:

- **BEESPOKE**: Development of habitat management guidelines.
- **CANAPE**: „Citizen Science“ approach: using members of the local community to support data collection about peatlands conducive to ecosystem management.
- **IMMERSE**: Development of interactive communication tools to improve stakeholder integration in the management process (establishment of a forum).
- **Jomopans**: Development of a framework for a fully operational joint monitoring programme.
- **NSW**: Development of new methodology for data source management and a risk assessment methodology.
- **PARTRIDGE**: Development of management plans, transnational monitoring protocols and tools for cross-border cooperation.

- **WaterCoG:** Development of up-scaling toolbox for delivering improved sustainable management strategies.




In addition to the overall scanning of the projects in PA3, the project PARTRIDGE was chosen for an **in-depth case study**. For the case study, the application of the project, project reports and the project's website were analysed and five stakeholder interviews (project beneficiaries, project advisors and end-user group) were conducted.

 CASE STUDY: PARTRIDGE	 
Project Info:	PA 3, Specific Objective 3.2, Call 2 13 Partners, Countries: Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden
Challenge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much of the diverse cultural and natural heritage of the rural areas of the NSR has been degraded or lost, because they are among the most intensively farmed, urbanized, fragmented and populated ones in Europe. • Consequently, there is a loss in biodiversity and a deterioration of ecosystem services, which needs to be addressed.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing about a change in behaviour and working practices, particularly in regards to the uptake of agri-environment schemes; long-term change based on a bottom-up as opposed to the current top-down approach; stakeholders are involved throughout the project (e.g. in-depth stakeholder interviews, large-scale survey with farmers). • Complementing the multidisciplinary approach by collecting and disseminating new socio-economic information on rural stakeholder behaviour. • Exchange of good and approved practices and methods between experienced and less experienced partners.
Examples for new methods:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project demonstrates how new management solutions can improve biodiversity and ecosystem services. • Project develops and field tests new transnational monitoring techniques and protocols → tools for long-term cross-border comparison of conservation measures. • Development, testing and distribution of concrete new methods to increase biodiversity such as wild-flower mix and beetle banks.
Feedback on Interreg NSR context:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Interreg NSR programme offered flexibility within the programme's boundaries, e.g. concerning the used measures to develop the new methods; more than other funding programmes. • The possibility to include several demo-sites (pilots) in different countries in the project was at the core of its success and provided the ideal basis for subsequently disseminating these new methods at the regional level. • The programme made the international innovative network possible and ensured that the transnationality was used to foster innovation. The international exchange and learning how others approached a common challenge was very fruitful.

3.6 Priority Axis 4: Promoting green transport and mobility

Priority Axis 4 focuses on the mobility and transport sector and aims at making it more sustainable and future-oriented. To achieve the objectives of this Priority Axis, the emphasis is placed on issues, such as green logistics, efficient public transport and the development of innovative and environmental-friendly new transport modes.

Priority Axis 4 consists of two Specific Objectives:

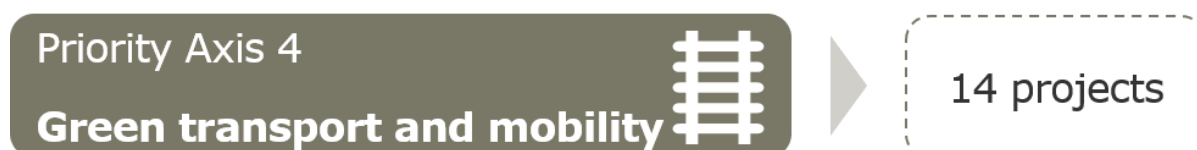
Green Transport and Mobility		 14 projects
 Specific Objective 4.1	 Specific Objective 4.2	
<p>Develop demonstrations of innovative and/or improved transport and logistics solutions with potential to move large volumes of freight away from long-distance road transportation.</p>	<p>Stimulate the take-up and application of green transport solutions for regional freight and personal transport.</p>	
<p>Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #IWTS 2.0 • AVATAR • North Sea CONNECT 	<p>Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ART-Forum • BITS • G-PaTRA • HyTrEc2 • MOVE • SEEV4-City • SHARE-North • Stronger Combined (SC) • SURFLOGH • SUV • ZEM Ports NS 	

Source: Cooperation Programme.

3.6.1 State of implementation

Number of projects

By the end February 2020, in total 11 Calls for Expressions of Interest and Full Applications have been opened since April 2015. In Priority Axis 4, 14 projects in total were approved by the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme.



Source: Achievements Report.

Output indicators

The target achievement of the output indicators of Priority Axis 4 shows that significant progress has already been made: By the end of August 2020, the programme's targets for the output indicators in this Priority Axis had already been exceeded.

The following table provides an overview of all output indicators in Priority Axis 4 and their target achievement as of August 2020 (64 projects are included in the total OMS data set, with 11 out of 14 projects from the PA4).

Table 13: Target achievement Output Indicators Priority 4

SO	ID	Indicator	Measure- ment unit	Target value pro- gramme 2023	Target projects, OMS data end of 08/2020	Achieved by projects, OMS data end of 08/2020
4.1, 4.2	CO41	Productive investment: Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Enterprises	9	284	390
4.1, 4.2	CO42	Productive investment: Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	Organi- zations	18	76	135
4.1, 4.2	0.1	Number of organizations / enterprises adopting new solutions by project end	Organi- zations/ enterprises	132	356	407
4.1, 4.2	0.2	Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end	Organi- zations/ enterprises	1,329	26,001	25,701
4.1, 4.2	4.1	Number of new and/or improved green transport solutions adopted	Green transport solutions	54	158	119

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 64 projects included in data set).

The considerable overachievement of almost all output indicators is clearly evident in Priority Axis 4. This indicates that the projects in this Priority Axis contribute to a greater extent to the objectives than initially expected.

Allocation of funding

105 percent of the planned ERDF funding for the Priority Axis 4 had already been allocated by October 2020. The financial target in this Priority Axis is already secured. Considering the European Commission's approval of 5 percent of over allocation in each PA, almost 4,345 € of ERDF funding remains for Priority Axis 4 by October 2020. At this stage, 131% of the initially planned Norwegian funding had already been approved.

Table 14: Allocation of funding (October 2020)

Priority Axis		ERDF funding + national counterpart 2014-2020	ERDF funding 2014-2020	ERDF funding approved, October 2020 ¹⁹	ERDF funding approved, October 2020	ERDF grant, October 2020
4	Green Transport and Mobility	52,309,996 €	26,154,998 €	27,458,403 €	105 %	+ 4,345 €

Priority Axis		Norwegian funding 2014-2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian funding approved, October 2020	Norwegian grant, October 2020
4	Green Transport and Mobility	1,451,304 €	1,901,645 €	131%	/

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and Achievements Report, information provided by Joint Secretariat.

Result Indicators

The result indicators in Priority Axis 4 show a **positive development** towards the formulated target. Looking at the objectives and targets of the Priority Axis, the result indicators are suitable to grasp the results.

The analysis shows that the projects funded in Priority Axis 4 contribute to the priority's objectives. It can thus be assumed that the programme contributes to the positive development of the result indicator. Please note: there are numerous factors beyond this funding instrument that influence the development of the result indicators in the North Sea Region.

¹⁹ The amounts take into account single lump-sum payments of € 20,000 per project for preparation costs, if applied for during the application phase.

SO	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value programme (2015)	Target value programme (2023)	Achievement toward target (2019)
4.1	Capacity of transport and logistics stakeholders to increase the proportion of long-distance freight carried on sustainable modes in the North Sea Region	Capacity scale	2.7	3.7	3.21
4.2	Capacity of authorities and enterprises to increase the use of green transport services	Capacity scale	3.0	4.0	3.55

Source: Achievements Report.

3.6.2 Impacts

Modal shift to low-carbon transport

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme increased regional capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to increasing regional capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport, the projects in SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 contribute with **individual focuses**.
- The relevant result indicators, which are directly connected to the funded projects, **show a positive development**.
- The project analysis indicates that the projects contribute to both dimensions of capacity-building.
 - Making new and/or **improved technologies, services and processes available for their end-users**
 - Making their end-users aware of these new methods and technologies and enabling their adaptation by **increasing expertise and establishing network platforms**.

To answer the question, applications from the PA 4 projects and relevant result indicators were analysed. Both dimensions of capacity building, which were explained in section 3.3.2, were considered to answer the question.

In the first scanning process of all projects of PA 4, it became evident, that **projects in both specific objectives contribute** to the increase in regional capacity to support the modal shift to

low-carbon transport, but with individual focuses. Whereas the projects in **SO 4.1 focus more on increasing the capacity of transport and logistic stakeholders**, the **SO 4.2 projects focus on increasing the capacity of regional authorities and enterprises (transport and logistic experts)**.

To gain more in-depth knowledge about the increase in regional capacity to support the modal shift to low-carbon transport, the projects #IWTS2.0 (SO 4.1) and SHARE-North (SO 4.2) were analysed in more detail:



Focus of SO 4.1:

Development of demonstrations of innovative and/or improved transport and logistics solutions with potential to move **large volumes of freight away from long-distance road transportation**.

Projects in SO 4.1 for example develop **training material** or **new technological products for transport and logistic stakeholders** (e.g. ship building manufacturers) in order to contribute to an overall increase in regional capacity.

Examples for increasing regional capacity:

- **#IWTS2.0:** Mobilises potentials and capacity to move freight to yet under-used waterways. Builds up capacity among logistic managers and ship crews.
- **AVATAR:** Increases expertise of e.g. shipowners, logistic services and engineers with regard to urban freight transport using inland waterways and works on gaining insights in operational bottlenecks, technologies and full-cycle optimization procedures.



Focus of SO 4.2:

Take-up and application of green transport solutions for **regional freight and personal transport**.

Projects in SO 4.2 for example develop sharing solutions and mainly address **regional and local public transport authorities and enterprises** in order to contribute to an overall increase in regional capacity.

Especially in SO 4.2, projects **target the policy sector** to support and facilitate **framework changes** to spatial planning and citizens travel needs.

Examples for increasing regional capacity:

- **ART-Forum:** Little guidance is being provided for public authorities on how to deal with sustainable new automated road transport technologies; the project's aim is to better involve and build the knowledge base of public authorities (capacity building of policy makers, planners, developers and other stakeholders)
- **Stronger Combined:** Project results (platform and transnationally validated service concepts for rural combined mobility) will benefit among others municipalities and regional public authorities.

There are two result indicators which are highly relevant for the given question at hand, as they provide an indication of how the capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport has developed since the start of the programme:

Table 15: Result indicators 4.1 and 4.2

ID	Indicator	Baseline value programme (2015)	Target value programme 2023	Achievement toward target (2019)
4.1	Capacity of transport and logistics stakeholders to increase the proportion of long-distance freight carried on sustainable modes in the North Sea Region	2.7	3.7	3.21
4.2	Capacity of authorities and enterprises to increase the use of green transport services	3.0	4.0	3.55

Source: Achievements Report.

Both indicators already show a positive development. In view of this performance and given the fact that the projects clearly contribute to the defined target, it can be assumed that **the programme is one factor that has contributed to this positive development.**

In addition to the overall analysis of the projects in PA4, the project #IWTS2.0 and the project SHARE-North were selected to conduct an **in-depth example/case study of one project for each specific objective of the PA4**. The aim of the in-depth example/case study is to demonstrate through concrete examples, how projects have increased the regional capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport. For the exemplary analysis of the #IWTS2.0 project, the application and project reports were analysed. For the case study of the SHARE-North project, the application of the project, project reports and the project's website were analysed and five stakeholder interviews (project beneficiaries, project advisors and end-user group) were conducted.

#IWTS 2.0:

Challenge:

- Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) offers relatively slow, cheap, climate friendly hinterland transport alternatives for commodities transported in large bulks of quantities. The energy input per t/km is superior to rail, road transport. **Many waterways in Europe remain widely un-/underused** in past decades.
- **Low awareness** about small waterway transport opportunities, **low innovation** in small barge development, transshipment of goods, **lack of expertise** in using small waterway opportunities, **lack of training** content and dedicated **crews** for small waterway sailing.



Approach:

- **Mobilise potentials and capacity** to move freight to yet under-used waterways.

Examples of regional capacity increase:

- Several **regional stakeholders** are being addressed by the project
- Capacity-building- among **logistic managers** deciding on modal shifts, e.g. development of **training material** and **training tool** "innovation lab" on the potentials of IWT transport as an alternative to road transport.
- Capacity-building **among crews** by providing **education/training** with a focus on navigation on smaller waterways.
- **Cooperation with training institutions** in the sector; e.g. as a lead beneficiary, the Maritieme Academie Harlingen educates and trains about 35 percent of European IWT crews.
- The project also **pilotes 8 small waterway modal shifts** to increase regional capacity building.



CASE STUDY: SHARE-NORTH



Project Info:

PA 4, Specific Objective 4.2, Call 1
10 Partners, Countries: Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom

Challenge:

- The North Sea Strategy 2020 **calls for increasing accessibility and clean transport** as well as for tackling climate change and attractive and sustainable communities.
- The challenges of sustainable transport in the North Sea Area cannot be met by technical solutions alone – it also requires behavioural changes.
- Sharing concepts are **far from exploiting their full potential** in the

	daily travel patterns today.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concept of sharing offers new opportunities to increase the efficiency of the transport system and significantly improve accessibility. Rising awareness and implementing examples (pilots) to showcase solutions. Close cooperation with cities and the departments responsible for mobility measures. Project is aimed at a variety of stakeholders (cities, planners, businesses, citizens).
Examples of regional capacity increase:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build and share knowledge on ride-sharing concepts in the region, e.g. by events, workshops, scenario building sessions and webinars (aimed at planners, NGOs, academia, consultants and occasionally mobility providers → broad spectrum of participants) and through public awareness campaigns. Increase knowledge on how to combine new technological options with new societal trends of sharing. Presentation of measures for sharing within the framework of transport planning → Inspire and stimulate decision-makers, operators, users and the media by developing lighthouse projects.
Feedback on Interreg NSR context:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Interreg context allowed tremendous flexibility for the applied methods and flexibility of where to implement measures. Interreg context allowed to communicate creatively and with great success. The regional context and shared regional identity nourished the project → great exchange across borders occurred and therefore the development of new ideas was facilitated → best practices were developed successfully.
Impacts beyond the NSR²⁰:	<p>Even beyond the borders of the NSR, the project SHARE-North influenced the shift to low-carbon transport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media activities and webinars even spread the SHARE-North findings to the USA. The experience and shared lessons learned from the SHARE-North project have been extremely useful for the work of the Shared Use Mobility Centre on mobility projects in the US. The implementation of SHARE-North projects provided a real-life example that was used as a baseline to think about mobility projects in the US. The SHARE-North project developed a series of documents (reports, presentations, webpage) that serves as informational material to design planning processes in the US. <p><i>"SHARE-North's is a key project in the development of shared mobility options, serving as a source of information, as a space to foster creative and innovative green mobility projects, and as a model for collaborative partnerships." (Alvaro Villagran, Shared-Use Mobility Centre US)</i></p>

²⁰ Source: Feedback from the US Shared-Use Mobility Centre (USA)

Green transport solution

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated the take up and application of green transport solutions?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to demonstrating the take up and application of green transport solutions.
- The target for the output indicator has already been **exceeded**: by the end of August 2020, 119 new and/or improved green transport solutions have been adopted.
- **All 14 projects** in the PA 4 explicitly pursue the goal to demonstrate the take up and application of green transport solutions by doing pilots and/or tests.

The following definition based on the Cooperation Programme is used to further analyse the take up and application of green transport solutions:



Definition of Green transport solutions

Environmentally-friendly (including low noise) and low-carbon transport systems, that **promote sustainable regional and local mobility**.²¹

The analysis comes to the conclusion that the programme has **clearly demonstrated the take up and application of green transport solutions**.

The question was on the one hand answered by reviewing the related output indicator that shows the number of new and/or improved green transport solutions adopted in the course of the programme. To support the conclusion drawn from the output indicator, the projects in PA4 were additionally analysed concerning their implementation of pilots or tests to actually demonstrate their green transport solutions.

The analysis of the output indicator OI 4.1, which represents new and/or improved green transport solutions adopted, showed, that the target of the output indicator on the programme level has already been **exceeded by the projects**.

