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INTERACT Study towards cross-programme evaluation

Operational aspects of cross-programme cooperation in Central and South-Eastern Europe

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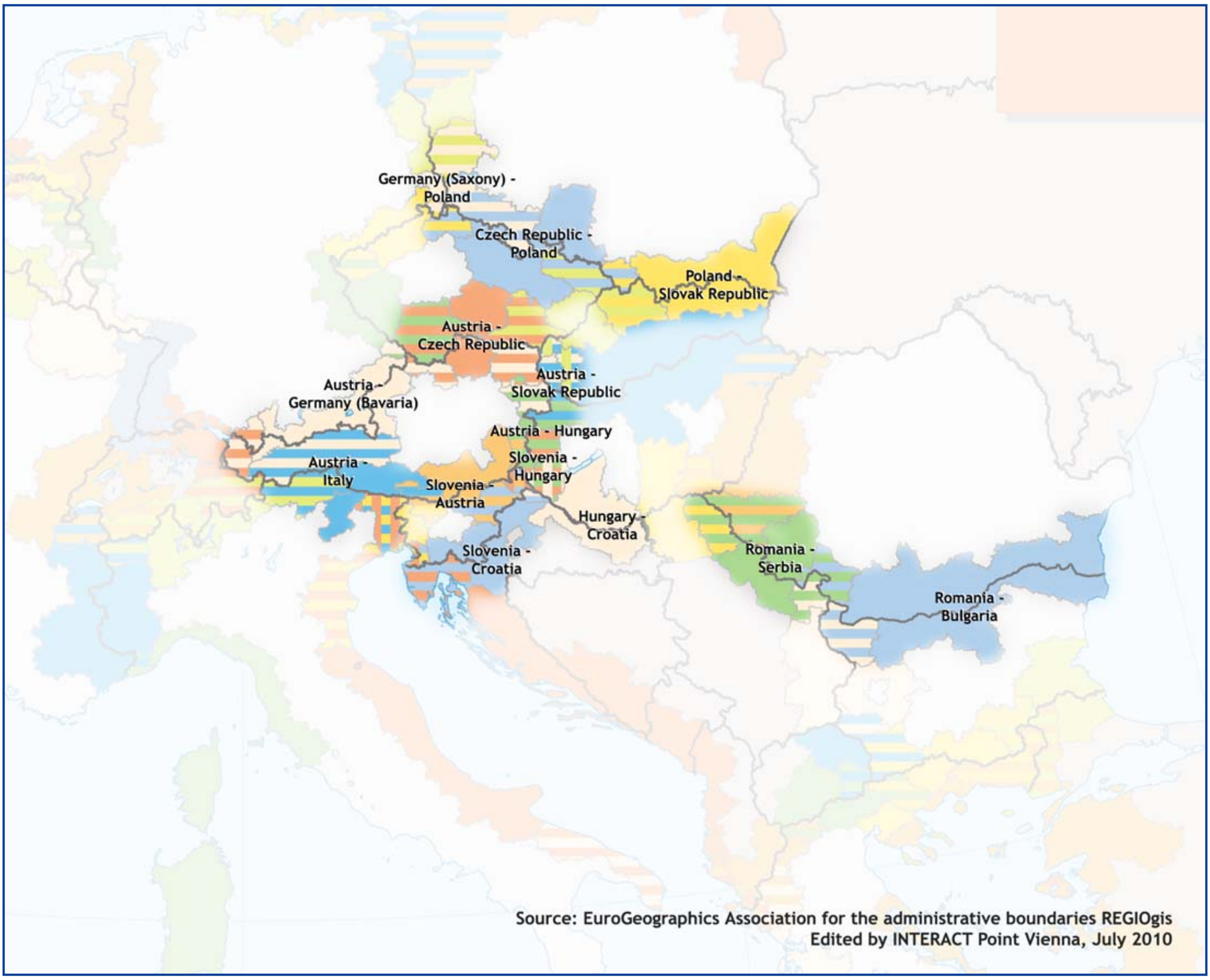

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Executive Summary

The 2007-2013 regulatory framework introduced the use of joint evaluations, which offer the possibility to cross-check several aspects of a programme during its lifecycle. INTERACT Point Vienna conducted two pilot studies aimed at testing joint evaluations of cross-border cooperation programmes in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The studies differ in terms of focus and approach: this "operational study" addresses operational and technical aspects involved in implementing programmes and the "thematic study" deals with thematic aspects and the added value of cross-border cooperation. The outcomes of thematic evaluation are summarised in the report "INTERACT Study towards cross-programme evaluation. Thematic aspects of cross-programme cooperation in Central and South-Eastern Europe: Understanding the added value."[1]

The overview of the whole pilot cross-programme evaluation — including main common findings of both studies, the description of evaluation process, limitations and lessons learned from the exercise — can be found in joint executive summary.[2]

Of the 28 cross-border programmes in the INTERACT Point Vienna Zone[3] invited to join this pilot exercise, 14 programmes decided to participate in the operational study, including 11 European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and three Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance Cross Border Cooperation programmes (IPA CBC).

Programme participation in the cross-programme evaluation pilot on Operational Aspects[4]:

EU 12: Poland-Slovakia (PL-SK), Poland-Czech Republic (PL-CZ), Romania-Bulgaria (RO-BG), Slovenia-Hungary (SI-HU)

EU 15: Italy-Austria (IT-AT), Austria–Germany (Bavaria) (AT-DE (BAVARIA))

EU 12-15: Slovenia-Austria (SI-AT), Austria-Hungary (AT-HU), Austria-Czech Republic (AT-CZ), Austria-Slovakia (AT-SK), Germany (Saxony)-Poland(DE (SAXONY)-PL)

IPA CBC: Hungary-Croatia (HU-HR), Romania-Serbia (RO-RS), Slovenia-Croatia (SI-HR)

Both pilot studies started with a joint kick-off meeting in Brussels on January 2010, at which time representatives of participating programmes and experts agreed on the objectives, scope and timeframe of the analyses. The results of both pilots were presented and discussed with participating programmes at a joint closing meeting in June 2010.