Table 16: Output indicator 4.1

Output Indicator	Target value programme (2023)	Target Projects, OMS data end of 08/2020,	Achieved in projects, OMS data end of 08/2020,
4.1 Number of new and/or improved green transport solutions adopted (SO 4.1 and SO 4.2)	54	158	119

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 1 out of 3 SO 4.1 projects and 10 out of 11 SO 4.2 projects included in data set).

²¹ Definition based on Cooperation Programme.

Moreover, the project analysis **concerning pilots/tests**, which demonstrate the take up and application of green transport solutions, has shown, that **all 14** projects in PA 4 **include pilots/tests** in some form. This again confirms the programme's contribution to the take up and adoption of green transport solutions in the North Sea Region.

The following projects **show concrete examples for pilots/tests** and illustrate **the take up and application of green transport solutions**:

- **SHARE-North:** The pilots showcase shared mobility stations in peripheral locations, mobility points in urban areas and shared mobility solutions for business parks.
- **SUV:** Testing of shared, electric autonomous vehicles and services in the complexity of urban as well as rural environments and local communities.
- **North Sea CONNECT:** Four of the project's pilots are concerned with smart ITW cargo handling, smart city port distribution, smart air-draft control system and smart seaport terminal accessibility.
- **#IWTS2.0:** Pilots innovative transshipment solutions on two modal shifts and tests new CO₂ neutral barge concept.

Sustainable transport

Evaluation question:

What is the increased capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR (How many more people or goods are moving via sustainable means as a result of NSR investment)?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to increase the capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR.
- The project analysis indicates that the projects contribute to both dimensions of capacity-building.
 - Making new and/or improved technologies, products and services available especially by **establishing innovative sustainable transport solutions**.
 - Making their end-users aware of these new methods and technologies and enabling their adaptation through **demonstrations, direct involvement and co-creation processes**.
- The relevant project result indicator for the project #IWTS2.0 already shows a positive development, implying that the **programme contributes** to an **increase in the regional capacity** for the modal shift to low-carbon transport.

As in several previous sections, when answering this question, the focus lies on both dimensions of capacity building, *the new and/or improved methods/processes, services, products or technologies concerning sustainable means of transport and the awareness-rising around these new offers*.

As already shown above, there were 119 new and/or improved green transport solutions adopted in course of the current funding period (see Table 16). This shows that the **programme has successfully contributed to an increase in sustainable transport solutions**.

Not only have these new and/or improved green transport solutions been developed, but a great deal of effort has been made to **communicate the solutions** and thus make relevant stakeholders aware

of them. In this context, an impressive number of over 25.000 organizations / enterprises were informed about the new solutions.

Table 17: Output indicator 0.2

Output Indicator	Target value programme (2023)	Target Projects, OMS data end of 08/2020	Achieved in projects, OMS data end of 08/2020
0.2 Number of organizations / enterprises informed about new solutions by project end (SO 4.1 and SO 4.2)	1,445	25,001	25,601

Sources: Cooperation Programme (2018) and OMS (August 2020, 1 out of 3 SO 4.1 projects and 10 out of 11 SO 4.2 projects included in data set).

The following projects **show concrete examples** for contributions to an increase in the capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR:

Examples for **new and/or improved methods, processes, services, products or technologies that are made available for potential users**:

- **SHARE-North:** The project develops, implements, promotes and assesses **car sharing, bike sharing, ride sharing and other forms of shared mobility** in urban as well as rural areas and employment clusters.
- **SUV:** The project develops and tests **shared, electric autonomous vehicles and services** in the complexity of the urban as well as rural environment and local communities.

Examples for projects that **made potential users aware of new methods and technologies and enabled their adaptation** in the field of sustainable transport:

- **G-PaTRA:** The project **demonstrates the technical innovations required**, and the institutional, operational, social innovation changes needed **to authorities** to reduce CO₂ from personal transport in remote, rural and island areas.
- **MOVE:** The project takes on a new approach in developing innovative and sustainable mobility initiatives **through co-creation**, bringing together local authorities, knowledge centres, local economic players and (temporary) inhabitants. The project therefore makes potential users directly aware of the new offers by already **involving** them in the development-process.

To further specify the findings from the evaluation, another project result indicator has been analysed. The **project result indicator in the project #IWTS 2.0** specifically demonstrates how many tons of goods are now being moved via sustainable means of transport as a result of NSR investment in this project. The indicator in the project #IWTS 2.0 already shows clear progress towards the defined target. This development again underlines that the programme contributes to an **increase in the take up and application of green transport solutions in the NSR**.

Table 18: Project result indicator #IWTS 2.0

Project Result indicator	Target Project	Achieved in project
Long distance modal shifts from road to IWT in t/km	20,000,000	9,768,975

Source: OMS, end of March 2020.

Moreover, the project **SURFLOGH** reports on the number of parcels handled by emission reducing solutions (e.g. cargo bikes). This indicator also provides an indication of the programme's contribution towards increased capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR. The project already shows clear progress concerning the freight volume that has been distributed by emission reducing logistics solutions.

Table 19: Project result indicator SURFLOGH

Project Result indicator	Target Project	Achieved in project
Increased volume handled, carried out and/or distributed by emission reducing logistics solutions (Number of parcels)	60,000	47,610

Source: OMS, end of March 2020.

Other projects' indicators do not directly report on the number of people or goods that are moving via sustainable means as a result of NSR investment, but they still demonstrate the progress of increased sustainable transport solutions. Examples are the following project achievements:

- **G-PATRA:** 1,924 additional passenger transport km using green transport solutions.
- **SHARE-North:** 24 new or improved shared mobility services, 1,539 cars removed from public streets through car-sharing.
- **SURFLOGH:** 17 more uses of zero emission urban vehicles in last mile distribution, 874 reduced conventional freight traffic in last mile distribution by using bundling solutions or zero emissions vehicles.

4. OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

The goal of the operational analysis is to provide insights on operational processes of the INTERREG VB North Sea Region programme.

4.1 Cooperation of programme bodies

Evaluation question:

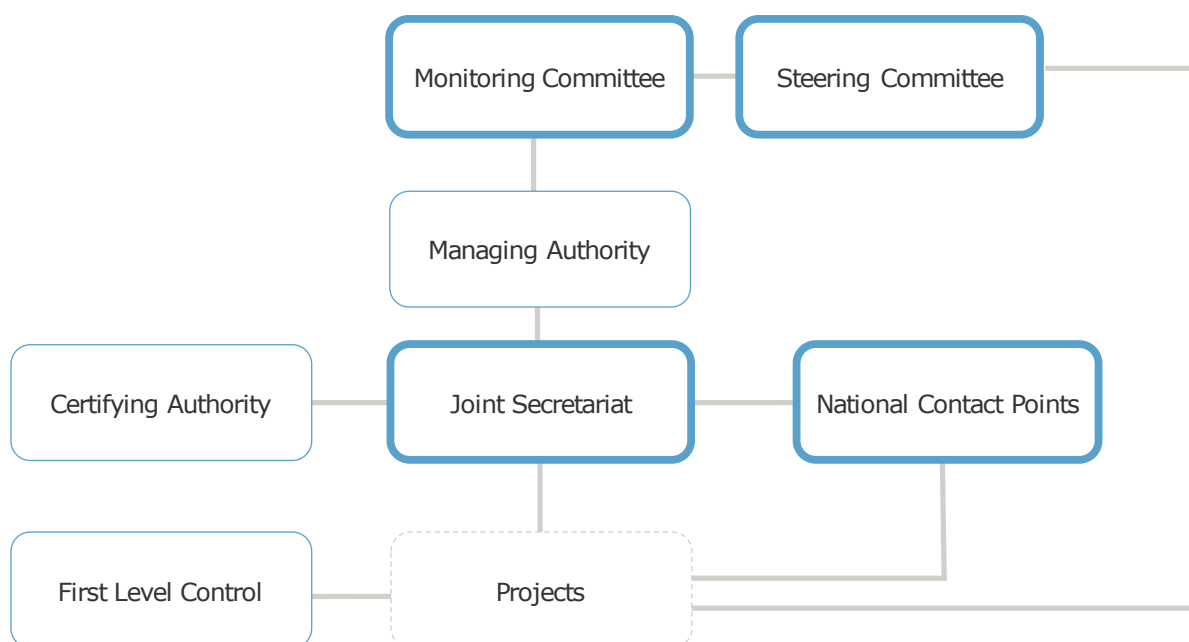
How do programme bodies complement each other in terms of management and implementation of the programme?

Conclusion:

- The cooperation between the programme bodies is in most cases **well established**.
- The atmosphere is characterized by a **high willingness to communicate, share knowledge and work together**.
- The responsibilities and tasks of each programme bodies are clear and conducted accordingly.
- The **high level of engagement** of people involved in the programme is prevalent.
- **Optimisation potential** was identified in the cooperation between the JS and the NCPs and between the MC and the SC.

One central aspect under scrutiny in the operational evaluation is the coordination of and cooperation among the programme bodies, which is essential for an effective and successful programme management and implementation.

The following figure illustrates in simplified form, which programme bodies are involved in the programme management and implementation:

Figure 27: Overview of most relevant bodies for the evaluation of the programme management

Source: own representation Ramboll Management Consulting, based on cooperation programme.

All programme bodies have tasks and responsibilities that are defined in the programme documents. The division of labour as stated in the cooperation programme serves as starting point for the operational analysis.

Table 20: Tasks and responsibilities of programme bodies

Managing Authority	Responsible for the overall management of the Cooperation Programme. The Managing Authority (MA) supervises the work of the JS and constitutes the channel for formal communication with the European Commission (e.g. for the submission of annual reports).
Joint Secretariat	Is responsible for the day-to-day implementation and administration of the programme and its projects. The responsibilities include among others: Promoting the programme in the participating countries Advising applicants on possibilities and conditions for receiving support Providing and adjusting information and seminar activities for applicants at the transnational level Preparing calls for applications and carrying out admissibility checks of incoming applications.
Monitoring Committee	Supervises the programme and is responsible for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of implementation as well as the accountability of programme operations . It is composed of representatives of each of the programme's

	countries and an advisor from the European Commission
Steering Committee	Steering Committee is responsible for approving or rejecting projects . It is composed of representatives from each of the programme's countries, including representatives from the national and regional levels to ensure efficiency and broad representation.
National Contact Points	Advise project developers on matters related to national rules and procedures and serve as multipliers of the programme at the national level. NCPs can be appointed and are organised on a national basis in such a way that best suits the administrative structure of the country concerned. They contribute to promoting the programme, act as an additional contact for information and guidance, and may also assist with spreading information on project achievements.
Certifying Authority	The CA is both physically and administratively separated from the Joint Secretariat. The main tasks of the CA are to prepare payment claims to the Commission, to receive payments from the Commission and national co-financing of TA from the member states and Norway and subsequently make payments to beneficiaries. In addition to this, the CA serves as an independent quality assurance body for the secretariat. It verifies the quality of the checks issued by desk officers and, on a sample basis, checks the validity of the beneficiaries' reports.
First Level Control	Each member state and Norway will set up a system for First Level Control (FLC) of beneficiaries operating on its territory. The individual member state is responsible for the first level control on its territory.

Source: based on cooperation programme.

Before the findings on the cooperation of programme bodies are presented, the applied criteria are introduced.

The following aspects are considered as prerequisites for an effective management and implementation of the programme. Ensuring an effective management and implementation of the programme requires a well-functioning cooperation between the programme bodies based on the following criteria:

Criteria of a well-functioning cooperation between programme bodies

- **Clear division of responsibilities and tasks** between the programme bodies
- **Common understanding** between all programme bodies regarding the division of responsibilities and tasks
- **Reliable fulfilment** of responsibilities and tasks

In the analysis of the cooperation between the different programme bodies the three criteria listed above were used. In addition to these criteria the status of implementation of the programme and the high level of target achievement was also considered.

Overall, it can be stated that no severe problems in the management and cooperation between the programme bodies have been identified. The responsibilities and tasks of each programme bodies are clear and carried out accordingly. The programme's implementation proceeds according to plan and the high level of target achievement underlines that the programme bodies fulfil their responsibilities and tasks reliably and effectively.

Additionally, the cooperation between the programme bodies is **in most cases well established**. The atmosphere is characterized by a **high willingness to communicate, share knowledge and work together**. This was confirmed by representatives of different programme bodies (JS, NCP, MC, SC). Additionally, the **high level of engagement** of people involved in the programme is prevalent in comparison to other funding programmes. The impression is that it is highly important to members of the different programme bodies that the programme is successful and that it contributes to the further integration of the North Sea Region. One example for this is the high engagement of the programme bodies to continuously improve their structures and processes. For example, the application process was evaluated internally after a number of calls for proposals had been made, potentials for improvement were identified and successfully implemented. Given the diverse institutional backgrounds of people, the mix of cooperating nationalities, and the complexity of tasks being worked on, this cannot be taken for granted. Working in an international environment, where national interests are involved, is challenging. as can be exemplified by the many current political developments and decisions on the European and international stage.

However, the analysis at hand found some optimisation potential regarding the cooperation between certain programme bodies. The optimization potential we found relates to the cooperation between

- the Joint Secretariat and the National Contact Points and
- the Steering Committee and the Monitoring Committee.

These two aspects are subsequently further described and analysed.

Cooperation between Joint Secretariat and National Contact Points

The analysis shows that the function and the **degree of involvement of the NCPs in the programme is not clearly enough defined and thus not always coherently implemented**. Remarkable differences between the NCPs regarding the understanding of roles were found. One reason for this, is the fact that NCPs are employed by their respective Member State. Accordingly, they are located at different institutions at different levels (regional or national). Moreover, NCPs have different amounts of time to devote to their role as NCPs, ranging from 20 percent part-time to full-time positions. This means that **resources available for the NCPs vary considerably and a simple common definition of tasks and responsibilities that all NCPs must fulfil is not feasible**. One additional aspect to consider is the fact that in recent years many personnel changes took place on side of the NCPs. This has also contributed to the impression that the NCPs role and the coordination between them and with the JS was to some extent unclear.

At the same time, it was found that the **NCPs are highly motivated to contribute to the successful implementation of the programme in an even more effective way**. When asked what they would like to be perceived as during a workshop with almost all NCPs in the course of the evaluation, the answer most provided was "as ambassadors of the programme". The findings from the evaluation further show that the NCPs are in many cases the first point of contact for potential beneficiaries and that their **knowledge of local, regional and national particularities** is key for engaging the right actors as beneficiaries in the programme and support them during project implementation. They fulfil a variety of tasks and play different roles throughout the lifecycle of the

programme and projects. This means that the NCPs **need to be extremely flexible and able to change roles constantly**. At the same time, a shared understanding of these roles is essential for a more coordinated approach among them and towards the JS in the future. To this end, a **network with all NCPs** already exists. However, as mentioned above, the evidence suggests that for various reasons (i.e. personnel changes and limited resources being two of them), the network was not as active and effective as it could have been at the time of the workshop in September 2019.

In terms of common tasks and responsibilities, the JS is the programme body closest to the NCPs. Like the NCPs, the JS mainly supports project partners and is engaged in the day-to-day implementation of the programme and its projects. This implies that for the NCPs to be more effective in their actions, **a close coordination with the NCPs is necessary**. The evaluation found that not only NCPs but also the JS is quite limited in its resources when it comes to coordinating joint activities. There is a JS-NCP liaison officer installed in the JS but the task to coordinate between JS and NCPs is just one out of many.

From interviews with the JS and workshops with the JS and NCPs it became clear that not only the NCPs but also the JS recognized **great potential for improving the role of the NCPs** and in this context puts a special focus on the cooperation between JS and NCPs. The high motivation of the NCPs and the JS to improve coordination was also underlined by their active engagement to start a process to this end. The goal of the process, which was initiated in parallel to this evaluation, is to implement a more coordinated approach between individual NCPs, the NCP network and the JS with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the NCPs actions.²² A first outcome of this process, is a document with an analysis of the status quo and a list with roles and responsibilities. It serves as a basis to further improve the NCPs' role and the coordination with the JS and the NCP network.

Cooperation between Monitoring Committee and Steering Committee

The analysis shows that the **cooperation between Monitoring Committee (MC) and Steering Committee (SC) works well in many aspects**. Most importantly, the division of tasks and responsibilities is clear and precise. This is of particular importance as there is a major overlap between members of the MC and the SC. The main difference between the bodies is the stronger representation of the regional and local level in the SC compared to the MC.