The operational study was mainly based on interviews of programme stakeholders and three interactive synthesis workshops, during which programme representatives discussed details of their operational practice and had extensive opportunities to exchange experience and opinions. A team of seven national experts supported the lead responsible expert (R. Hummelbrunner). They carried out interviews with programme stakeholders, assembled the programme synthesis reports and contributed to the synthesis workshops and the final report.

1 Available at http://www.interact-eu.net/interact_publications/316

2 http://www.interact-eu.net/interact_publications/316

3 There are four INTERACT Points in Europe (Valencia-ES, Viborg-DK, Turku-FI and Vienna-AT) each of which serves a geographic Zone in Europe. INTERACT Point Vienna's zone covers 28 cross-border cooperation programmes from Central and South-Eastern Europe.

4 Programme names according to Inforegio website: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prordn/search.cfm?gv_pay=ALL&gv_reg=ALL&gv_obj=11&gv_the=ALL&lan=EN&gv_per=2.

The operational study focused on three aspects of the programme cycle that were considered important for the participating programmes at the current stage: project generation, assessment of proposals and project selection. Major findings are summarised below.

Project generation

- **Guidance or competition:** Programmes either practice on-going submissions or call systems to generate projects. Ongoing submissions put less time constraints on applicants and are thus favoured by programme actors who wish to guide project development over a period of time. Programme actors who wish to emphasise the competitive element in the selection procedure favour call systems. The approach taken can also determine the primary interface between project applicants and programmes: Ongoing submissions often imply a strong role for regional bodies (RBs) in screening project ideas and determining support provided to applicants. Open calls for proposals often require a strong role of the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS). There are also significant differences between EU 12 and EU 12-15 programmes: Most EU 12 programmes use calls for proposals, while programmes involving both EU 12 and 15 member states often employ on-going submission.
- **Considerable differences in requirements:** Programmes have very different requirements for applicants, and as a result, the workload for applicants varies. In some cases, substantial differences even exist *within* a programme for applicants of different partner countries. These differences relate not only to application requirements and procedures but also to: the provision of co-financing – either required beforehand or granted as a result of joint project selection; the level of expected co-operation – parallel or complimentary activities vs. joint actions; and the preference for types of projects – infrastructure or investment projects vs. “soft” activities.
- **Strategic project generation is rarely practiced:** Some programmes foresee criteria and mechanisms for strategic projects, but so far such strategically generated projects have rarely been implemented. Several programmes would like to move more in the direction of strategic projects, but the main challenge seems to be reaching consensus between partner countries. The strategic importance of a project is often defined at the regional level rather than being based on common interests.
- **Experiences with the lead-partner principle are mixed:** Although most actors agree that the lead-partner principle effectively supports the generation and implementation of joint projects, negative side effects have been noticed. These include an increase in administrative and capacity requirements on the side of the lead partner and the transfer of responsibilities from other partners to the lead partner. The demanding requirements for the lead partner also tend to favour experienced project partners, with sufficient capacity and resources, and discourage less experienced actors from taking over lead partner responsibilities.

The main tendencies and emerging practices identified in project generation include the following: Programmes increasingly aim at achieving a stronger strategic focus in project generation. As part of this effort, programmes provide more information and support at early stages of project development – such as exchange of project ideas and aiding in partner search. Some programmes use a call system for the generation of certain types of projects but not for others. In more strategic thematic fields, these programmes support project generation from the project idea through the application process. This type of project is not ranked, and receives co-financing without competition. Efforts are also being made to harmonise programme conditions – such as level of support provided or requirements – on both sides of a border. Some programmes have introduced pre-financing, to alleviate the financial burden and risk of project owners.

Assessment of proposals

- **Guidance or competition:** The assessment of proposals most often parallels the approach used for project generation and influences the role of RBs in the assessment: Ongoing submissions support a strong role of RBs not only in project generation but also in the assessment of proposals. In programmes using an open call for proposals, the JTS plays a stronger role. Since EU 12-15 programmes favour ongoing submissions, these programmes involve RB in the assessment much more often than do EU 12 programmes.

- **External experts:** Most programmes use external experts, in addition to internal experts, for the assessment of proposals. External experts are used in all EU 12 programmes, though in some cases this is done by only one partner country, acting unilaterally. External experts are used less frequently in EU 12-15 programmes, mainly due to different management traditions and/or national requirements. All participating IPA CBC programmes use external experts.
- **Discomfort with simple scoring systems:** Strong reservations have been raised against scoring systems that just contain points, without any further explanations. Such “black box” systems are not sufficiently transparent and not useful for guiding monitoring committee (MC) decisions. These systems may even undermine trust between partners. Scoring is more effective when it uses calibrated scales – which specify properties for the numbers on a scale, to provide clear information for all assessors involved – as well as a verbal, qualitative. assessment.
- **Manifold problems with assessors:** Programmes using external experts for the assessment of proposals often experience substantial problems in terms of quality of work and impartiality. Ensuring quality assessments requires substantial efforts, including training sessions and efforts to raise awareness among assessors of the specific needs and challenges of territorial cooperation programmes. Some programmes experience similar difficulties with internal assessors, but this seems to be most common in cases where public officials who are participating in the evaluation are considered internal. Public officials are not paid additional money for this work, so there is often not enough incentive for them to learn about territorial cooperation and provide quality assessments.
- **Mixed experience with flexibility during assessment process:** Only a few programmes allow applicants to amend their applications during the assessment process – for example, to submit a corrected co-financing statement. There are mixed opinions concerning the usefulness of this step. Whereas some see this as an element for gradually improving applications, others expressed concern that the opportunity to revisit the application complicates the process and adds confusion.

The main tendencies and emerging practices identified in the assessment of proposals include the following: programmes try to limit the use of external experts to certain aspects of the assessment, such as very technical parts, specific issues or project types; programmes increasingly establish groups of assessors, containing both internal and external experts, and also strengthen the role and involvement of the JTS in the management of the process and the synthesis of results. Other ideas gaining ground include allowing direct contact with applicants during the assessment phase. And assessing the quality of an application’s content independently from co-financing deliberations (in cases where currently the co-financing decision is also taken as content assessment, e.g. in AT).

Selection of projects

- **Differences of Monitoring Committee (MC) involvement:** MCs are the dominant decision-making body and only two of the analysed programmes use separate steering committees. In some programmes, MC decisions are embedded in a process of gradually developing joint opinions between partners. In other programmes, the MC has the task of selecting projects ad-hoc, without any prior consultation taken place between the partners**.**
- **Political influence during the selection process is limited:** Political influence is mainly exerted outside of (and before) MC meetings. One reason for this is that few MCs have political representatives as members. Another reason that these committees are depoliticised is that the consensus principle applied in MC decision-making has proven useful for mitigating political pressures. Some programmes use

thresholds or project ranking lists to guide MC decision-making, a practice that further limits opportunities for political influence.

- **The influence of regional level is important:** Aside from selection criteria, regional interests and pressure by regional-level representatives, including RBs) are among the most important factors influencing the choice of projects. The importance given to the regional level is connected to the concern for regional balance –a desire to assure that all regions benefit from programme resource that is sometimes expressed through indicative allocations or "shadow tables".
- **Mixed experience with conditional approvals:** Most programmes practice conditional approvals, but the type of condition varies considerably among programmes – from documents to be submitted or changes in the project design prior to starting, to requirements to be fulfilled during implementation. Conditional approvals can be a way to prevent MC deadlocks, which sometimes occur as a consequence of the consensus principle. (Another option in these cases is to put projects on hold). Follow-up on conditions is predominantly the task of JTS, and it does not seem to pose major problems. Opinions on the usefulness of conditional approvals are mixed: Critics say conditionality adds to confusion in the selection process and allows projects that do not adequately meet the selection criteria to be accepted "through the back door".

The main tendencies and emerging practices identified in the selection of projects include the following: There is growing awareness that project selection should be done more in line with programme objectives/strategies rather than guided by individual interests or needs. To this aim, some programmes modify MC membership, perhaps reducing the number of members, in order to achieve a more balanced representation. Some programmes also modify the MC decision-making process, for example by limiting voting rights of regional representatives. Other measures to actively improve the process include providing instruction to MC members on their tasks and responsibilities, providing them with information early on and/or speeding up the selection process altogether. Some programmes are also introducing an element of "pre-selection", which can involve preparatory meetings or thematic working groups.

Territorial cooperation in the larger context

- **Exchanges with other programmes:** The operational study also analysed the exchange of territorial cooperation programmes with other relevant European Union (EU) programmes. The study found that exchanges mainly take place with adjacent territorial cooperation programmes, Objectives 1 and 2 programmes and - in some cases - also LEADER programmes. The potential for improving cooperation and linkages is mainly seen with regard to other territorial cooperation programmes, in particular adjacent cross-border cooperation programmes in "trilateral" areas. Better coordination and communication is needed between cross-border and transnational strands.

- **Reaching beyond the programme boundaries:** Programmes are open to the participation of actors located outside of the programme area. All of them apply the so-called "20% rule", which allows for up to 20% of ERDF funds to be used to finance expenditure incurred by partners located outside the programme area. Replication of successful projects in other cross-border cooperation programmes is seen as a useful way to transfer ideas and good practices, but it is only occasionally practiced. Transfers to other mainstream programmes (Objectives 1 and 2) are not seen as feasible, because the focus areas of these programmes, as well as their dynamics and structures, are quite different. Fast track or capitalisation approaches are considered less useful for the transfer of successful projects to other programmes, and there are general doubts about the usefulness of this approach in the cross-border cooperation context.
- **Territorial cooperation programmes and macro-regional strategies:** Programmes generally agree that they need to be embedded in a wider context, such as that provided by macro-regional strategies, like

the EU Strategy for the Danube Region - EUSDR. But some doubt the usefulness of macro-regional strategies, or at least caution against using them as a reference frame for ETC programmes, due to concerns about the practical implications for cross-border cooperation programmes. The findings imply that incorporating cross-border cooperation programmes into macro-regional strategies would foremost require a multi-national governance structure, capable of liasing between macro-regional strategies and territorial cooperation programmes as well as between the cooperation strands. Provided such a framework exists, territorial cooperation programmes could be modified in view of macro-regional strategies – in terms of project generation, assessment and selection, as well as earmarking for budget allocations.

The chapters and sections in this report highlight significant patterns, including commonalities and key differences; illustrate the experience gained on the ground through interesting/good practices; and assemble the various ideas for improvement mentioned by programme actors.

The report is structured as follows: After some background information (Chapter 1) and an outline of the methodology (Chapter 2), Chapter 3 provides a summary overview of participating programmes. Thereafter, the three main organisational aspects at the heart of the analysis are presented in three consecutive chapters: project generation (4), assessing applications (5) and selecting projects (6). Chapter 7 analyses ETC programmes in the wider context, including development of macro-regional strategies. Chapter 8 presents concluding remarks, some reflections on the utilisation of cross-programme evaluations and an assessment of the outlook, with suggestions concerning future activities.

Acronyms and glossary

AA	Audit Authority
AF	Application form
CA	Certifying Authority
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EU 12	EU Member States that joined in 2004 or later
EU 15	EU Member States that joined before 2004
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
FLC	First level controller
IB	Intermediary Body
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
LP	Lead partner
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NA	National Authority
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
PP	Project partner
RB	Regional Body
RDA	Regional development agency
SC	Steering Committee
TA	Technical Assistance

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1. Background and rationale

On 20 January 2010, representatives of 11 interested programmes, the European Commission (EC) and INTERACT came together in Brussels for a kick-off workshop to agree on the objective, method and timeframe of the cross-programme evaluation pilot. This group constituted the **advisory group** for the whole cross-programme evaluation.

At the kick-off workshop, the advisory group agreed upon the following **basic rules**:

- The cross-programme evaluation should be **needs-driven** and guided by the interest of participating programmes. Therefore, only topics that are of relevance to all programmes will be addressed in the cross-programme evaluation.
- The main aim of the evaluation is a comparative analysis of experiences and challenges. That means that the cross-programme evaluation is a collaborative **learning exercise** and not a judgment of individual programmes. To achieve learning across programmes requires the willingness to share and discuss experiences. To safeguard this kind of open climate, all information that is intended for wider dissemination must be endorsed by the participants beforehand.
- The results of the cross-programme evaluation also could be useful for the development of **macro-regional strategies** in Europe (e.g. EUSDR).
- Cross-programme evaluation cannot substitute for programme-specific evaluations, but should complement and inspire these more focused evaluations. The insights derived from the cross-programme evaluation could therefore be used as **inputs for programme-specific evaluations**. Conversely, if such programme-specific evaluations are already carried out and provide relevant findings, these should feed into the cross-programme evaluation process.