Potential for improvement was found regarding the **efficiency of decision-making and meeting routines in which the members of the two committees are involved**. The current set-up requires numerous and time-consuming meetings and the decision-making processes still take longer than the programme bodies would like them to take.

Currently all meetings of the Monitoring Committee and the Steering Committee are organized as **personal meetings**.²³ Decisions are, with few exceptions, only taken during these meetings. The Monitoring Committee usually meets twice a year. One meeting is organized in May or June, the other meeting usually takes place in October or November. Due to one important formal responsibility of the MC to approve the Annual Implementation Report before it is submitted to the European Commission, a meeting must be held in May or June. The Steering Committee meeting routines are similar to the ones of the MC; the bi-annual meetings are usually scheduled for June and November.

²² See working document on overview of roles and responsibilities of NCPs, produced as a result of a meeting between the JS and NCPs in Bergen in March 2020.

²³ The restrictions due to the Corona Pandemic are considered as extraordinary circumstances. The analysis is based on the usual routines and processes before the Corona Pandemic.

This means that the SC meetings take place shortly after the MC meetings. Considering the responsibilities of the two committees, the **current meeting routines imply that in some cases the final decision on a question which the SC has discussed in June will only be taken in November when the MC meets next**. Members from both committees confirm that this can cause delays in programme implementation.

While the personal meetings can be perceived as inefficient in some ways, they do fulfil an **important function** in the programme. As pointed out in the impact evaluation, INTERREG is to a great extent about bringing people from different countries and regions together and increase mutual understanding. It hence is largely concerned with **networking across borders and joining forces to effectively tackle joint challenges**. These objectives of INTERREG are mainly targeted towards beneficiaries and end-users of the programme. At the same time, it is of high relevance that also those who are in charge of managing and implementing the programme also connect closely and understand themselves as a group aiming for the same objectives. Experience shows that in order to achieve this, personal meetings are much more effective than digital meetings. Of course, decisions can also be taken when meeting digitally. But everything that happens in between, i.e. small talks, informal exchange and the joint dinner, does not take place in digital meetings to the same extent.

One additional aspect when analysing the current meeting routines of SC and MC is the amount of resources used. The current focus on personal meetings implies **significant costs and time for travel**. Distances can be quite long in the programme area and often members of the committees travel by plane. Considering the ambition of the North Sea Region Programme regarding sustainability, not only as a horizontal principle but as a major topic, the amount of resources used for traveling to meetings could be seen critically.

Recommendations for the cooperation between programme bodies



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the current and the future funding period regarding cooperation between programme bodies:

Cooperation between JS and NCPs

- **Keep the momentum from the joint meeting in March 2020 and engage actively in the NCP network and between the NCPs and JS to maintain the strong levels of cooperation.**
- **Regularly check and - if needed - update the working document setting out the roles and responsibilities of the NCPs and the cooperation with the JS.**

Cooperation between MC and SC

In summary, efficiency is of course important for future meeting routines, but it should not be the only considered aspect in the context of a transnational INTERREG programme. Rather, adjusting the timing of the meetings and a good mix between face-to-face and digital meetings or even written procedure could be an option for the future.

- **Check whether consecutive days of SC and MC meetings are possible. This would**
 - **reduce the timeframe of decisions to be taken by the MC after**

the SC to a minimum;

- **it would significantly reduce travel time and costs considering the large overlap of representatives in both committees**
 - **reduce the time needed for organizing the meetings compared to meeting at two different places**
- **Consider making use of digital meeting routines in addition to personal meetings: make sure to thoroughly evaluate for which meetings a digital format is well suited and in which cases a personal meeting is the paramount choice.**
- **Consider allowing for more flexibility in the decision-making processes: check whether digital voting and written procedures can be used in some cases to reach a decision.**

4.2 Common understanding of aims and objectives between programme bodies

Evaluation question:

Is there a common understanding between the programme bodies and its members about the aims and objectives of the programme and the projects expected to deliver these aims?

Conclusion:

- There is a **common understanding about the aims and objectives of the programme** between programme bodies and its members.
- There is a **common understanding about the main characteristics that projects** have to demonstrate in order to contribute to the programme objectives.
- The high degree of common understanding is expected to **support the effective management and implementation of the programme**.

A common understanding about the aims and objectives of the programme is a highly important factor for effective programme implementation. It constitutes a prerequisite, as it allows all actors involved to steer the programme in the same direction and have a same understanding of what is to be achieved. It nevertheless should be pointed out that pursuing the same goals does not mean that there is always consensus on how to achieve these goals.

The evaluation found that a **common understanding** between the programme bodies and its members about the aims and objectives of the programme **prevails to a great extent**. The question was asked to all members of the ESG (as representatives of different programme bodies) and beside different wordings the answer seems to be clear: **the programme's objective is building greater cooperation across the NSR to effectively tackle joint challenges**. This common understanding is expected to support the effective implementation of the programme and is thus regarded as highly positive by the evaluation.

In a second step, it was analysed whether a **common understanding on which characteristics projects need to demonstrate in order to maximize their contribution to the programme objectives, exists**. This aspect is considered particularly relevant because the answers to this question provide evidence whether the project selection criteria are understood in the same way and whether certain projects are selected or rejected for the same reasons. Again, the question was asked to all members of the ESG. The answers again show that there is a **common understanding of what good projects are characterised by**: strong target-group orientation, high relevance of the topic for the NSR as a whole and a well organised and strong partnership. Further, a long-term vision (going beyond the project lifetime) and the openness to connect with people from other countries and backgrounds is pointed out as important for good projects.

The results from the analysis show that in many respects there is a **common understanding of what the NSR programme is aiming at and how this can be achieved**. This is highly encouraging and likely one **important aspect for effective programme implementation**.

Recommendations for the common understand of aims and objectives between programme bodies



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the common understanding of aims and objectives between programme bodies:

- **Continue to ensure a common understanding of the programme's aim and objectives by discussing the topic on a regular basis.**
- **Ensure that characteristics for good projects remain clear to all relevant actors in the future (especially potential newcomers).**

4.3 Communication strategy

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme's communication strategy contributed to reaching the specific programme management objectives?

Conclusion:

- The programme has made **considerable progress** regarding the allocation of funding, the number of funded projects and the target achievement. This indicates that the communication activities have **contributed to their objective, which is to communicate the programme to relevant stakeholders and to stimulate stakeholders to develop and deliver high quality projects**.
- Revision of the strategy shows that programme management reacts to new priorities and adapts main aims and activities according to the implementation status of the programme.
- The programme management **regularly evaluates its communication methods** and priorities and adopts changes where needed.

Summary of communication strategy

The communication strategy of the Interreg North Sea Region programme is based on the legal requirements of the European Commission, in addition to a number of key principles in line with the overall strategy and aims of the 2014-2020 programme. In autumn 2015, the communication strategy has been approved at the first Monitoring Committee meeting of the 2014-2020 Programme.

The **main goal of the communication activities** has been formulated in the Cooperation Programme: the aim is 'to communicate the programme to relevant stakeholders and stimulate them to develop and deliver high quality projects' (Specific Objective 5.1).

The communication strategy has further specified the **main objectives** of the communication activities:

Figure 28: Main aim and objectives of the programme's communication strategy

Main aim	Support project implementation and communication in order to maximize delivery of Programme and project objectives.
Main objectives	Attracting relevant stakeholders
	Supporting the project community
	Making project results and outputs visible
	Facilitating effective administration and support
	Keeping policy makers and stakeholders involved

Source: Communication Strategy, own illustration Ramboll Management Consulting.

The communication strategy also defines the **end-user groups** to be reached by the communication activities:

- Potential beneficiaries relevant to Programme priorities
- Beneficiaries
- Programme bodies
- Other relevant stakeholders (such as information centres, European Commission representation offices)
- External non-professional audiences, i.e. relevant groups among the general public

The communication strategy clearly defines the **responsibilities for the communication activities** which are shared among the Monitoring Committee, the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat, the National Contact Points and the projects.

Findings from analysis

The high demand for funding indicates that the Interreg programme and its funding possibilities are well-known by the end-user group. This indicated that among others, the communication efforts by the programme management have been **successful in reaching the end-users of potential beneficiaries**.

In general, the programme seeks to ensure a **consistent visual identity** throughout communication methods to ensure that the Interreg programme is recognised and remembered. The analysis confirms that the visual identity of the programme is **clear** and that it is **well visible** throughout the different communication measures.

As planned in the communication strategy, different communications measures are used. The following overview describes and shortly analyses the main communication activities:



Programme website

Short description

- The **programme's website** is the main communication channel and includes all relevant information about the programme, opportunities for funding, relevant regulations, key documents, etc.

Analysis

- It is informative (e.g. fact sheet section, well described project life cycle), well-structured, up to date.
- One well-structured site for each project in which the projects are vividly presented.
- Optimisation potential regarding the design of the website which has already been recognised by the programme and which is confirmed by the evaluation (see Achievements report).



Social media

Short description Analysis

- The programme uses **LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr**.
- Especially LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are regularly and intensely used to inform about project activities, achievements as well as current information from the programme.
- The regular and intense use is very positive. It must be pointed out that

using social media in this intensity is very time consuming but can also be a very effective measure.

- At the same time the number of followers on i.e. LinkedIn is limited (4,948 on August 25, 2020) even though it is considerably higher than the number of followers from other Interreg B programmes.
- Another positive aspect is the ongoing evaluation process of the social media use: The programme constantly evaluates and tests how to use social media in the most efficient way. Improvements are implemented where relevant and possible.



Events and campaigns

Short description

- In the current funding period, the Joint Secretariat has among others organised five **North Sea Conferences**, seven **Interwork events**, an **Implementation Seminar** and an **Idea Generation Bootcamp**.
- Due to the ongoing COVID 19-situation it is, as of right now unsure, when and if additional personal meetings will take place in the future.

Analysis

- Events are an important aspect of the communication activities of the programme.
- Experience shows that events are a very effective communication measures for ESI-funds programmes. Especially the informal exchange and the possibility for networking is important to attract and inform potential beneficiaries about the funding, to form new partnerships but also to communicate results.



Blog, newsletters and publications

Short description

- In 2017, the programme launched its blog which provides updates and more informal content with more visualisation and the opportunity to interact (e.g. comment on posts). On average, two articles per month are published.
- The programme's newsletter has been relaunched in May 2018. It disseminates new content published on the website or on the blog.

Analysis

- With two articles per month the blog is, similar to social media, a rather time-intensive activity. The impression is that interaction on the blog is rather limited.
- Subscription numbers for the newsletter have been growing considerably since the relaunch. This indicates that it is more target-group oriented and attracts more attention.

Additionally, the projects themselves act as multipliers since they are very active and successful in disseminating information about the projects and achievements among different end-user groups (see chapter 0).

The relevant output indicator for Specific Objective 5.1 is the number of project ideas advised. According to the Cooperation Programme, the relevant data has to be internally monitored by the JS and the NCPs. Table 21 provides an overview of the target achievement of the indicator. However, these numbers only take into account project ideas that were officially filed through the Online

Monitoring System. The number does not include the project ideas that were directly communicated to the JS and the NCPs via e-Mail, personal contact or by phone. The actual number of project ideas that have been advised by the JS and the NCPs is thus much higher, even though not fully documented.

Table 21: Target achievement Output Indicators Specific Objective 5.1

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value programme 2023	Achieved, end of 12/2019
5.1	Number of project ideas advised	Project ideas	500	276

Source: Monitoring by Joint Secretariat

The communication strategy was **revised at the beginning of 2019** to better reflect new priorities based on the progress and advancement of the programme's implementation. Since the majority of funds were already allocated and the programme had considerably matured since the beginning of the funding period, the focus of the communication activities was changed: it was decided that the focus would shift from attracting new applicants to disseminating and spreading information about the achievements and outputs of the programme. This is a very positive fact and underlines the **highly professional approach** towards communication in the programme.

Recommendations for the communication strategy



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the programme's communication strategy:

- **Continue the constant and regular evaluation of communications activities and adapt accordingly to current needs and implementation status of the programme.**
- **Check whether the blog and all social media channels are equally important and effective. Make sure to concentrate resources on the most effective measures. Use events, the newsletter and the website to raise awareness of the good social media activities and actively invite people to follow your channels to increase its reach.**
- **Consider the different needs for communication when designing the new communication strategy based on the experiences of the current programme to avoid the necessity of revising the communication strategy.**
- **Ensure the full documentation and consideration of data for the output indicator to quantify target achievement.**

4.4 Structure and timing of calls for proposals

Evaluation question:

Does the structure and timing of calls for proposals support the delivery of the programme in the most effective way? What can be learned from application processes in other Interreg programmes?

Conclusion:

- **44 percent of the beneficiaries** from call 5-7 (calls after the process has been shortened) experienced the **length of the application process as acceptable** (*not too long or too short / rather short*).
- Overall, the beneficiaries still have **varying opinions** about the length of the application process. Especially for innovative topics and for-profit private beneficiaries, the overall length of the application process can be an issue.
- The majority of the lead beneficiaries (54 percent) agrees that the **two-step application was helpful** and contributed to a better project application (compared to only submitting a full application). This was clearly confirmed by the in-depth case study interviews.
- The lead beneficiaries are **very satisfied with the support** that was available to them during the application process.
- The application process is **well organised and elaborated**. Only minor improvement possibilities have been identified.
- The evaluation **sees no need** to change the overall application process or structure of the calls for proposal.

The two-step application procedure

The programme's project approval is based on a **two-step application process. The obligation to apply through the two-step application process started with call 2** (opened in January 2016).²⁴

In the two-step application process, applicants first submit an **Expression of Interest (EoI)** and only those projects which are approved at this stage are asked to submit a **Full Application**. The **rationale** behind this approach is to receive more mature and high-level quality projects by rejecting immature or insufficient projects at an early stage. In addition, this allows for more effective support to those applicants who submitted a successful Expression of Interest in regards to their Full Application later on.

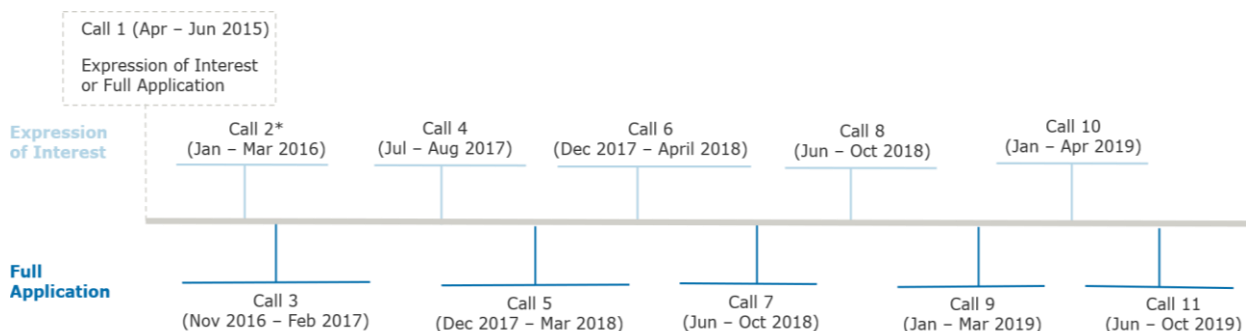
The two-step application procedure has been **reviewed** and evaluated by the Joint Secretariat in 2017. The internal evaluation came to the conclusion that the two-step application process should be remained – with certain **adjustments** regarding the timeline (allowing two calls each year for both, Expressions of Interest and Full Applications), the Expression of Interest form and the support to applicants through better cooperation between National Contact Points and Joint Secretariat.

Since the start of the programme, 11 calls for proposal have been issued. The calls are alternating either open for Expressions of Interests or Full Applications, thereby offering an incremental application process as described above.

²⁴ Call 1 applicants could choose either to submit an Expression of Interest or go directly to a Full Application.

After call 4, the assessment in the application process has been shortened to roughly one year. Up until call 4, the potential time from the submission of EoI to the project's approval/rejection took up to 18 months

Table 22: Overview of calls for EoI and Full Applications



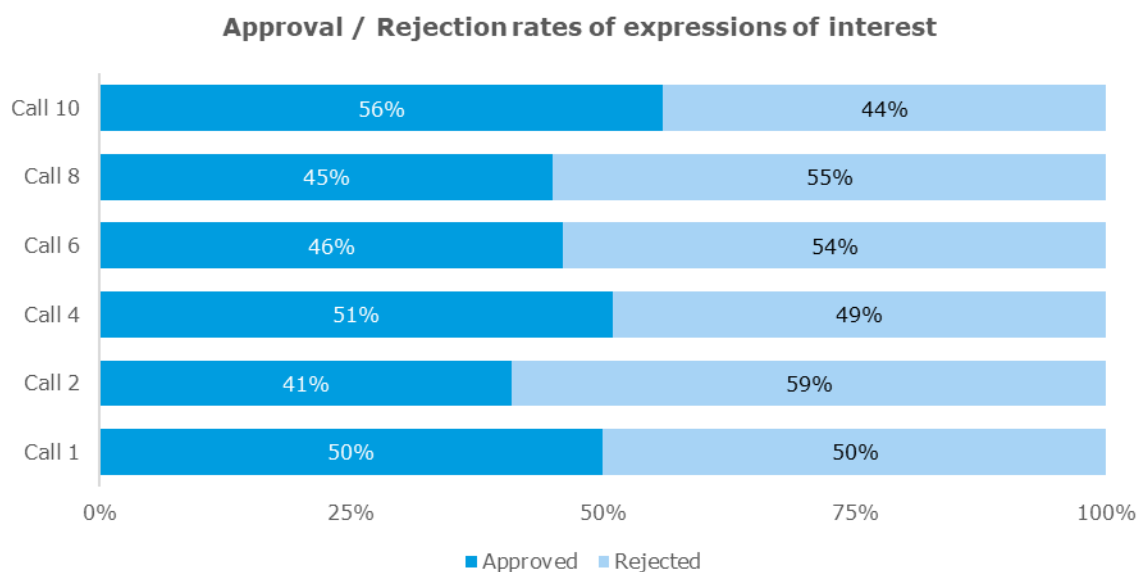
Source: Joint Secretariat.

After the submission of the applications the following work-procedures are undertaken:

1. The Joint Secretariat assesses the applications using the 4-eye-assessment-policy, as outlined by the management approval.
2. Afterwards the applications and the JS' (very short) assessments are sent to the Steering Committee, four weeks prior to the Steering Committees meeting. The SC members approve or reject project applications.
3. After the official decision by the Steering Committee has been made, the applicants are directly informed after the SC meetings. As soon as the programme countries sign the decisions, a list that indicates which projects are approved, is published. It should be noticed that applicants are not automatically informed when meeting of the SC meeting takes place and thus when a decision on their application is taken.

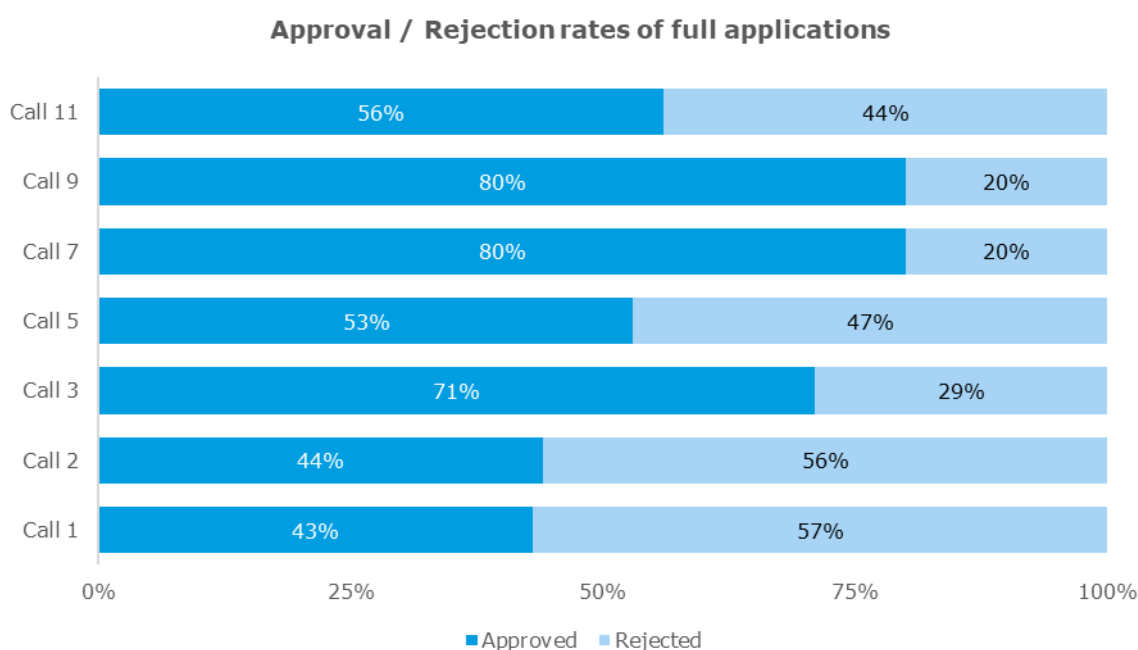
The **approval rate of the expressions of interest**, shows no clear trend over the years and is rather fluctuating from one year to the next (between 41 and 56 percent). However, the approval rate has been the highest in the last call (#10). The **approval rate of full applications** shows some tendency, that in the later calls, there have been more projects approved than rejected, compared to earlier calls. Especially the calls 7 and 9 have a high approval rate (80 percent), although in call 11 the approval rate was lower again.

Figure 29: Approval rate EoI



Source: Achievements report.

Figure 30: Approval rate full application

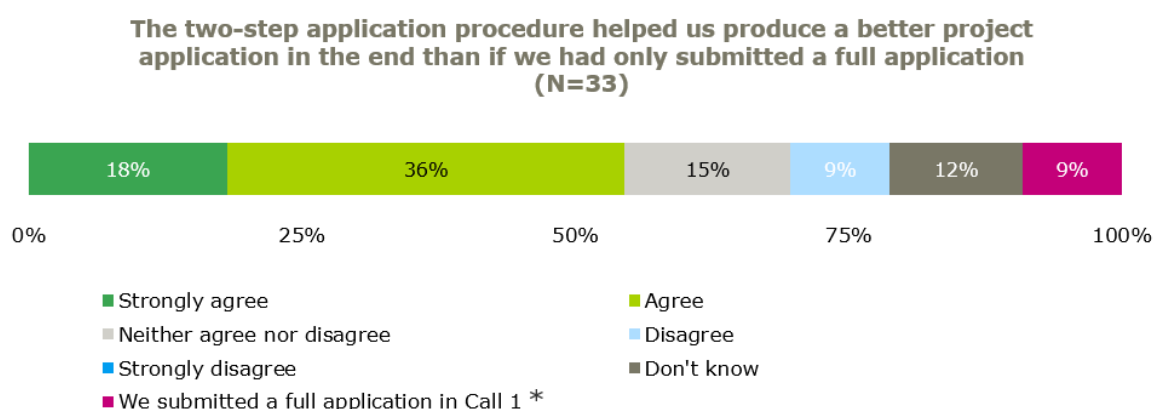


Source: Achievements report.

Handing in an expression of interest, which is approved, does not always automatically mean, that the following full application will be approved as well. 30 full applications of projects have been rejected since the start of the programme, even though the applicants had previously submitted a successful EoI. Some of these projects were nevertheless approved in a following full application call. This indicates, that the **EoI is just one element of the quality control done by the programme.**

The survey of the lead beneficiaries showed that from the applicants' point of view (54 percent of the beneficiaries answering the survey), the two-step-application process was considered helpful and contributed to a better project application (compared to only submitting a full application). Certain lead beneficiaries indicated that they benefited from remarks on their Expression of Interest to formulate the Full Application and that the two-step application procedure already contributes to understanding the Interreg programme at an early stage. Certain lead beneficiaries experienced the second step as challenging and rather time-consuming, as they had to start the process of involving all partners of the application again.

Figure 31: Survey results on two-step-application process



Source: online survey lead beneficiaries.

In the case study expert interviews, more in-depth feedback concerning the structure of the two-step-application process was collected. Generally, the interview partners emphasized how beneficial the two steps for the efficiency of the applications and for the overall quality of the projects are.

Feedback from case study interviews

Feedback on two-step-application process

- Two-step-application process is excellent, because the EoI initially requires far less work than a full application.
- The current process improves the end result of application and supports the development of a sound and solid project plan.
- The process provides the opportunity to receive specific and targeted feedback on the submitted project idea. However, the programme's management must ensure that the feedback is made adequately available to applicants.
- The process allows for a very refined budget in the end.
- The standardized forms can sometimes be difficult to fill out by highly innovative projects. For some highly innovative projects, the two-step-application process be too time-consuming.

Because of the feedback received in the interviews, stating that the **EoI-form** could possibly be further simplified, the content and length of the form was reviewed including a comparison to other programmes' forms. From the perspective of the evaluation, the EoI form of the Interreg NSR project is **very logically structured and no unnecessary content** is required to be filled in by the applicant. However, in other programmes **the number of characters** which are allowed per question

is more limited than in the Interreg NSR form. Even though the word count for the EoI form has already been reduced in the course of the funding period, it could be considered to be even stricter with the number of characters in the future.

Furthermore, the **application form** for the full application was analysed, also in comparison to other programmes' forms. Again, the full application form for the Interreg NSR project is **very well structured and focuses on the relevant information** which is needed to decide on a project's approval or rejection. Compared to other programmes' forms it is seen as better structured and less complex, which makes it easier for both, the applicant and the approver, who work with the form. In other programmes which also follow a two-step-application approach, the full application form includes a section on the "**changes compared to the EoI**". For the future Interreg NSR programming, it could be considered to include such a section (e.g. following the section "summary of the project") to help the approver draw connections to the EoI and see if necessary optimizations have been made by the applicant.

Length of application process

The length of the application process is usually one aspect of particular importance to applicants, and at the same time it is a point of criticism for applicants and beneficiaries in many Interreg and other EU funded programmes. For this reason, this aspect was analysed in greater detail in course of this evaluation.

In the North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020, the length of the application process has been adapted during the funding period. The intention was to shorten the overall timeframe from the submission of the EoI to the approval/rejection of the full application. Up to call 4 the potential timeframe was 18 months from the submission of EoI to the approval/rejection of the full application. After call 4, from call 5 on (opened in December 2017), the timeframe was shortened to roughly **one year**.

The results from the survey of the lead beneficiaries showed, that the opinion on the length of the application process varies. Even though the overall timeframe was shortened after call 4, 37 percent of the project beneficiaries from the later calls 5-7, who answered the survey said, that the process still takes too long. However, **44 percent of the beneficiaries from call 5-7 experienced the length of the application process as acceptable** (*not too long or too short / rather short*).

In your opinion, the length of the application process, from submission of your Expression of Interest to the decision on your Full Application, was (N=16, call 5-7)

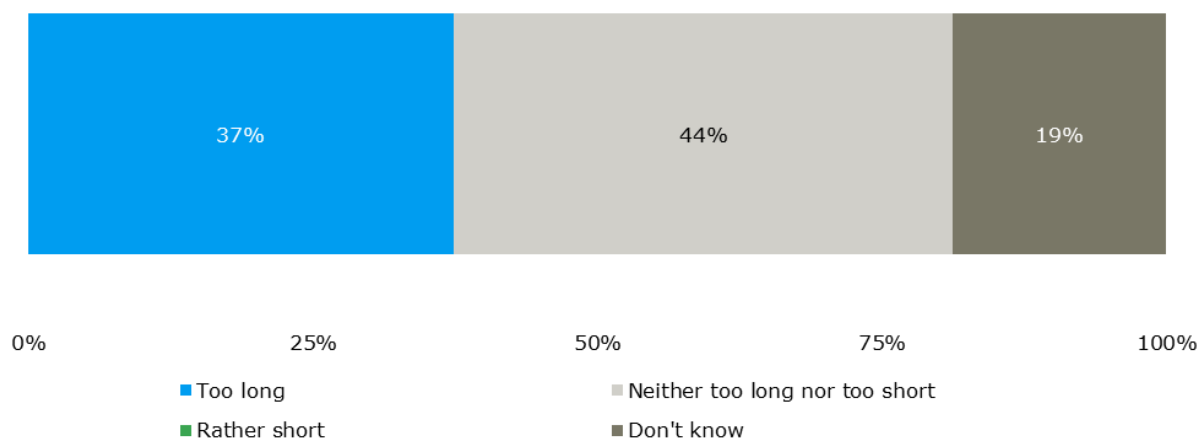
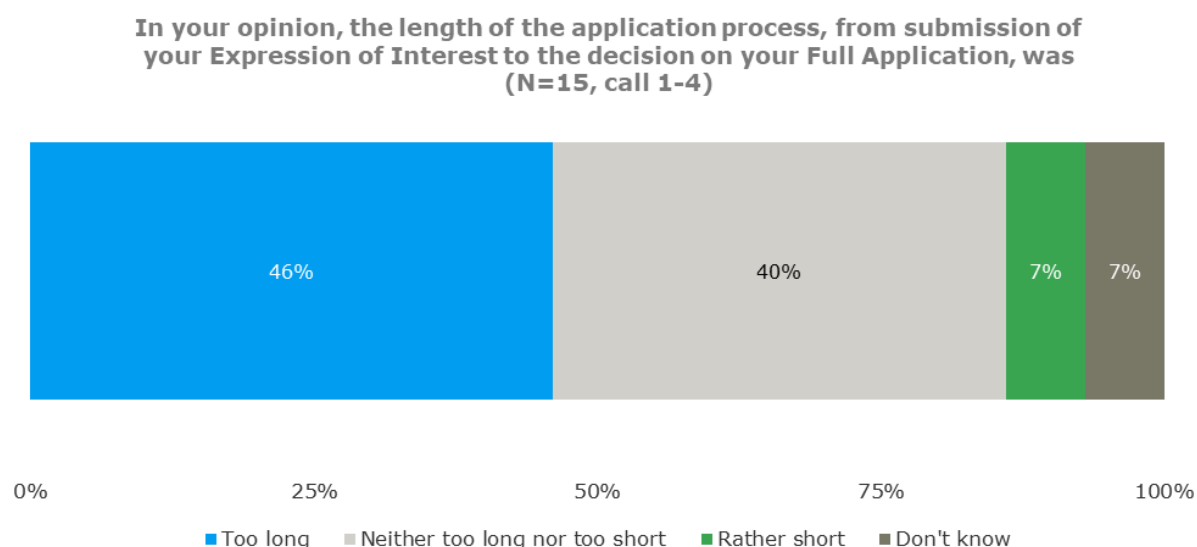


Figure 32: Satisfaction with length of application process, call 5-7²⁵

Source: online survey lead beneficiaries.

Compared to the feedback from those lead beneficiaries who participated in call 1-4 before the changes were made (Figure 32), it can be seen that **fewer beneficiaries felt that the length of the application process was too long in the later calls 5-7** with the reduced time for the application process. Also slightly more beneficiaries from the calls 5-7 stated, that they experienced the duration as appropriate ("neither too long nor too short"), compared to the calls 1-4. Thus, the results from the survey show that the feedback is generally more positive in regard to the length of the application process in the later calls. The adaptation and shortening of the application process after call 4 was therefore **a step in the right direction**, but further improvement should still be considered (see summary below).

²⁵ None of the lead beneficiaries from the calls 5-7 chose the answer option "rather short"

Figure 33: Satisfaction with length of application process, call 1-4

Source: online survey lead beneficiaries.