2. Methodology

Topics

Based on preliminary feedback from programmes, the following two focus areas were agreed upon at the kick-off meeting of the operational cross-programme analysis:

1. Operational aspects along the programme cycle: The study focused on the following three stages, for which the advisory group provided a range of specific aspects/questions to be addressed (see Research Grid – Annex 1 and Interview Guide – Annex 2 for more details):
   - Project generation
   - Assessment of proposals
   - Project selection
2. Topics in relation to the wider context of ETC programmes:
   - Swift transfer of projects and experiences beyond the immediate cooperation area – through use of the 10%/20% rule, replication of project ideas, fast track and capitalisation projects;
   - Coordination between ETC and other relevant EU programmes, in particular other mainstream programmes, using existing contacts and channels for information flows;
   - Incorporation of macro-regional strategies in programme decision making, in the area of structures as well as mechanisms.

Collection of data and information

As a first step, a research grid was elaborated. The grid outlined all the information to be collected and agreed upon by the advisory group (see Annex 1). Based on this research grid, it was possible to elaborate the tools for information collection – an interview guide and questionnaires (see Annexes 2-4.).

Most of the data collection was carried out by a team of **national experts (Table 1)**, who were subcontracted for these tasks. They were responsible for the following countries and programmes:

Table 1: List of national experts and their responsibilities

Experts	Countries	Programmes
Richard Hummelbrunner, Doris Wiederwald	AT, DE, IT	AT-CZ, AT-DE (BAVARIA), SI-AT, AT-SK, AT-HU, IT-AT, DE (SAXONY)-PL
Ales Oven	SI, HR	SI-AT, SI-HU, SI-HR, HU-HR
Jobbágy Valér	HU	AT-HU, SI-HU, HU-HR
Daniel Neagoe-Bacanu	RO, BG	RO-BG, RO-RS
Marie Kaufmann	CZ, SK	AT-CZ, PL-CZ, AT-SK, PL-SK
Anna Borowczak	PL	PL-SK, DE (SAXONY)-PL, PL-CZ
Ivan Knezevic	RS	RO-RS

Interviews were carried out with key stakeholders of the programmes: programme bodies managing authorities (MA), JTS, intermediary bodies (IBs)/regional bodies (RBs), national authorities and other stakeholders considered relevant by the involved programmes. The participating programmes proposed a list of persons to be interviewed.

Since much of the information to be collected dealt with qualitative aspects, and required tapping tacit knowledge of actors, face-to-face interviews of individuals or groups were used for the study. The information from these interviews was complemented with other relevant material, including programme documents, manuals for applicants or calls for proposals.

Altogether, 96 interviews involving approximately 120 stakeholders were carried out between March – Mid-April 2010. The following **Table 2** gives an overview of the number of interviews per programme, broken down by type of actor. The results show that the coverage varied considerably between programmes, both in terms of total numbers of interviews and the range of actors involved.

Table 2: Number of interviews with programme actors

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ-	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	Total
JTS	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	18
MA	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
IB/RBs	4	2	5	3	6	-	3	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	26
National Actors	2	-	2	2	3	3	1	4	3	2	1	1	2	2	28
Regional Actors[5]	-	-	1	2	1	1	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	10
Total	**8**	**4**	**11**	**10**	**13**	**6**	**6**	**8**	**11**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**96**

An additional questionnaire was used to capture perspectives and ideas of the MCs. The **survey of MC members** was carried out online between 5 and 23 April 2010. In total, 51 datasets were obtained. As can be seen below, the coverage again varied considerably, and MC members from three programmes did not participate at all in this survey. Moreover, 19 MC members started to insert data but did not complete the questionnaire.

Table 3: Number of online questionnaires filled-in by MC members

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ-	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	Total
Total	12	6	1	1	7	8	4	7	10	1	10	0	3	0	70
Sufficiently complete	8	6	1	1	3	6	3	4	7	0	10	0	2	0	**51**

[5] *Difference between Regional Bodies and Regional Actors. RBs are decentralized implementing bodies and thus directly involved in programme implementation. Whereas regional actors are not directly involved. They act as partners fulfilling specific functions: e.g. intermediaries (RDAs, Euregios) involved in project development, Info-Points, municipalities.*

In addition, a survey of **project owners / partners** was also carried out. Questions were added to the project-owner survey undertaken by the thematic cross-programme evaluation, to avoid overburdening project owners with questionnaires. In all, 476 datasets were received, once again with varying degrees of participation. Two programmes that participated in the operational study did not participate in the thematic study. Another programme didn't have any projects approved at the time of the study. The following table gives an overview of the number of complete datasets, with a breakdown by country of MA and partner country.

Table 4: Number of surveys of projects owners

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ-	DE (SAXONY) -PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	Total
Country of MA	-	34	36	26	43	-	9	53	16	12	7	6	11	-	
Partner Country	-	31	24	22	48	-	6	49	21	3	10	4	5	-	
Total	-	65	60	48	91	-	15	102	37	15	17	10	16	-	**476**

Analysis

For the purpose of analysis and interpretation, the programmes were classified into four distinct **categories**, reflecting the duration/status of EU membership of the participating countries. The same categorisation was also used in the thematic cross-programme evaluation:

- EU 15: These programmes involve countries that joined the EU before 2004 and have been cooperating since 1995 under a joint regulatory framework (INTERREG II and III a).
- EU 12-15: These programmes involve both countries that joined the EU before 2004 (EU 15) and countries that joined in 2004 or later (EU 12). EU 12-15 countries have been cooperating since 1995, albeit mostly under different frameworks (INTERREG and PHARE CBC).
- EU 12: These programmes involve only countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later. The cooperation experience of these programmes is slightly more limited, and they have transitioned from PHARE CBC to ETC, with a short interlude of INTERREG III.
- IPA CBC: These programmes involve both member states and candidate/potential candidate countries. The cooperation is carried out under the framework of pre-accession instruments, currently IPA CBC.