The case study interviews confirmed the varying opinions among the beneficiaries concerning the length of the application process. Provided Feedback during the interviews regarding the length of the application process include the following:

Feedback from case study interviews

Feedback on the length of the application process

- It would be good to especially **receive the notification for EoI sooner**, to get ready to prepare the full application.
- **Two-step process produces good results** and ensures that project partners are on the same level, but changes may occur during the time of application (with regard to project partnership, priorities and/or topics → **innovation** happens fast, the waiting period can be a challenge for innovative projects).
- The length compared to the application procedures of other programmes is considered very reasonable, but the overall application procedure of the NSR programme is still considered too long.
- **Special challenges** because of the overall length of the application process can occur: keeping all project partners **"enthusiastic" and involved** throughout the whole process, might cause an issue, especially for **for-profit-private partners** to stay on board for such a long time

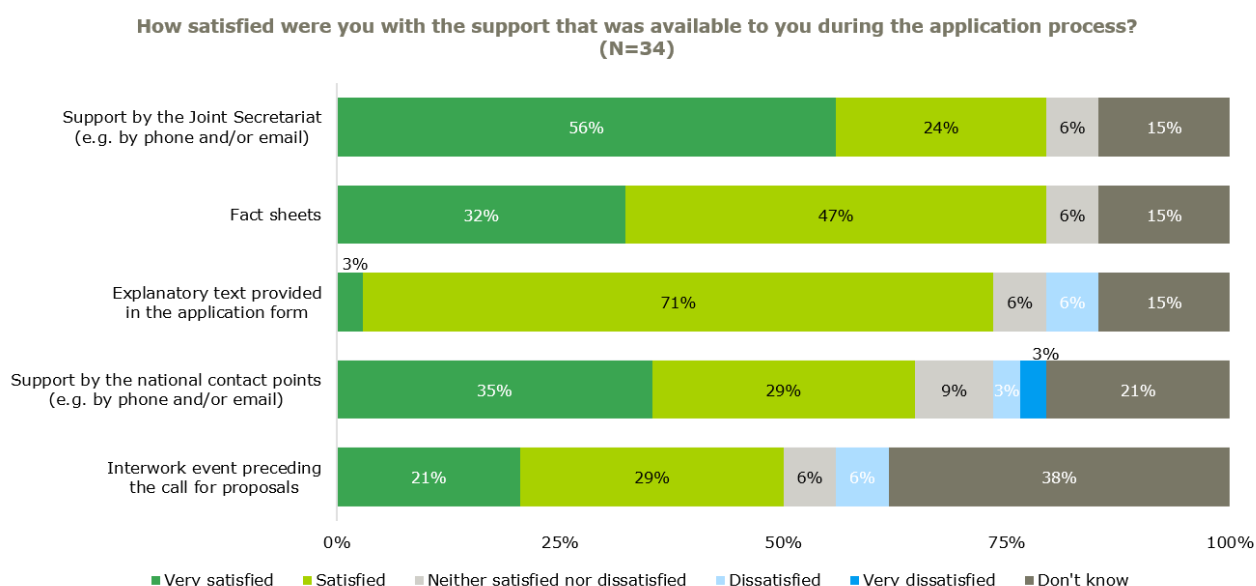
To sum the analysis of the length of the application process up, it can be stated that the process in the NSR programme seems to be of adequate length. The programme management is actively trying to further improve the process which is seen as very positive by the evaluation. The overall feedback from the lead beneficiaries is, especially compared to other similar programmes, satisfactory and does not indicate any need for major changes.

Support during application process

Due to the high complexity of the projects in the NSR programme and the project partnerships, the support provided during the application process is seen as a highly important aspect for the development of successful applications and subsequent high-quality projects.

In the survey of the lead beneficiaries, it was evident that the lead beneficiaries are **very satisfied with the support** that was available to them during the application process. All types of support that were provided to the lead beneficiaries are positively evaluated by (at least) the majority of the survey participants. They especially value the support by the **Joint Secretariat** e.g. by phone and/or mail: more than 50 percent of the lead beneficiaries are very satisfied; additional 24 percent are satisfied. The feedback from the case study interviews clearly **confirms the positive result** about the satisfaction with the support for the beneficiaries during the application process. In the interviews the support from the Joint Secretariat (JS) was emphasized as being **very good**.

Figure 34: Feedback on support during application process from the lead beneficiary survey



Source: online survey lead beneficiaries

Beside the JS' support, the **engagement of the NCPs** is also **highly valued** by the lead beneficiaries. 64 percent are either very satisfied or satisfied with the help they received from their NCP during the application process. This is very positive and underlines the high expertise and engagement of the NCPs.

One additional aspect that was identified as **positive** by the evaluation was the **numerous fact sheets** about rules and procedures of the NSR programme available on the programme's website. Most of the lead beneficiaries are satisfied with these fact sheets which indicates that they are helpful during the application process. This is supported by the evaluation. The fact sheets are perceived as highly **informative** and well **structured**.

In addition to confirming the overall positive feedback on the support provided during the application process, the case study interviews identified a number of minor aspects that should be considered by the programme bodies in order to keep the quality of support high and possibly improve even further.

Feedback	Feedback on support during the application process
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**from case
study
interviews**

- **Interwork event** was very helpful.
- JS was very helpful during the whole application process.
- JS is very down to earth, **easy to reach and supportive** → excellent support was given to beneficiaries.
- **Appreciation for the feedback on EoIs**, it helped a lot to develop and elaborate the project idea.
- It is sometimes **difficult to understand the terminology**, “Interreg-terminology” and “normal English” are different (applicants have to be aware of these differences otherwise it can be difficult when communicating with the programme bodies).
- At national level, **regulations are sometimes interpreted differently** than on the transnational level. A clear communication is necessary to prevent making the administrative processes more complicated for projects by giving diverging feedback.

Recommendations for the structure and timing of calls for proposals



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the structure and timing of calls for proposals:

Two-step application procedure

- **It should be made transparent to applicants from the outset when they can expect to be notified whether their project proposal (EoI and full proposal) has been approved by the programme. This would assist the organisations involved in each application process to plan ahead and would also enable them to possibly find a more appropriate funding scheme for their project idea if the processes in the NSR programme are considered too lengthy.**
- **The section “conclusions” of the assessment report written by the JS should have a character limit, to shorten the length of these assessments in order to simplify the subsequent work for the Steering Committee.**
- **The number of characters in the EoI form could be limited even further, to render this first step of the application process even more efficient.**
- **The form for the full application could integrate a section about the changes compared to the EoI, to help the approver understand the progress the project’s application has made since the EoI.**

Length of the application process

- **Digital formats and written procedures instead of meetings in person could be considered to simplify and possibly even shorten the duration of processes further.**
- **Finetuning of timing could help to further improve the internal processes from the programme bodies’ side: Consider call periods carefully and take holidays into account; potentially combine**

meetings of Monitoring Committee and Steering Committee to fasten processes.

Support during application process

- **Continue the high quality of support to applicants during the whole application process.**
- **Be very aware of the specific EU-terminology and ensure consistent use especially between JS and NCPs.**

4.5 Decision-making processes at programme level

Evaluation question:

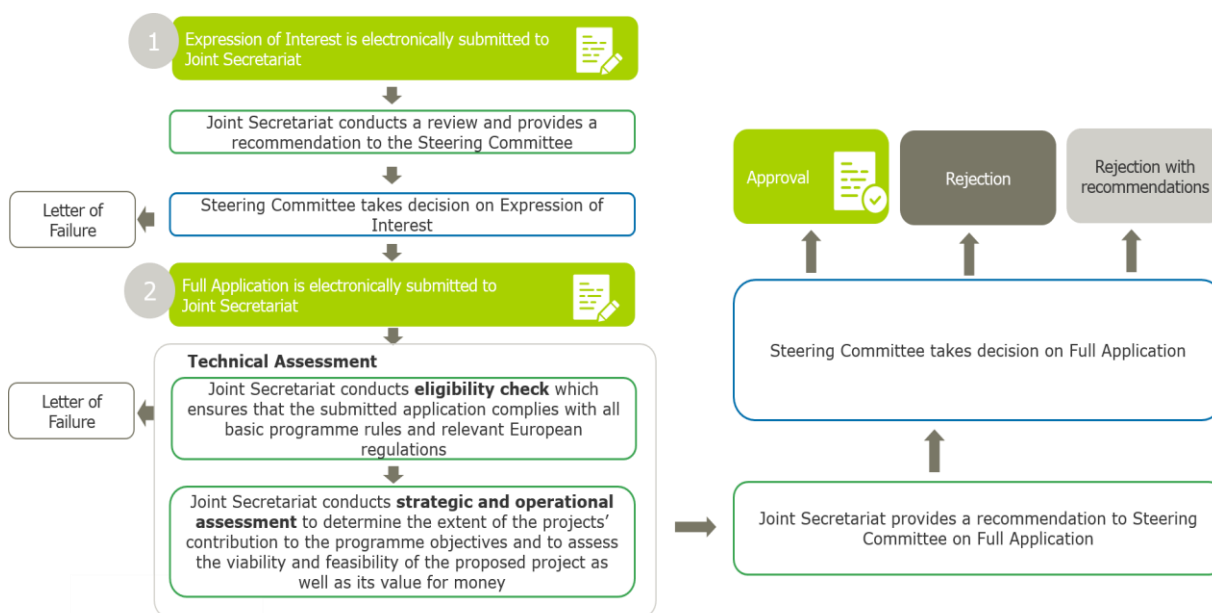
Are the decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent?

Conclusion:

- The decision-making process is **explained very clearly** in fact sheet #19
- For the majority of the lead beneficiaries, the **decision-making process was clear and transparent.**
- There is **no need for improvement** concerning the clarity and transparency of the decision-making processes.

During the evaluation, the information on the programme's website about the decision-making process was analysed. The following figure provides an overview of the decision-making process.

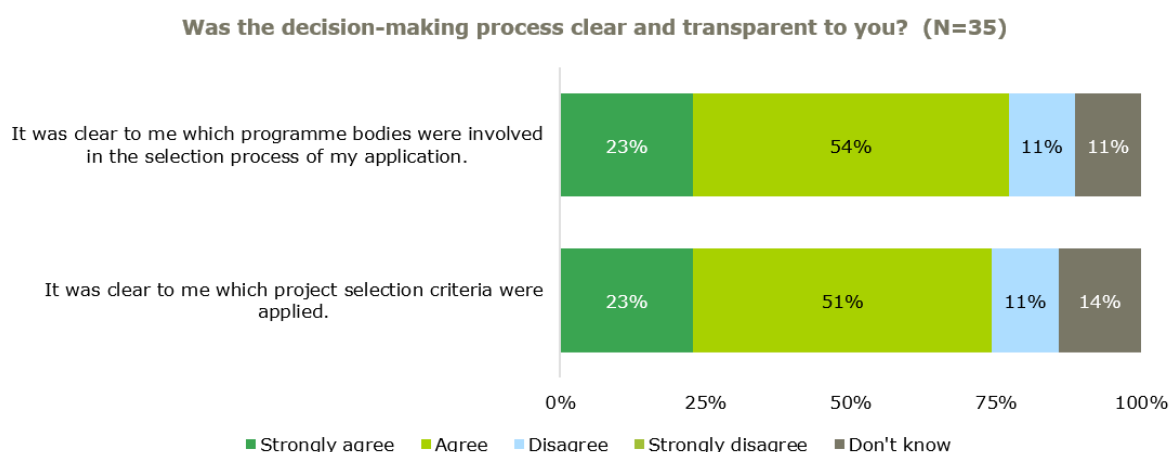
Figure 35: Decision-making process



Source: fact sheet 19.

The information is collected in fact sheet #19, it is **very easily accessible and clearly understandable**. The answers from the survey of the lead beneficiaries supported this finding: Within the survey 77 percent of the lead beneficiaries indicated that it was clear to them, which programme bodies were involved in the decision process. Furthermore, 74 percent of the lead beneficiaries stated that they were aware which project selection criteria were applied in the decision-making process. These high numbers are very positive and likely support the overall high satisfaction with the decision-making process in the NSR programme (see also section 4.4).

Figure 36: Feedback on decision-making process



Source: survey of the lead beneficiaries.

Moreover, the feedback from the in-depth interviews in the case studies made clear, how transparent the decision-making process is for the beneficiaries:

Feedback from case study interviews

Feedback on the decision-making process:

- The decision-making process was very clear and if aspects were not sufficiently answered, it was clear where information could be found.
- The Interreg NSR programme was clear on what criteria the projects are judged on and the process was very transparent.
- It was clear when to expect a decision on the application and which committees were involved in the decision-process. It unclear, which individuals sit in which committees, but this was not of primary interest to applicants.
- The JS has been very clear about the decision-making process and has sufficiently explained the criteria as well as what needs to be done to successfully apply, to the applicants.

In the case study interviews and in the workshop with the ESG it was emphasized that the **comprehensive and constructive feedback** from the JS on approvals or rejections of project applications is **highly valued** by the applicants and helps to ensure a high quality standard of the projects. The feedback from the programme must also include sufficient information for applicants, for instance a timetable for resubmitting revised applications.

Recommendations for the decision-making processes at programme level



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the decision-making processes at programme level:

- **Continue to clearly present and communicate the decision-making process, especially regarding selection criteria, the steps of the process and the actors involved.**

4.6 Coordination with other Interreg programmes

Evaluation question:

How effective is the **coordination with other INTERREG programmes**?

Conclusion:

- The coordination with other Interreg programmes occurs in a **variety of ways**, most of which are **informal**.
- The Interreg NSR programme successfully coordinates its **communication activities** with other Interreg programmes.
- Coordination and cooperation is successfully facilitated by the participation of various Interreg NSR stakeholders in other Interreg programmes, by joint events and by cooperation of projects from the Interreg NSR programme with projects from other Interreg programmes.

The Interreg NSR programme cooperates with other Interreg programmes in a variety of ways.

Facilitated by **Interact**, the transnational Interreg programmes have worked closely together to **promote the benefits of transnational cooperation**. Two important parts of this joint and coordinated promotion were the **publication** of all the Interreg B programmes “10 Things to know about Transnational Cooperation” and the **joint exhibition** #MadeWithInterreg for the EU Week of Regions and Cities in 2018. Interact has become very active over the years and is by now a highly important actor for coordination and exchange between programmes. The programme stakeholders share experiences and collaborate via Interact on a regular basis. According to the JS, the NSR programme tremendously **benefits from Interact**; it helps the programmes learn from each other to “not having to reinvent the wheel”.

The Interreg NSR programme has also adopted to the EU-wide **joint branding of Interreg programmes**. To do so, the programme and project logos were updated in 2018 according to the latest Interreg design, including a larger EU flag.

Through the **participation of several of the Interreg NSR countries in neighbouring Interreg programmes**, ongoing potentials for joint action can be identified through the programme’s representatives at national and regional level. In some cases, the **same persons are members of committees in different programmes** (transnational and cross-border) and thus can actively contribute to an effective coordination.

Furthermore, joint events and meetings with representative from outside the Interreg NSR programme are an important way for coordinating activities between the different Interreg programmes. Two examples of these events are:

- **Interreg Annual Event** (organised by Interact):
The meeting is one of the annual opportunities to review the Interreg programmes' implementation. It also aims to discuss with the Managing Authorities and the Joint Secretariats of all the Interreg programmes most topical issues related to implementation with the European Commission.

- **Regional Interreg events:**
There are also events organised by the regions participating in the programme, which facilitate a successful coordination of the different Interreg programmes. One example is the annual "Familientreffen" of the Interreg programme stakeholders in Hamburg. In this event, an overview of the results and successes of the past year, upcoming tenders, deadlines and opportunities for participation in the Interreg programmes is provided to the regional stakeholders. The event also offers time and space for exchange and ideas between the Interreg programmes with a participation of Hamburg stakeholders.

Moreover, on the implementing **project level**, there is coordination between the North Sea Region programme and other Interreg programmes happening, while synergies are jointly shared. On the one hand, **project cooperations** between the different Interreg programmes are established. One concrete example is the Project NorthSEE, which has a partner project in the Baltic Sea Region programme (BalticLINES). By working intensively side by side, the projects NorthSEE and BalticLINES strengthen each other's output. The two projects are similar concerning overlap of the partnership (guarantee for information and findings to be spread among all partners in both projects) and concerning an overlap of thematic sectors. On the other hand, Interreg NSR projects give **inputs to other Interreg Programme areas**. For example, the project CORA shared its innovative solutions at the annual forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2018.

The feedback that was gained from the interview with the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg NSR programme showed, that aside from the coordination measures mentioned above, there is also a lot of **informal coordination** happening. For example, members of the JS know their colleagues from other programmes and are encouraged to approach them to share knowledge and advance jointly.

Recommendations for the coordination with other Interreg programmes



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the coordination with other Interreg programmes:

- **Continue the active exchange and coordination with other programmes, especially through Interact and personal contact with colleagues from other programmes**

4.7 Synergies with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives

Evaluation question:

To what extent have synergies been created with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives?

Conclusion:

- **No synergies** were created with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives, because no direct benefit for the NSR programme is expected.

In its cooperation programme the Interreg NSR programme establishes the **framework for the engagement** with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives:

The programme sets itself the task to work on avoiding overlaps with other funding programmes, while trying to support cooperation in thematic areas of shared interest. The main areas of shared interest that have been identified are: Business development (R&D/innovation support), social cohesion, quality of life, accessibility and environmental protection.

Programme guidance and advice is modified on basis of possible thematic links with other programmes and projects have to consider links with other policies, initiatives and programmes already in their application process and during the implementation-phase of their project.

In the evaluation it was found that the coordination and thus the creation of synergies with programmes other than Interreg is **very limited**. Whereas an intensive coordination with other Interreg programmes takes place (see section 4.6), other ERDF and EU funds initiatives are not in the focus. The reasons for this are two-fold: coordination with other funds is **not an end in itself**. It should always serve a certain purpose such as more effective programme implementation, better projects etc. Considering the specific characteristics of transnational Interreg programmes it seems at least **questionable how synergies with very different programmes and initiatives are expected to support the programme's objectives**. From perspective of the evaluation, initiatives such as Horizon or regional ERDF programmes pursue very different objectives and are targeted towards different actors. Additionally, the JS and other programme bodies are, as pointed out in preceding sections, highly engaged in implementing the programme as effectively and efficiently as possible. They focus on their most important tasks which include that **resources are limited for activities that are seen as less important** for a successful programme. According to the JS this is unfortunate but considering the resources available it is without alternative. The evaluation supports this assessment.

Recommendations for synergies with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the future funding period regarding the synergies with other ERDF and EU fund initiatives:

- **Keep the possibility to create synergies with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives in mind and make use of them where possible.**

4.8 Costs and benefits of transnational cooperation

Evaluation question:

What are the costs and benefits of transnational cooperation: What measure might be used to assess the “transnational added value” of programme activities?

Conclusion:

- Effective transnational cooperation as it is realized in the NSR programme requires **highly engaged and qualified stakeholders**.
- **Costs of successful transnational cooperation (in terms of personnel and time resources invested by the actors involved) are quite high**, especially in comparison to the financial budget of the NSR programme.
- It does not seem meaningful to compare the programme’s financial budget against the personnel and time resources invested by the programme and its project actors in order to conduct a cost-benefit analysis because the benefits of transnational cooperation are often long-term and cannot be measured in monetary terms.
- From the perspective of the evaluation the **Interreg-specific impacts along the categories of empowerment, activation and application define the main benefits of transnational cooperation**. This evaluation underlines the great extent to which the NSR programme contributes to all three impact categories.
- The **added value of transnational cooperation** lies in finding common solutions for shared problems.
- The methodology applied in this evaluation proves to be valid and **adequate to grasp the “transnational added value”** of the NSR (and other) Interreg programme.

To answer this question the findings from previous evaluation questions are summarized. The costs of initiating and realizing transnational cooperation have been pointed out by analyzing multiple aspects of programme implementation and management in the operational evaluation. The benefits of transnational cooperation have been the focus of the impact evaluation. Finally, the transnational added value is analyzed by applying the methodology which explicitly focuses on identifying the specific impacts of transnational cooperation.

Summing up the relevant findings from the operational evaluation it can be stated that effective transnational cooperation as it is realized in the NSR programme requires **highly engaged and qualified stakeholders as well as effective and efficient structures and processes**. Planning, implementing and delivering an effective transnational programme is a challenging task. Relevant stakeholders have to combine **profound programmatic, thematic and methodological knowledge** and additionally have to be strong in **intercultural communication**. The evaluation found that in the NSR programme the relevant actors possess those skills. This holds true for the programme’s side but also for the projects.

Additionally, a **high commitment and extraordinary engagement** are factors which strongly support the effective transnational cooperation in the NSR. Summing up the findings from the analysis of the complex processes and structures for programme implementation, management and delivery and the resources needed for their functioning, it becomes clear that the **costs of successful transnational cooperation (especially in terms of personnel and time resources invested by the actors involved in the programme as well as the projects) are rather high**, especially in comparison to the financial budget of the NSR programme and the projects.

But following the overarching objective of Interreg, improving European territorial cooperation, it does not seem meaningful to compare the programme's financial budget against the personnel and time resources invested by programme and project actors and on this basis evaluate whether the programme is effective.

Instead, the long-term benefits of the NSR programme for the region and the contribution to the objective of European territorial cooperation should be taken into account. The benefits of the programme are pointed out in detail in the impact evaluation. Beside the contribution to the different specific objectives of the programme, the Interreg-specific impacts of the programme are likewise analysed in section 3.2.2. From the perspective of the evaluation the **Interreg-specific impacts along the categories of empowerment, activation and application define the main benefits of transnational cooperation**. This evaluation underlines the great extent to which the NSR programme contributes to all three impact categories (see section 3.2.2 for details). It was found that the projects are characterized by a strong orientation towards their end-users and that they aim for the sustainable establishment of transnational networks, more effective knowledge transfer and innovative solutions for shared needs. This is, among others, supported by the findings from the analysis on the benefits for the private sector. For-profit private beneficiaries' main motivation for participating in NSR projects is the establishment of new networks and contacts with other organizations and experts. They expect positive long-term benefits instead of short-term financial profitability. In public institutions and in universities the participation in transnational cooperation projects has significantly contributed to more effective processes and workflows and has led to improvements in internal knowledge transfer and further training of employees. These findings very well illustrate the main benefits of transnational cooperation in Interreg and make obvious why it is not adequate to assess the costs and benefits of transnational cooperation in monetary terms or on a short-term basis.

Summing up the added value of transnational cooperation can be described as finding common solutions for shared problems.

To answer the third part of this evaluation question on measures to assess the transnational added value it is again referred to the **methodology applied for this evaluation**. Applied in impact evaluations of different Interreg programmes, the methodology proves to be valid and **adequate to grasp the "transnational added value"** of the NSR (and other) programme.²⁶

²⁶ For more details see Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (2017): https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/ministerien/bmvi/verschiedene-themen/2017/wirkungen-interreg-b-spezifisch-eng-dl.pdf;jsessionid=E7F5EB341E8A57A7F86B8F1996E07023.live11291?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The operational and impact evaluation of the North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020 comes to the conclusion that the programme is successfully implemented and highly effective. The state of implementation underlines that the programme is implemented according to plan, almost all funds have been allocated to projects by the end of 2019 and the amount of funds spent is very high. This underlines that the programme addresses relevant needs in the North Sea Region. Targets for many output indicators have already been exceeded and values for the result indicators show a positive development towards the defined targets.

The stakeholders efficiently use the financial resources of the programme by planning, implementing and executing the programme and its projects very professionally. Well-functioning structures and processes of programme management are one of the main reasons for the effective implementation of the programme and the positive target achievement. The bodies involved in programme management cooperate effectively, a high level of mutual trust and understanding has been found between the involved parties by the evaluation. This is remarkable when considering their diverse national and institutional backgrounds. Further, the personal experience of many individuals in implementing Interreg programmes and projects supports the successful programme. Finally, the high engagement of the individuals involved (on programme but also on project level) has become evident throughout the evaluation and is also seen as one important factor that contributes to the successful implementation of the North Sea Region Programme.

The programme contributes successfully to its Specific Objectives. It effectively supports the development towards a more innovative and sustainable North Sea Region. The findings from the impact evaluation underline that the programme successfully gives impulses and supports future-oriented developments in the NSR in the four thematic focus areas of the programme. It was found that the programme contributes to the establishment of transnational networks, the increase of transnational knowledge transfer and the establishment of long-term cooperation. As a result, it is expected that the projects will have positive long-term effects on the development of the North Sea Region that go far beyond the beneficiaries.

In the following the summarised findings for each evaluation question are presented:

5.1.1 Impact evaluation

Indicators and financials on programme level

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme reached the performance framework milestones and targets? What is the progress of the programme in reaching specific objectives and expected results?

Conclusion:

- The programme **reached all performance framework milestones** in 2018.
- The programme has already **reached the performance framework targets for 2023** to a very large extent.
- The programme has substantially contributed to reaching the specific objectives: **all output indicators have already met and considerably exceeded their targets** by August 2020.
- **102 percent of the ERDF funding** have already been allocated by December 2019.
- It can be assumed that the programme **contributes to the positive development of the result indicators**.

Interreg-specific impacts

Evaluation question:

What is the Interreg-specific added value of the projects implemented during the Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme 2014-2020?

Conclusion:

- All projects (will) lead to the impact categories “empowerment of key stakeholders” and the “application of knowledge and skills”.
- More than 2/3 of the projects (will) also contribute to the third impact category “activation of decision-makers”.
- Based on our experience with the evaluation of similar programmes, it is **extraordinary that there is such a high number of very complex projects** that contribute to all three impact categories.

Pilots – Validation of results and key benefits

Evaluation question:

Have beneficiaries validated new knowledge through piloting and/or consultation with end-users?

Conclusion:

- The targets with regard to the conduct of pilots have been achieved to a **very large extent**.
- **Almost all projects** in all four Priority Axes include tests or pilots to **validate new knowledge** and to **test jointly developed solutions**.

- In some projects, the pilots have already been completed, while most projects are currently conducting pilots. Certain projects have not yet started piloting.
- The pilots are conducted in different regions in different countries which ensures testing under different circumstances by different actors.

Communication of findings to end-users

Evaluation question:

Have the findings been effectively communicated to other members of relevant end-user-groups elsewhere in the programme area?

Conclusion:

- The findings have been communicated to relevant end-user groups by using a **variety of means of communication**.
- Lead beneficiaries apply a **target-specific communication strategy** and use different means of communication.
- Applying **target-specific means of communication** acknowledges the characteristics of the different end-users and thus ensures that the different end-users are reached efficiently.

Involvement of different types of partners

Evaluation question:

In what way and to what extent does the private sector participate in the North Sea Region programme? How many projects have private sector participation as project beneficiaries/end-users?

Conclusion:

- The for-profit private sector is participating in the form of project beneficiaries and as end-user group.
- In 41 of the 73 projects there is at least one for-profit private organisation involved as a project beneficiary.
- About 11% of the project beneficiaries are for-profit private ones
- In PA 2, 3 and 4 the participation of the for-profit private sector as beneficiaries is as expected. In PA 1 the number of participants from the for-profit private sector is lower than expected.
- All projects address for-profit private sector organisations as a end-user group of the project outcomes in some way, but not always as their main end-user group.

Evaluation question:

To what extent does the private sector find participation in the North Sea Region programme financially profitable?

Conclusion:

- For the private sector the financial profitability does **not seem to be the main reason** to participate in the programme.
- The for-profit private project beneficiaries find the participation in the North Sea Region

programme **to some extent** financially profitable. (**20 percent of them indicated** that they find the participation in the North Sea Region programme **financially profitable**)

- Several **other important benefits** gained from participating in the projects have been confirmed

Evaluation question:

To what extent does the private sector contribute in the form of private capital or working hours?

Conclusion:

- The for profit private sector is contributing with private capital and working hours approximately to the **same extent**.
- The for profit private sector is contributing with a private capital of **6.758.749 € (~4,3% of the total co-financing budget)** to the programme
- The for profit private sector is contributing with **6.308.398 € working hours** to the programme.
- **Large private enterprises** are especially relevant for their **support through working hours**, **SMEs are contributing the highest numbers of private capital** to the programme.

Evaluation question:

Has transnational cooperation efficiently contributed to effective processes and workflows within public institutions, universities and enterprises?

Conclusion:

- The participation in transnational cooperation projects has **significantly contributed to effective processes and workflows** in public institutions, universities and enterprises.
- Projects have especially contributed to an **improvement in internal knowledge transfer** and **further training of employees**.
- The **wide range of benefits** from participating in the programme goes also **beyond more effective processes and workflows**, e.g. new opportunities for students of academic institutions, besides the benefits for the employees working on an Interreg project directly.

Impact on policy-making and policy implementation

Evaluation question:

How has the programme demonstrated increased capacity of decision-makers (in terms of new/adopted solutions; services; products and processes) to solving current challenges?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **contributed to increasing the capacity of decision-makers** and has enabled them to introduce changes at different political level through
 - Informing them about project goals, progress and outcome and by
 - Involving them in the process of the project

Evaluation question

Have any changes in laws or regulations been implemented and has the programme contributed to placing topics higher on the political agenda?

Conclusion:

- Yes, the programme has **successfully contributed** to the implementation of laws and changes and has contributed to placing certain topics higher on the political agenda.
- The lead beneficiaries confirmed that their projects are having direct impacts on laws and/or regulations on different levels.
- 50 out of 73 projects contribute to the relevant impact category of 'activation'.
- The changing of laws and regulations is rather long-term oriented and the successful awareness-raising is right now a more dominating achievement of the programme, which can then be the base for long-term law or regulation changes.

Impact on aligning national and transnational priorities

Evaluation question

Has the programme successfully contributed to aligning national and transnational priorities in political processes?

Conclusion:

- There are **certain projects where the projects' results have led to the introduction of regulations and laws** on national level and therefore aligned different priorities (e.g. TOPSOIL).
- Several projects had an impact on **national legislation and/or regional policies** in some participating countries as a result of INTERREG cooperation.
- A number of projects expect that they will further influence national laws and priorities in the years after project closure by means of policy recommendations and further dissemination of the project outcomes.
- Overall the **possible impact of the programme on national and transnational policies must be regarded as limited**. Decision-making processes are extremely complex and influenced by numerous factors and actors, the programme can realistically only support already ongoing initiatives or further push certain topics which are already high on the agenda of political decision-makers.

Contribution to cross-cutting themes of equality and sustainability

Evaluation question:

What has been the programme's contribution to cross-cutting themes of **equality and sustainability** in terms of promoting and having a practical impact in the NSR? To what extent are the horizontal principles integrated in programme management arrangements and in the activities of funded projects?

Conclusion:

- The programme ensures that the projects address the cross-cutting themes by having them consistently included over the course of the projects, from the **application and the project approval process to the reporting of the projects**

- The **programme management arrangements are contributing** to the themes of equality and sustainability in a variety of ways.
- **The Priority Axes of the programme directly include the cross-cutting theme of sustainability; the cross-cutting theme of equality is included in the Priority Axes rather indirectly.**
- The approved projects **clearly contribute** to the cross-cutting theme **of sustainability.**
- The approved projects are **mainly neutral concerning** the topics **equal opportunities, non-discrimination and the equality between men and women.**

Contribution to EU 2020 strategy

Evaluation question

To what extent has the programme contributed to the EU2020 strategy?

Conclusion:

- The North Sea Region programme is **consequently aligned with the three EU 2020 objectives.**
- **Smart growth** is supported through activities in all four Priority Axes with a special focus in the **PA 1 and 2.**
- **Sustainable growth** is also strongly supported by the programme. Especially the **PA 2, 3 and 4** are targeted to a more sustainable NSR region with different thematic focuses. Many projects contribute directly or indirectly to the Europe 2020 sustainability targets of reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions and resource use.
- The programme also **contributes with some projects** to the objective of **inclusive growth.** Social challenges are especially addressed by projects in the **PA 1.**

Priority Axis 1: Supporting growth in the North Sea Region economies

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme built SMEs' capacity to increase innovation?

Conclusion:

- Despite the relatively low number of SMEs as project beneficiaries, the programme has **clearly contributed** to building SMEs' capacity to increase innovation.
- **Projects in all four Priority Axes contribute to capacity increase in SMEs**, especially projects in Priority Axis 1.
- The project analysis, the online survey among the SMEs and the case study indicate that the projects contribute to capacity-building by
 - Making new and/or improved technologies and processes available for SMEs especially by **establishing new networks and new contacts.**
 - Making SMEs aware of these new methods and technologies and enabling them to use them, by **establishing new networks and new contacts** and **improving know-how and skills** within the SMEs.
 - Raising awareness for new ways of thinking and other markets: start-ups internationalised and opened up as a result of the project and benefited from the exchange of experience and knowledge with international partners.

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated innovation capacity building to deal with long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed to enhancing regional innovation capacity building**
- **All nine projects** in Specific Objective 1.2 (Enhance regional innovation support capacity to increase long-term innovation levels and support smart specialization strategies) contribute to **creating better framework conditions** to enable innovation activities.
- The measures and approaches taken differ among the projects. All three impact categories are addressed by the projects since the activities include
 - the empowerment of key stakeholders,
 - the activation of decision-makers and
 - the application of know-how and skills

Priority Axis 2: Eco-innovation: Stimulating the green economy

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme stimulated the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed** to stimulating the adoption of products, processes and services to 'green' the North Sea Region.
- The target for the output indicator has already been exceeded: by the end of August 2020, 275 products, services or processes have been piloted and/or adopted by the approved projects.
- All 12 projects in the Specific Objective 2.1 explicitly pursue the goal to develop or implement new green products, services or processes.