The underlying principle for qualitative and quantitative analysis was **triangulation**, which involves using various information sources to study the same subject. Due to the relatively high number of interviews and datasets from surveys, more sophisticated quantitative analysis could be carried out than was originally foreseen. For example, it was possible to cross-referencing data and conduct a correlation analysis. However, since the degree of response and coverage varied considerably between programmes, the principle of triangulation could only be applied with some limitations. In general, the data validity for the programme categories EU 12 and IPA CBC is significantly lower compared to the of the other programmes.

Three **synthesis workshops** were held to validate preliminary analyses and to exchange experiences among programmes. To this end, three sub-groups of programmes were formed, as these smaller groupings offered a chance to exchange information in more detail. The composition of the sub-groups was defined by the programmes involved, and was previously agreed upon at the kick-off meeting. The workshops took place right at the end of data collection – and prior to more refined analysis.

Dates, venue and composition of the workshops were:

– 28 April 2010, Vienna: AT-DE (Bavaria), AT-HU, AT-SK, PL-SK, RO-BG, SI-HU
– 4 May 2010, Vienna: AT- CZ, IT-AT, DE (Saxony)-PL, PL-CZ, SI-AT
– 11 May 2010, Zagreb: SI-HR, HU-HR, RO-RS (all IPA CBC)

Documentation and reporting

The operational cross-programme evaluation was documented in several ways:

– **Three programme overviews** were produced by the evaluation team from the three synthesis workshops. These were used as cross-programme baseline information for discussion and exchange.
– **Fourteen programme synthesis reports** contain all the information and data collected in the framework of the study. For this purpose, anonymous interviews and surveys were compiled and grouped by programme. Programme synthesis reports are unedited working documents that are intended for the sole use of the programmes concerned.
– **One final report**: The present report assembles the main findings from a cross-programme perspective. It contains neither programme-specific aspects nor details, and can also be used for wider dissemination and publication.

The draft report was presented and discussed at the **final event and final meeting of the advisory group** on 28-29 June 2010 in Vienna. Results of the discussions and additional written comments that were received afterwards were then incorporated to finalise the report.

The team leaders of both cross-programme evaluations also elaborated a **joint executive summary**, highlighting those findings that can be generalised, the whole process of the pilot exercise and the lessons learned from implementation. This summary can also serve as a stand-alone document for wider dissemination, beyond the participating programmes. The above-mentioned summary is available at the INTERACT website.

3. Overview of involved programmes

The tables on the following pages characterise participating programmes in terms of financial and human resources, thematic focus and stage of implementation. They are intended to give background information on the involved territorial cooperation programmes and are also taken into account later on, in the analysis of specific operational aspects.

Table 5 contains key data on programme implementation:

- **Programme (ERDF/IPA) budget**: There are enormous differences between the programmes. The two programmes with the highest budgets (PL-CZ, RO-BG) have more than EUR 200 million in ERDF money available. Compared to this, the four programmes with the lowest funding (SI-HU and the three IPA CBC programmes) have less than EUR 50 million in ERDF money. It should be kept in mind, however, that IPA CBC-programmes only have budgets approved for the first three years (i.e. 2007-2009) and the total budgets of these programmes are not yet known. Therefore, a direct comparison with other programmes is not possible.
- **Resources committed**: Again, considerable differences can be seen between programmes when we look at the various degrees of implementation. At the time of this study, five programmes (i.e. HU-HR, AT-HU, AT-CZ, SI-HR, AT-DE (BAVARIA)) had already committed more than 50% of their budget, while the programme DE (SAXONY)-PL had committed less than 25% of its funds. It must be noted that, for IPA-programmes, the commitment rate only refers to the programme budget for 2007-2009 and can thus not be compared to the other programmes.
- **Resources disbursed**: Only three programmes have already made some disbursements (AT-DE (BAVARIA), AT-CZ, IT-AT), and all the others had no or very low disbursements at the time of the study. Some programmes did not provide this information.

Number of approved projects: These figures are important, as they characterise, to some extent, the past workload for project assessment and selection, but they should be interpreted only in combination with information on programme budgets and average project sizes (see below). For instance, the number of projects cannot not be interpreted as an indication of a programme´s "popularity" with beneficiaries, because this depends on many factors.

Table 6 contains key statistics on the projects supported so far:

- **Average project duration**: Apart from the programmes RO-BG and HU-HR, projects last on average between two-to-three years. For RO-BG and HU-HR, projects on average take less than two years.
- **Average project size**: The smallest projects are found in the programmes AT-DE (BAVARIA), IT-AT and HU-HR, with project budgets averaging below EUR 500,000. Meanwhile, for the AT-HU, DE (SAXONY)-PL, SI-AT, PL-CZ and PL-SK programmes, the average project budget is above EUR 1 million.
- **Average number of project partners**: All programmes, except SI-HR, have relatively small partnerships – averaging less than five partners per project programme, which is typical for cross-border co-operation. The programme SI-HR has larger partnerships, with an average of six partners per project.

The resources available to implement the programmes (see *Table 7*) are calculated in person-months per year, in order to obtain comparable data across programmes. For the calculation of these figures, MAs, JTSs, IBs – and other actors, like national authorities (NA) and first level controllers (FLC) were considered. Most of these figures are estimates collected from various sources, and it was sometimes difficult to draw exact boundaries, since, often, the same actor deals with more than one programme. These figures should be interpreted in combination with other data, notably programme budget, implementing system (degree of decentralisation), approach to project generation and support systems for applicants. There are also considerable differences between partner countries in a programme, as is indicated by the figures for IBs and other actors. More details are contained in the programme-specific synthesis reports.

Table 8 provides a thematic overview based on the project typology that has been developed by IP Viborg. This typology involves classifying projects according to five specific achievements or focus areas: research or analysis; process; context; investment, product or service; and community integration. Some programmes were quite hesitant to provide such a breakdown, and this should only be considered as a first tentative set of data, most of which do not have a sound base. Some programmes could not make clear demarcations between the types, resulting in double attributions. Three programmes were not able to supply any information at all.

There is no clear pattern emerging from this typology that can be attributed to the programme categories (i.e. EU 12; IPA-CBC, etc.). For more information concerning thematic focus of the programmes under study see the report of the thematic cross-programme evaluation.