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and reduce overall energy use?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly demonstrated** methods and techniques to deal with renewable energy generation and reduce overall energy use.
- All 7 projects in the Specific Objective 2.2. **include pilots/tests in some form and demonstrate methods and techniques.**
- The projects of SO 2.2 have already significantly contributed to the relevant output indicator 2.2: by the end of August 2020, 35 products, services or processes with a focus on methods and techniques for renewable energy generation and for a reduction of overall energy use had been piloted and or adopted in the context of the approved projects.

Evaluation question:

How has the development and roll-out of new or improved energy technologies contributed to either an increase in renewable energy production or a reduction in energy use or loss (increase in energy efficiency?)

Conclusion:

- Different approaches are adopted to develop or roll-out new or improved energy technologies.
- All 7 projects in the Specific Objective 2.2. contribute either to an increase in renewable energy production and/or a reduction or loss in energy use.

Priority Axis 3: Sustainable NSR: Protecting against climate change and preserving the environment

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated methods and techniques to deal with environmental risks?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed** to demonstrate methods and techniques to deal with environmental risks.
- The target for the relevant output indicators has already been exceeded: by the end of August 2020, 45 new and/or improved climate change adaptation solutions have been reported to be demonstrated and 69 sites have been reported to be managed using new solutions supporting long-term sustainability.
- All 18 projects in PA3 include pilots/tests in some form to make sure the methods and techniques are directly demonstrated.

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme built capacity for improved land management?

Conclusion:

- The programme has **clearly contributed** to building capacity for improved land management.
- The project analysis indicates that 12 of the 18 projects in PA3 and **all 7 projects in SO3.1** contribute to both dimensions of capacity-building concerning land management.
 - Making new and/or **improved methods, products and programmes** available to their individual end-users.
 - Making their end-users aware of these new offers and enabling their adaptation by **demonstrating the new offers, by establishing new networks and by empowering the end-users.**

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme contributed to climate change adaptation, increased resilience and improved eco-system management due to NSR investment?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to climate change adaptation, increased resilience and improved eco-system management
- All of the 18 projects address one or more of these topics:
 - **7** projects contribute to **climate change adaptation**
 - **9** projects contribute to **increased resilience**
 - **12** projects contribute to an improved **eco-system management**

Evaluation question:

What kind of new methods for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems have been designed and implemented?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to designing and implementing new methods for the long-term sustainable management of the North Sea ecosystems
- The methods the projects have designed and implemented differ among the projects: the methods include
 - new methodology for data source management and a risk assessment methodology
 - habitat management guidelines
 - „Citizen Science“ data collection approach
 - interactive communication tools (forum)

Priority Axis 4: Promoting green transport and mobility

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme increased regional capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to increasing regional capacity to support modal shift to low-carbon transport, the projects in SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 contribute with **individual focuses.**
- The relevant result indicators, which are directly connected to the funded projects, **show a positive development.**
- The project analysis indicates that the projects contribute to both dimensions of capacity-building.
 - Making new and/or **improved technologies, services and processes available for their end-users.**
 - Making their end-users aware of these new methods and technologies and enabling their adaptation by **increasing expertise and establishing network platforms.**

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme demonstrated the take up and application of green transport solutions?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to demonstrating the take up and application of green transport solutions.
- The target for the output indicator has already been **exceeded:** by the end of August 2020, 119 new and/or improved green transport solutions have been adopted.
- **All 14 projects** in the PA 4 explicitly pursue the goal to demonstrate the take up and application of these green transport solutions by doing pilots and/or tests.

Evaluation question:

What is the increased capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR (How many more people or goods are moving via sustainable means as a result of NSR investment)?

Conclusion:

- The programme has clearly contributed to increase the capacity of sustainable transport in the NSR.
- The project analysis indicates that the projects contribute to both dimensions of capacity-building.
 - Making new and/or improved technologies, products and services available especially by **establishing innovative sustainable transport solutions.**
 - Making their end-users aware of these new methods and technologies and enabling their adaptation through **demonstrations, direct involvement and co-creation processes.**
- The relevant project result indicator for the project #IWTS2.0 already shows a positive development, implying that the **programme contributes** to an **increase in the regional capacity** for the modal shift to low-carbon transport.

5.1.2 Operational Evaluation

Cooperation of programme bodies

Evaluation question:

How do programme bodies complement each other in terms of management and implementation of the programme?

Conclusion:

- The cooperation between the programme bodies is in most cases well established.
- The atmosphere is characterized by a high willingness to communicate, share knowledge and work together.
- The responsibilities and tasks of each programme bodies are clear and conducted accordingly
- The **high level of engagement** of people involved in the programme is prevalent
- **Optimisation potential** was identified in the cooperation between the JS and the NCPs and between the MC and the SC.

Common understanding of aims and objectives between programme bodies

Evaluation question:

Is there a common understanding between the programme bodies and its members about the aims and objectives of the programme and the projects expected to deliver these aims?

Conclusion:

- There is a **common understanding about the aims and objectives of the programme** between programme bodies and its members.
- There is a **common understanding about the main characteristics that projects** have to demonstrate in order to contribute to the programme objectives.
- The high degree of common understand is expected to **support the effective management and implementation of the programme.**

Communication strategy

Evaluation question:

To what extent has the programme's communication strategy contributed to reaching the specific programme management objectives?

Conclusion:

- The programme has made **considerable progress** regarding the allocation of funding, the number of funded projects and the target achievement. This indicates that the communication activities have **contributed to their objective, which is to communicate the programme to relevant stakeholders and to stimulate stakeholders to develop and deliver high quality projects.**
- Revision of the strategy shows that programme management reacts to new priorities and adapts main aims and activities according to the implementation status of the programme.

- The programme management **regularly evaluates its communication methods** and priorities and adopts changes where needed.

Structure and timing of calls for proposals

Evaluation question:

Does the structure and timing of calls for proposals support the delivery of the programme in the most effective way? What can be learned from application processes in other Interreg programmes?

Conclusion:

- **44 percent of the beneficiaries** from call 5-7 (calls after the process has been shortened) experienced the **length of the application process as acceptable** (*not too long or too short / rather short*).
- Overall, the beneficiaries still have **varying opinions** about the length of the application process. Especially for innovative topics and for-profit private beneficiaries, the overall length of the application process can be an issue.
- The majority of the lead beneficiaries (54 percent) agrees that the **two-step application was helpful** and contributed to a better project application (compared to only submitting a full application). This was clearly confirmed by the in-depth case study interviews.
- The lead beneficiaries are **very satisfied with the support** that was available to them during the application process.
- The application process is **well organised and elaborated**. Only minor improvement possibilities have been identified.
- The evaluation **sees no need** to change the overall application process or structure of the calls for proposal.

Decision-making processes at programme level

Evaluation question:

Are the decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent?

Conclusion:

- The decision-making process is **explained very clearly** in fact sheet #19
- For the majority of the lead beneficiaries, the **decision-making process was clear and transparent**.
- There is **no need for improvement** concerning the clarity and transparency of the decision-making processes.

Coordination with other Interreg programmes

Evaluation question:

How effective is the coordination with other Interreg programmes?

Conclusion:

- The coordination with other Interreg programmes occurs in a **variety of ways**, most of which are **informal**.
- The Interreg NSR programme successfully coordinates its **communication activities** with other Interreg programmes.
- Coordination and cooperation is successfully facilitated by the participation of various Interreg NSR stakeholders in other Interreg programmes, by joint events and by cooperation of projects from the Interreg NSR programme with projects from other Interreg programmes.

Synergies with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives

Evaluation question:

To what extent have synergies been created with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives?

Conclusion:

- **No synergies** were created with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives, because no direct benefit for the NSR programme is expected.

Costs and benefits of transnational cooperation

Evaluation question:

What are the costs and benefits of transnational cooperation: What measure might be used to assess the “transnational added value” of programme activities?

Conclusion:

- Effective transnational cooperation as it is realized in the NSR programme requires **highly engaged and qualified stakeholders**.
- **Costs of successful transnational cooperation (in terms of personnel and time resources invested by the actors involved) are quite high**, especially in comparison to the financial budget of the NSR programme.
- It does not seem meaningful to compare the programme’s financial budget against the personnel and time resources invested by the programme and its project actors in order to conduct a cost-benefit analysis because the benefits of transnational cooperation are often long-term and cannot be measured in monetary terms.
- From the perspective of the evaluation the **Interreg-specific impacts along the categories of empowerment, activation and application define the main benefits of transnational cooperation**. This evaluation underlines the great extent to which the NSR programme contributes to all three impact categories.
- The **added value of transnational cooperation** lies in finding common solutions for shared problems.
- The methodology applied in this evaluation proves to be valid and **adequate to grasp the**

“transnational added value” of the NSR (and other) Interreg programme.

5.2 Recommendations

Beside the very successful and effective implementation of the programme, the evaluation identified some aspects which could potentially help to further improve the Interreg NSR programme. Considering the far progressed state of implementation of the current programme, most recommendations are targeting towards the future programme 2021-2027.

Recommendations for indicators and financials



- Try to set more realistic targets for the output indicators by actively using the experience from the current funding period.
- Try to avoid using output indicators which even with a clear definition can potentially be misinterpreted and for which the values reported by the projects are difficult to validate (i.e. 0.2.).
- Continue to clearly define the output and result indicators and to provide the output indicators' definitions in a clear and understandable way to the project beneficiaries (fact sheet).
- Make sure to support beneficiaries in the definition of targets and in the reporting of values reached where necessary.

Recommendation for Interreg-specific impacts



- Continue to select projects of high complexity which contribute to different impact categories and impacts in order to achieve a high level of sustainable impact in the North Sea Region.

Recommendations for pilots



- Continue to focus on pilots as one component of future projects.
- Point out the potential benefits to applicants in order to raise awareness for the benefits of pilots.

Recommendations for the communication of findings to end-users



- Encourage lead beneficiaries and project beneficiaries to continue applying target-specific communication measures.
- Where possible, provide the beneficiaries with examples of good practices of communication to inspire them in their own communication endeavours

Recommendations for the involvement of different types of partners



- Continue to involve different types of partners in the programme to ensure a multidisciplinary perspective and a high level of innovation in the projects.
- The involvement of private organisations, business support organisations or network representatives, should be an integral part of the project partnerships to allow for a close link to practice. To increase their overall relevance, beneficiaries need to be aware of the actual demand for the products/services they want to develop within their projects.
- Take into consideration, how a stronger focus on the impact category “application” could be incorporated into the programme (e.g. by having project partnerships include short-term benefits more prominently in their projects).
- Make sure to point out and effectively communicate the potential benefits of participation for the private sector, i.e. use statements from former beneficiaries in your communication measures.

Recommendations for the impact on policy-making and policy implementation



- Continue to directly involve local and regional authorities and their decision-makers in the programme to ensure a direct link to policy-making and implementation.
- Keep a high focus on future-oriented topics in the programme in order to link projects to ongoing political debates and thus make use of the momentum for a certain topic.

Recommendations for aligning national and transnational priorities



- Continue to directly involve local and regional authorities and their decision-makers in the programme to ensure a direct link to policy-making and implementation.
- Keep a high focus on future-oriented topics in the programme in order to link projects to ongoing political debates and thus make use of the momentum for a certain topic.

Recommendations for the cooperation between programme bodies



Based on the findings, this analysis formulates the following recommendations for the current and the future funding period regarding cooperation between programme bodies:

Cooperation between JS and NCPs

- Keep the momentum from the joint meeting in March 2020 and engage actively in the NCP network and between the NCPs and JS to maintain the strong levels of cooperation.

- Regularly check and - if needed - update the working document setting out the roles and responsibilities of the NCPs and the cooperation with the JS.

Cooperation between MC and SC

In summary, efficiency is of course important for future meeting routines, but it should not be the only considered aspect in the context of a transnational INTERREG programme. Rather, adjusting the timing of the meetings and a good mix between face-to-face and digital meetings or even written procedure could be an option for the future.

- Check whether consecutive days of SC and MC meetings are possible. This would
 - reduce the timeframe of decisions to be taken by the MC after the SC to a minimum;
 - it would significantly reduce travel time and costs considering the large overlap of representatives in both committees
 - reduce the time needed for organizing the meetings compared to meeting at two different places
- Consider making use of digital meeting routines in addition to personal meetings: make sure to thoroughly evaluate for which meetings a digital format is well suited and in which cases a personal meeting is the paramount choice.
- Consider allowing for more flexibility in the decision-making processes: check whether digital voting and written procedures can be used in some cases to reach a decision.

Recommendations for the common understand of aims and objectives between programme bodies



- Continue to ensure a common understanding of the programme's aim and objectives by discussing the topic on a regular basis.
- Ensure that characteristics for good projects remain clear to all relevant actors in the future (especially potential newcomers).

Recommendations for the communication strategy



- Continue the constant and regular evaluation of communications activities and adapt accordingly to current needs and implementation status of the programme.
- Check whether the blog and all social media channels are equally important and effective. Make sure to concentrate resources on the most effective measures. Use events, the newsletter and the website to raise awareness of the good social media activities and actively invite people to follow your channels to increase its reach.
- Consider the different needs for communication when designing the new communication strategy based on the experiences of the current programme to avoid the necessity of revising the communication strategy.
- Ensure the full documentation and consideration of data for the output indicator to quantify target achievement.

Recommendations for the structure and timing of calls for proposals



Two-step application procedure

- From the beginning it should be made transparent to applicants when they will receive the notification, if their project application (EoI and full application) has been approved by the programme. This would help the planning of the organisations involved in each application and would also allow them to potentially find a more fitting funding scheme for their project idea in case the processes in the NSR programme are considered too long.
- The section “conclusions” of the assessment report written by the JS should have a character limit, to shorten the length of these assessments in order to simplify the following work of the Steering Committee.
- The number of characters in the EoI form could be limited even further, to make this first step of the application process even more efficient.
- The form for the full application could integrate a section about the changes compared to the EoI, to help the approver to understand the progress the project’s application has made since the EoI.

Length of the application process

- Digital formats and written procedures instead of meetings in person could be considered to simplify and possibly even shorten the duration of processes further.
- Finetuning of timing could help to further improve the internal processes from the programme bodies’ side: Consider call periods carefully and take holidays into account; potentially combine meetings of Monitoring Committee and Steering Committee to fasten processes.

Support during application process

- Continue the very good support to applicants during the whole application process.
- Be very aware of the specific EU-terminology and ensure consistent use especially between JS and NCPs.

Recommendations for the coordination with other Interreg programmes



- Continue the active exchange and coordination with other programmes, especially through Interact and personal contact with colleagues from other programmes

Recommendations for synergies with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives



- Keep the possibility to create synergies with other ERDF and EU funds initiatives in mind and make use of them where possible.

APPENDIX 1

ONLINE SURVEY LEAD BENEFICIARIES – QUESTIONNAIRE

The Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme
Programme Secretariat of the Interreg VB North Sea Programme 2014 - 2020

February 2020

INTERREG VB NORTH SEA REGION OPERATIONAL- AND IMPACT- EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME (2014-2020)

ONLINE SURVEY LEAD BENEFICIARIES FROM THE FUNDING PERIOD 2014-2020

YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS

In this section we would like to ask you some questions regarding your experiences in the application process for your North Sea Region Programme project *project-title*.

1. Was the decision-making process clear and transparent to you?

Please respond to the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
It was clear to me which programme bodies were involved in the selection process of my application.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was clear to me which project selection criteria were applied.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. What did you think of the duration of the decision-making process?

By decision-making process we mean the time from submission of your application until the approval of your application by the programme's Steering Committee.

	Too long	Neither too long nor too short	Too short	Don't know
Expression of Interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Full Application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. How satisfied were you with the support that was available to you during the application process?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
Explanatory text provided in the application form	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support by the Joint Secretariat (e.g. by phone and/or email)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support by the national contact points (e.g. by phone and/or email)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fact sheets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interwork event preceding the call for proposals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. In your opinion, the length of the application process, from submission of your Expression of Interest to the decision on your full application, was:

Too long	Neither too long nor too short	Too short	Don't know	We submitted a full application in Call 1
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

The two-step application (Expression of Interest and Full Application) process was introduced to allow new and less experienced beneficiaries to experiment with a project proposal without making a significant time and budget commitment.

5. Please respond to the following statement: The two-step application procedure helped us produce a better project application in the end than if we had only submitted a full application:

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	We submitted a full application in Call 1
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Do you have any further remarks regarding the application process?

[open textfield]

OUTCOMES OF YOUR PROJECT

In the following questions we would like to address the target achievements and potential impacts of key results of your project. The focus lies on cross-cutting issues and centres, on the one hand, on the benefits that apply to your own organisation, and on the other hand on the outcomes of your project beyond your organisation and beyond your partnership.

7. According to your current project plan, how far along are you with implementation?

Please rate on a scale from 0% to 100%.



The next question examines the benefits that your own organisation has gained from participating in the project.

8. Please indicate whether the following effects have occurred in your organisation as a result of your participation in the project

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Gaining know-how and skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved internal knowledge transfer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Further training of employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development and improvement of products and tools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More efficient use of human and technical resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased capacity to work in transnational projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	[open textfield]					

Moving on from your organisation's benefits to the broader outcomes of your project beyond your organisation and the partnership:

9. Our project has contributed to the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Build-up of knowledge and skills among key stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raising key stakeholders' awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increasing the capacity to act among key stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating an organisational base (e.g. new management and coordination tools) for an intensified political coordination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raising awareness of the value of transnational cooperation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing communication channels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pooling and communication of interests on a transnational level (e.g. by founding new international task forces, development of transnational agenda)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enhanced awareness among decision makers of the relevant topic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased exchange of knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creation of better framework conditions which stimulate innovation (e.g. making new technologies accessible, mobilising financial resources)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raising awareness of the added-value of new methods and approaches	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Common development of new and/or the improvement of existing processes and procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Awareness raising of new and/or improved processes and procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development of planning processes and management structures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvement of framework conditions to initiate structural changes (e.g. founding of new institutions, creation of funding programmes)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In the next question we would like to learn more about the factors that might influence your project's success.

10. Please respond to the following statement: The following aspects are important to the successful implementation of our project:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Our project has addressed significant transnational challenges .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In our project we have reached an agreement on common goals and interests .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our partnership includes all relevant organisations necessary for implementation of our project activities .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In our project we have identified synergies with thematically related collaborative schemes which were already in place (e.g. other Interreg projects or networks/associations/fora outside the programme)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our project is managed professionally (e.g. the project manager helps build a strong team spirit, ensures all partners are well informed, helps partners with reporting and financial issues, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please respond to the following statement: The output indicators for our project capture sufficiently what the project is achieving:

Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PILOTS IN YOUR PROJECT

In the following questions we would like to address project pilots your partnership might be implementing. Their purpose is to test new or improved approaches with clear and measurable differences to standard practices.

12. Have you carried out pilots in your project?

Yes, we have finished the pilots	<input type="radio"/>
Yes, we have started the pilots	<input type="radio"/>
No, we haven't started yet	<input type="radio"/>
No, pilots are not included in our project	<input type="radio"/>
Don't know	<input type="radio"/>

Filter: Only if question 12 item 1 or 2 (yes, we have finished the pilots" oder „yes, we just started the pilots") ausgewählt wurde.

13. Please respond to the following statement: The pilots in our project have helped us test a new or improved approach in our project:

[Pflichtangabe]

Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Filter: Only if question 12 item 1 or 2 (yes, we have finished the pilots" oder „yes, we just started the pilots") ausgewählt wurde.

14. What do you think are the advantages of pilots in your project?

You can choose more than one answer.

Pilots show concrete practical solutions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pilots make results more tangible	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pilots help build stakeholder support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pilots are a useful testbed for theoretical project findings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pilots support the learning process because, as testbeds, they don't have to fulfil all expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: (text field)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Filter: Only if question 12 item 1 or 2 (yes, we have finished the pilots" oder „yes, we just started the pilots") ausgewählt wurde.

15. What do you think are the challenges of implementing pilots in your project?

You can choose more than one answer.

Difficulty ensuring their transferability to other organisations in the North Sea Region	<input type="checkbox"/>
External factors out of our control (e.g. lack of necessary local permits)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effort/investment too high for the expected result	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: (text field)	<input type="checkbox"/>

COMMUNICATION

The next question aims at getting more insights on the dissemination processes of the gained project results, e.g. the communication towards the target groups.

16. Which target groups have you addressed with which means of communication?

Please fill in as many as are applicable to your project.

		Means of communication						
		Newsletters	Homepages	Social Media	Workshops / Conferences	Fairs/ Exhibitions	Press (e.g. newspaper)	Other: (text field)
Target Group	Public authorities (local, national, regional)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	EGTCs (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Infrastructure and public service providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Sectoral agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Higher education and research institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Education/Training centres and schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	International organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Interest groups including NGOs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Business support organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	SMEs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	General Public	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other: (text field)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. Please respond to the following statement: The following means of communication and publicity are useful to disseminating the outcomes of our project:

Means of communication	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Newsletter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homepages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Workshops/Conferences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fairs/Exhibitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Press (e.g. newspaper)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

INVOLVEMENT OF FOR-PROFIT PRIVATE COMPANIES

In many Interreg projects, private partners are a vital part of the transnational partnership.

*We would like to know more about the involvement of for-profit private partners in your project **project title**.*

18. Are any beneficiaries in your project's partnership for-profit private companies?

Yes	<input type="radio"/>
No	<input type="radio"/>
Don't know	<input type="radio"/>

Filter: Only if question 18 item „yes“

19. Please respond to the following statement: The involvement of for-profit private companies is important to the successful implementation of our project:

Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Filter: **Only if question 18 item „yes“**

20. What are the concrete advantages of involving for-profit private companies for your project?

You can choose more than one answer.

Possible transfer of project results into practice	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical „on the ground“ knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledge on specific needs of target groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contacts and access to networks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wider distribution of project results	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	[open textfield]

Filter: Filter: Only if question 18 item „no“

21. If your project does not involve for-profit private companies:

Based on your experience, what were the factors that hindered for-profit private companies from participating in your project?

You can choose more than one answer.

State aid requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Administrative requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of financial resources	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Length and timing of project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Profit orientation / Income generation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	[open textfield]

INFLUENCING THE POLICY LEVEL

We would like to know more your project's contributions to policy making or policy influence.

22. Please respond to the following statement: Our project has contributed to raising awareness among key political decision-makers in the following areas:

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Knowledge partnerships between business, knowledge institutions, administration and end-users	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regional innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public service delivery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Greening economy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increasing renewable energy and reducing overall energy use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Climate resilience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sustainable management of North Sea ecosystems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Innovative transport and logistic solutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Green transport	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	[open textfield]					

23. How has your project contributed to increasing the capacity of decision-makers and enabling them to introduce changes at different political levels?

(e.g. gaining background knowledge or learning about best-practice examples from others that can be transferred to their area)

	Directly	Indirectly	Not the focus of the project	Don't know
Local level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regional level (NUTS 2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
European level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. Please specify.

[open textfield]

25. Have national laws and/or regulations been directly impacted by the outcomes of your project? If yes, please elaborate.

[open textfield]

ADDED-VALUE OF INTERREG

26. From your point of view: what is the biggest added value of participating in a North Sea Region Programme project?

[open textfield]

APPENDIX 2

ONLINE SURVEY PRIVATE BENEFICIARIES - QUESTIONNAIRE

**The Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme
Programme Secretariat of the Interreg VB North Sea Programme 2014 - 2020**

March 2020

INTERREG VB NORTH SEA REGION OPERATIONAL- AND IMPACT- EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME (2014-2020) ONLINE SURVEY PRIVATE BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION FOR THE FUNDING PERIOD 2014-2020

1. What are your organisation's main motivations for participating in the Interreg North Sea Region programme project **project-title?**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Gaining know-how and skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased capacity to work in transnational projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased capacity for innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing new networks and new contacts with other organisations or experts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity to enlarge the company's customer base	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved internal knowledge transfer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Further training of employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Implementation of new products or processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More efficient use of human and technical resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify):	[open textfield]					

In the following we would like to know whether your participation in the North Sea Region Programme is financially profitable for your enterprise.

2. **Has the investment your company has made in the project (whether staff hours and/or actual capital) been financially profitable?**

Yes	No	Don't know
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

We would like to know which benefits the participation in the North Sea Region Programme had for you.

3. **Please indicate whether your organisation has derived the following benefits as a result of your participation in the North Sea Region Programme project **project-title**.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Gaining know-how and skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased capacity to work in transnational projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased capacity for innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing new networks and new contacts with other organisations or experts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity to enlarge the company's customer base	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved internal knowledge transfer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Further training of employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Implementation of new products or processes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More efficient use of human and technical resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify):	[open textfield]					

*Finally, we would like to know whether you encountered any obstacles before or during your participation in the North Sea Region Programme project **project-title**.*

4. **Please respond to the following statement: The following made our participation in the North Sea Region Programme project **project-title** more difficult.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Disagree	Don't know
State aid requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administrative requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strain on financial resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strain on human resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Length and timing of project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uncertainty about financial profitability of the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify):	[open textfield]					

APPENDIX 3

CASE STUDIES – LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Priority Axis 1: Soft Landing for SMEs in the NSR (SO1.1, call 1, 28 project beneficiaries)	
Role in the project	Organisation
Project advisor:	Anne Pintz, Isabella Leong
Lead beneficiary:	Vaeksthus Sjaelland
Project beneficiary: Private organisation	Business Development Friesland - Inqubator Leeuwarden
Target group:	MEPTEK
Priority Axis 2: Dual Ports (SO2.2, call 1, 17 project beneficiaries)	
Role in the project	Organisation
Project advisor:	Jesper Jönsson
Lead beneficiary:	Haven Oostende, NV van Publiek Recht
Project beneficiary:	Hvide Sande Fjernvarme A.m.b.A.
Project beneficiary: University	Uppsala University
Target group:	Danish ports federation
Priority Axis 3: PARTRIDGE (SO3.2, call 2, 13 project beneficiaries)	
Role in the project	Organisation
Project advisor:	Sarah Holsen, Axel Kristiansen and Jenny Thomsen
Lead beneficiary:	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
Project beneficiary: Private organisation	Odling I Balans

Project beneficiary: University	Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
Target group:	Farmer based in Göttingen
Priority Axis 4: SHARE-North (SO4.2, call 1, 10 project beneficiaries)	
Role in the project	Organisation
Project advisor:	Sarah Holsen and Peter Racz
Lead beneficiary:	Freie Hansestadt Bremen
Project beneficiary: Private organisation	Advier
Project beneficiary: University	Lunds university
Target group:	Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen

APPENDIX 4

CASE STUDIES – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Please note: depending on the Case Study and the interview partner, the following questions were adapted and asked accordingly (see info in brackets next to the questions). Moreover, PA-specific questions were added to the interviews. Therefore each interview that was conducted, was structured by an individualised set of questions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS EXPERT INTERVIEW

May 2020

Project **Operational and Impact Evaluation INTERREG VB programme North Sea Region**

Content **Introduction**

1. Application and decision-making process
2. Pilots and Communication of findings
3. Impacts
4. Thematic impacts PA-specific

1. Application and decision-making process

Application Process (questions only for lead beneficiaries)

1. What is your opinion on the length of the application process, from submission of your Expression of Interest to the decision on your full application? Was it too long/neither too long nor too short/rather short? Why?
2. Has the two-step application procedure helped you produce a better project application in the end than if you had only submitted a full application? Why (not)?
3. How satisfied were you with the support that was available to you during the application process? What kind of support did you use? How did it help you in the application process? What could have been better/should be improved?
 - Joint Secretariat
 - Fact sheets
 - explanatory text provided in application form
 - support by national contact points
 - Interwork event preceding calls for proposal

Decision-making process (questions only for lead beneficiaries/project advisors)

4. Was the decision-making process clear and transparent to you? If no: why? What was not clear and how could this be improved?
 - Was it clear which programme bodies were involved in the selection process?
 - Were the applied criteria clear and transparent to you?

(question only for lead beneficiaries)
5. Do you have any remarks regarding the application and decision-making process in general and specifically in regard to the project of this Case Study? (question only for project advisors)

2. Pilots and Communication of findings

Pilots (questions for project advisors, lead beneficiaries, partly target group)

6. How are/were findings validated through pilots (and consultation with target group)?
7. What would you say were the key benefits from the pilots that have been implemented in the project? How did pilots contribute to
 - Show concrete practical solutions
 - Help build stakeholder support
 - Support the learning process because (as testbeds) they don't have to fulfil all expectations
 - Make results more tangible
 - Being useful testbeds for theoretical project findings
8. What are/were difficulties with implementing pilots? How have you dealt with them?
9. What are your lessons learned from the pilots and tests in the project? Would you recommend to other beneficiaries to implement pilots and tests in their project (regardless of any obligation)?

Communication of findings to target group (questions for project advisors, lead beneficiaries, target group)

10. How do you communicate your project's findings to the target group? (Workshops/Newsletter/press/social media/homepages/fairs) Which ways of communication do you consider to be most effective? How do you assess the effort in relation to the benefit?
11. Are findings also communicated to target groups elsewhere in the programme area, i.e. beyond the regions that are involved in your project? How?

3. Impacts

Benefits for private sector (questions for project advisors, lead beneficiaries, private beneficiaries)

12. Do you find participation in the North Sea Region Programme financially profitable? If yes: how has this become apparent in your company? How exactly did you profit financially? If no: why not? Was the participation nonetheless beneficial? (question only for private beneficiaries)
13. What were the main benefits for you (private beneficiaries)/the private sector from the project (besides direct funding) (e.g. establishing new networks and new contacts etc.)
14. Would you again participate in the North Sea Region Programme? Why/why not?

Benefits for Public Institutions, Universities and enterprises in terms of effective processes and workflows (question for project advisors, lead beneficiaries, private beneficiaries and universities; questions will be formulated accordingly)

15. Can you name an example on how your project contributed to effective processes and workflows within public institutions, universities and enterprises?
 - More efficient use of human and technical resources
 - Improved internal knowledge transfer
 - Further training of employees

Impact on policy making/national legislation (questions for project advisors, lead beneficiaries)

16. Does your project aim at placing topics higher on the political agenda or at influencing changes in laws or regulations?
17. Has your project had any impact on placing topics higher on the political agenda? Or has it maybe even influenced any changes in laws or regulations? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?
18. Did the project raise awareness among key political decision-makers? How?

Impact on capacity of decision-makers (questions for project advisors, lead beneficiaries)

19. Does your project aim at increasing the capacity of decision-makers (i.e. to enable them to introduce changes as political level)?
20. Has your project contributed to increasing the capacity of decision-makers How? (e.g. by informing them about project or by directly involving them in the conduct of the project? (Decision-makers on national, regional or local level)

4. Thematic impacts PA-specific

Thematic impacts PA-specific: (questions for project advisors, lead beneficiaries, possibly private beneficiaries/universities/target group)

Note: depending on the case study and the interview partner, these questions were adapted.

APPENDIX 5

ESG WORKSHOP – PARTICIPANTS

Name	Role in the project, besides ESG
Asger Andreasen	Monitoring Committee / Steering Committee
Albin Hunia	National Contact Point
Katherine Louise Clarke	National Contact Point, Steering Committee and the North Sea Commission
Carsten Westerholt	/
Sandra Vandewiele	National Contact Point
Sebastian Delic	National Contact Point
Vanessa Pilley	National Contact Point
Linn Kristoffersson	/
Jesper Jönsson	Joint Secretariat
Sarah Holsen	Joint Secretariat

APPENDIX 6

FURTHER INTERVIEWS/FEEDBACK

Programme bodies:	Joint Secretariat (Sarah Holsen and Jesper Jönsson)
	National Contact Points (participants of workshop in 09/19 Hamburg: Lisa Krägeloh, Sandra Vandewiele, Vanessa Pilley, Albin Hunia, Andreas Catoni, Sebastian Delic, Kathrine Louise Clarke)
Project beneficiaries:	Region Midtjylland (projects TOPSOIL and C5a)
Target group representatives:	Shared Use Mobility Center (USA)