Table 5: Key data on programme implementation

Categories[6]	**EU 15**		**EU 12-15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**[7]		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
ERDF/IPA budget, in millions of euro	50.88	56.47	77.35	56.31	100.99	98.8	63.1	206.29	147.96	27.52	204.75	26.05	17.38	17.06
Resources committed, as a percentage of total	64 %	43.7%	63.5%	44.2%	52.1%	24%	46.2%	34.3%	54 %	46.5%	54.3%	54.3%	70.8%	61.1[8]%
Resources disbursed, as a percentage of total	8.5 %	7.6%	0.0%	1.3%	5%	0.4%	n.a.	n.a.	9 %.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
No. of approved projects	89	48	41	35	87	24	27	105	50	19	44	21	42	0[9]

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[6] *Figures without technical assistance (TA).*

[7] *Figures for IPA-CBC are allocation for 2007-2009 only.*

[8] *The amount of funds allocated for the first call for proposals, not yet allocated for concrete projects.*

[9] *First call not finalised at the time of study.*

Table 6: Key statistics on projects supported so far[10]

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12-15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS[11]
Average project duration (months)	36	36	30-36	30-36	34	24-36	29	24	30	30	15-20	32	13.7	n.a.
Average project size, in euros[12]	200,000 - 450,000[13]	515,237	1,198,371	711,468	606,340	1,140,000	1,080,516	1,034,556	1,571,429	674,875	642,523	673,776	293,047	n.a.
Average number of project participants	2,5	3,5	4,1	3,5	3	2,5	4	2,5	3	n.a.	3,5	6	3,3	n.a.

[10] Source: Interviews of programme actors, own calculations; except for the 'average project size'. This information is mostly derived from the thematic cross-programme evaluation. Only data for AT-DE (BAVARIA) and DE (SAXONY)-PL are derived from interviews

[11] Programme RO-RS didn't have any projects approved (call for proposals was not finalised) by the time of the study, therefore the data is not available.

[12] All without TA-projects.

[13] The range was provided by the programme during the interview. No average over all projects is available.

Table 7: Resources available to implement the programme (person-months per year)[14]

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12-15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
Managing Authority	15.6	14	16.8	9	~24	60	17	60	30	17	96	12	18	78
Joint Technical Secretariat	30	48	60	39,6	72	~ 84	72	132	120	54	168	60	90 + 12 in Antenna office	186 + 24 in Antenna office
Implementing Body/-ies - Regional Body (RB) - Regional Coordinator (RC) - Regional Contact Point (RCP)	96	132 (not only IT-AT)	12-VATI-HU 24 RB-AT	28,8 RB-AT 48 -SK	40.8 RBs-AT 72 RC-CZ	24 RCP-PL	28- AT 36 -SI	108 RC-CZ 72 RC-PL	36 RCP-PL 72 RCP-SK	36 - SI 12 - VATI-HU				
Others - First Level Control (FLC) - Control Unit (CU) - Certifying Authority (CA) - Audit Authority (AA) - National Authority (NA) - Assessment Unit (AU)	48-FLC	30 -CA 24 -AA (Not only IT- AT)	24 NA-HU	60 NA-SK ~ 26-28 FLC-AT ~ 24 CA-SK+AT	12 NA-CZ 120 CU-CZ 3 bodies CU-AT	60 AU-PL 15 NC-PL 24 CU-DE 13 CA-DE 24 AA-DE 120 CU-PL	24 -FLC 16 -CA	84 CU-CZ 72 CU-PL 180 - NC	168 CU-PL 36 CU-SK 12 NA-SK		96 NA-BG	24 NA-SI 16 NA-HR	48 FLC-HU 24 FLC-HU NA-HR: 12	12 NA-SB

[14] *Source: These figures are estimates, mainly provided by the JTS and/or MAs during interviews or at/after the synthesis workshops. Not all programmes have provided figures for the same range of actors (e.g. Implementing Bodies, other actors), therefore it was not possible to achieve the same coverage.*

Table 8: Percentage of project types which correspond to specific project achievements (% of total projects)

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12-15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes/ Achievements	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
Research or analysis focus Studies and analysis where the main purpose is to develop new knowledge about the programme area as a framework for further cooperation.	n.a.	0	20	20.4	0	0	22	0	10	50	n.a.	0	35.7	n.a.
Process focus Change/significant improvement of working methods, practices and procedures, e.g. guidelines, strategies, tool kits.	n.a.	~ 30	40	16.3	0	0	33	0	0	30	n.a.	28	21.4	n.a.
Context focus Changes to policy such as new or amended laws, regulations, and permanent cooperation structures. Also changes of public behaviour.	n.a.	~ 30	2	14.3	~ 10	10	37	0	0	5	n.a.	11	0.00	n.a.
Investment, product or service focus Delivery of concrete outcomes, such as new services, products or infrastructure	n.a.	>10	8	38.8	~ 80	75	4	75	60	47	n.a.	22	26.2	n.a.
Community integration focus Achievements on the local community level with the main purpose of integrating communities on both sides of the border and strengthening personal contacts (e.g. on cultural and social issues).	n.a.	~ 30	30	10.2	~ 10	15	4	25	30	47	n.a.	39	28.6	n.a.

4. Project generation

4.1 Approach to, and procedures for, project generation

As can be seen from *Table 9* below, two basic approaches can be found regarding project generation:

Table 9: Approach followed for generating projects[15]

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12 & 15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
Open calls for proposals		X					X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Restricted calls for proposals											X[16]			
Ongoing submission	X		X	X	X	X		X						

- Open calls for project proposals: This was the approach used by PHARE CBC and Neighbourhood programmes, and this might be the reason why it is still predominantly practiced by programmes of the EU 12 and IPA CBC categories. In these two categories, only PL-CZ has on-going submission.
- Ongoing submission: This is dominant practice in public support schemes in Austria and Germany. Therefore it is practiced in programmes, where representatives from these two countries act as MA, including AT-DE (BAVARIA), AT-CZ, AT-HU, AT-SK and DE (SAXONY)–PL.

There is only one programme (RO-BG) that uses restricted calls. Even in this programme, restricted calls are only used as the second step of a two-step approach. The first step is organised as an open call.

By and large, the programmes tended to defend their specific approach and there was not a single one that indicated a willingness to change the approach.

The main arguments brought up in favour of the **open calls** for proposals were:

- It is often required by the national legal frameworks (e.g. IT, SI).
- It is seen as beneficial for applicants, as it provides a stable and clear framework.
- Calls are implemented with a clear and visible schedule regarding information and publicity measures, and a series of events are organised for dissemination of information.
- Beneficiaries are mobilised; competition forces them to submit better projects.

The main downside of open calls is that the administrative workload is high and therefore the duration of the entire procedure, including assessment, is long.

The main fears with respect to changing the approach were that on-going submission could force a reorganisation of the work of JTS and that extending application periods could cause delays in programme implementation.

On the other hand, the main arguments in favour of the **on-going call for proposals** were:

- It is considered very customer (=applicant) friendly, and it is actually seen as a service for applicants. The key advantage is the absence of a deadline, so that applicants can prepare projects continuously, in line with their needs.

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[15] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

[16] *In the course of the second of a two-step-approach.*

- On-going submission is often associated with a "pro-active" role by public authorities in project development, as this approach means that they can support project development from the very beginning.
- It is also considered to be faster and requires less work by programme actors, since there is no need to organise a call procedure, with all the related documents and events.
- In practice, the meeting dates of the MC, which are communicated to beneficiaries, serve as de-facto deadlines for applications, and often the bulk of applications arrive at this deadline. Such a de-facto deadline is also considered necessary to implement a joint assessment procedure, where all applications submitted by a certain date are considered at one MC session.

The main drawback of the on-going approach is seen in the "first-come-first-serve" practice: Those submitting applications first receive co-funding quite easily. And it leads to high commitment rates early on, so that, at later stages, even good projects have little chance to receive funding.

The main fears with respect to changing the approach were that a call system would be more time-consuming and competitive. However, it was considered a viable option to organise restricted calls that invite targeted applications (e.g. for a certain topic).

A core feature of the application procedure is the **requirements for applicants**, exemplified by the application form and requests for additional information. *Table 10* provides an overview of the documents required for application and illustrates considerable differences between the programmes:

- The programmes with the least formal requirements, in terms of additional documents to be provided, appear to be PL-CZ, SI-AT and SI-HU. More requirements must be fulfilled to apply to the DE (SAXONY)-PL, RO-RS and SI-HR programmes. It must, however, be kept in mind that these observations might not be fully valid, as only selected requirements were taken into account. It is notable that project partners from the same country are faced with substantial differences, depending on the programmes to which they submit their application. For example this is the case with Austria, which cooperates in AT-CZ/AT-SK or AT-DE (BAVARIA), AT-HU and SI-AT. The reasons for these differences were not explored in the course of this study and should be further investigated. For instance, some programmes see information requested from applicants as a means to avoid irregularities or as a way to safeguard programme actors in case irregularities happen.
- It can also be noted that beneficiaries in some countries, such as Poland, are dealing with more requirements than beneficiaries in other countries.

Another factor influencing the workload for applicants is the language in which the applications must be submitted. As indicated in *Table 11*, only three programmes – RO-BG, HU-HR and RO-RS –require that applications are submitted in the English language. Three programmes – SI-HU, SI-AT and SI-HR – offer the option to submit applications in English language *or* national languages. Several programmes require that English is used for specific annexes.

Good / interesting practice: Gradual submission of applications in AT-DE (BAVARIA)

The project lead partner (LP) is asked to submit the project idea online (maximum half a page) to the regional body/intermediary body (RB/IB) responsible for the lead partner's region. This RB/IB checks the project idea without formal involvement of the MC or other programme bodies. After release of the project idea, the LP receives a code for electronic submission of the full application. This approach is considered positive as it provides a good, quick first filter for obtaining suitable projects and supports internal organisation, because every IB can enter the system and access already existing ideas and applications.

Table 10: Documents required for submitting applications[17]

(AF=Application Form, LP=Lead Partner; PP=Project Partner)

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12-15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
AF hardcopy - signature of LP	X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X
AF hardcopy signed by LP and all PP		X					X			X				
AF in electronic version	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Partnership agreement	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			(X)	X	X	X
Co-financing statements	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Additional documents (summarised)														
Budget specification	X	X	X	X		X			X		X			X
Confirmation that VAT is not deducted	X					X		X	X	X	(X)			
Document legal entity, trade register	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Proof of joint project development				X	X	(X)								
Map of project localisation					(X)	X		X	X					
Proof for payment (tax, Soc. Sec.)				X					X					
Financial/organisational capacities		X		X	X	X		X	X				X	X
CVs/ToR of PM / external experts											X		X	X
Communication plan											(X)			
Indication of possible revenues		X			X				X					
Legalised mandate/authorisation)						X		X	X		X	X	X	(X)

[17] *(X) information is required for specific cases or at a later stage in the application process. Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

Table 11: Languages used in the application procedure[18]

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12-15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
English							X 1 annex			X 1 annex	X	X 1 annex	X	X
National language(s)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		

4.2 Provisions for project generation

With respect to the **management of project generation**, information was collected on the roles and tasks of the various programme actors. The main difference between the programmes is that different actor(s) are the primary interface for applicants: In programmes that have on-going submissions, proposals are received by IBs or RBs. In programmes with open call systems, the primary interface is usually the JTS.

The **main activities** carried out by the primary interface for applicants are: first information on applicants (at times with FLC); technical, and often content guidance; dissemination of information; and organisation of events and meetings, for information and consultation. Regional bodies also provide support with: obtaining national co-financing, project development, partner search and feedback on draft applications. In programmes where both JTS and RBs co-exist, their actual division of tasks may vary. An interesting formula for this division was provided by one of the respondents, who said: *"IBs know best about the region and applicants; JTS knows the programme best"*

Another important aspect in project generation is the **degree of screening**, i.e. whether all project ideas must necessarily be transformed into applications in order to be considered, or whether someone acts as a filter. Screening is predominantly practiced in programmes with on-going submissions. By screening project ideas at an early stage, the RBs or JTS, sometimes in collaboration, try to limit the workload - for applicants, but also for the subsequent assessment process.

The degree and timing of **exchange between programme actors**, on both sides of the border, varies considerably between the programmes and is, once again, related to the approach followed: In programmes with open call systems, programme actors tend to act in isolation during most of the project generation process – apart from preparing the call together – and often only meet at the assessment stage. Whereas in programmes that have on-going submissions, the actors (predominantly RBs) exchange information and meet quite frequently, even during early stages of the project generation process. In addition, they engage in multiple informal contacts, which prepare the ground for joint understanding and future decision-making.

The programmes also involve actors at **local/regional level** for project generation. Some of them are directly connected with programme management and act as their outreach agents – as is the case with JTS Antenna Offices, Infopoints or Regional Contact Points. But mostly additional structures, outside of the formally appointed programme actors, are involved: This can either be existing structures / institutions, like Regional Development Agencies, NGOs and municipalities, or structures that have been established specifically for ETC programmes, like regional coordinators.

[18] *In case both options are chosen (English and national languages), applicants can select either or. Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

The roles and tasks of these actors at the local / regional level include project development, partner-search, acting as members of advisory groups or liasing with other actors in the area. In some programmes, they implement a Small Project Fund, as is done in the DE (SAXONY)-PL programme.

Other important aspects of **project generation** are support and advisory services and information/publicity activities. This is, again, closely related to the call system: Support to applicants can either be temporary, during calls, or continuous, which is mainly the approach of programmes that practice on-going submission. Support and advisory services can be decentralised as is frequently the case in programmes that have on-going submissions. These programmes rely heavily on IBs/RBs, and they strongly involve actors at the local/regional level. Examples include AT-DE (BAVARIA) and DE (SAXONY)-PL. Alternatively, support and advisory services can be centralised, mainly via the JTS.

The most frequently mentioned **challenges** in relation to supporting project generation include:

- Financing: This most of all concerns the pre-financing of expenditure and the funding of project preparation activities. Apart from the fact that advance payments are difficult under the current regulatory framework, problems frequently cited include long delays of payments and complicated procedures to obtain co-financing.
- Identification of partners: Finding partners appropriate for the respective project continues to be a huge task for applicants. Partner search and matching, as well as brokerage of project ideas, appear to be the services most often requested.
- Information and publicity: Although information days and seminars for applicants are widely practiced in all programmes, the dissemination of information to specific target groups or areas remains an enormous challenge. There seems to be a tendency towards information events alongside general information and publicity measures.
- Target groups: There is a mixed - and often contradictory – picture emerging from the interviews. Some programmes prefer to work with a “closed shop” approach, working with a set of proven and experienced applicants upon which they can rely. But others would like to involve new actors, hoping to reach new target groups, to receive more innovative proposals and/or to enter into new domains of action. In some programmes, both tendencies coexist, either because each one is favoured by different actors (or partner countries), or because both exist in different cooperation topics.

Good / interesting practice:

- **Decentralised support structure for applicants (AT-DE (BAVARIA):** This programme has the most decentralised structure with a two-tier support system (IBs and Euregios) along the entire border area. IBs are responsible for guidance to applicants and co-ordinate with other IBs on the suitability of proposals. Euregios support bottom-up project development and networks as well as organise Small Project Funds (SPFs). This structure assures good local knowledge and proximity to applicants. Since the border area is relatively long (over 800 km), with varied topography, this decentralised approach is considered very convenient by programme bodies.
- **Round table (AT-DE (BAVARIA)):** So-called “round-table meetings” are held for bigger and more complex project ideas. All IBs involved in the project and the project partners meet for a joint discussion of the project idea, and IBs can give advice for further project development.
- **Building on the activities of Regional Development Agencies (RDA) in project generation (HU-HR):** The RDA of South-Trans-Danubia, as well as Croatian RDAs, play an important, informal, role in project-generation.
- **Provision of external experts (Friuli Venezia Giulia):** In the call system of the programme IT-AT, one

Italian region is also involved in project assessment and selection. In order to avoid conflict of interest; the region contracted an external expert who provides advice and guidance to applicants during the application period. This offer was used by about half of the project applicants of the region.

- **Targeted information events (RO-BG):** First a series of general information events, which focused on raising awareness, were organised across the eligible area. Afterwards, the focus shifted to offering support for developing good quality proposals by bringing participants in touch with potential partners and programme actors.
- **Partner Search Forum (RO-RS):** Two large events were held, one in Romania with approximately 150 participants, and one in Serbia with about 200 participants, to facilitated the exchange of project ideas and experience between potential applicants from both countries. These events included a series of bilateral meetings to match potential cross-border partners, and they were supported by consultants and translators. All costs were covered from the programme budget.
- **Pre-finance facility of Lower Austria (AT-CZ, AT-SK):** To ease the financial pressure on project partners caused by long waits for reimbursement of expenses, the region of Lower Austria introduced the possibility to receive intermediate financing from regional sources, within certain limits. This pre-financing has to be repaid to the regional authority at the latest at project closure. With a similar aim, the South Bohemian Regional Office (AT-CZ) introduced a grant scheme providing financial support to the project partners up to a maximum of CZK 200,000, or about EUR 8,000.

4.3 Selected aspects of project generation

Major **factors of influence** on project generation are summarised in *Table 12* below, grouped along the various call systems (according to information source):

Table 12: Major factors which may influence positively or negatively project generation[19]

	Positive	Negative
Programmes practicing calls for proposals	• Similarity of (problem) situation on both sides. • Political alignment and agreed "top-down" strategies are possible. • Familiarity of applicants with the programme, its rules and requirements. • Public/political interest and commitment at regional level. • Good capacities of external consultants to write applications (especially in peak periods)	• Difficult to identify and contact appropriate partners (e.g. physical and language barriers). • Heavy reliance on consultants for writing applications (unguided by beneficiaries). • Accumulation of workload due to timing of calls (overlapping with other programmes) • Pushing of national interests, political pressure on regions. • Lack of co-ordination in border area due to competition among applicants.
Programmes practicing Ongoing submission	• Early information about projects (already at idea stage). • Experience and continuity of all actors involved (e.g. IBs, Euregios, applicants) • On-going calls favourable for smaller, less experienced applicants. • SPF as training ground for smaller applicants.	• Lack of implementation structures at regional level (at least on one side of the border) • Crowding out of inexperienced, smaller applicants due to requirements and lead partner principle. • Irritations and changes the beginning of programme implementation (e.g. rules and

[19] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

	• Good knowledge and understanding of situation in partner country. • No time limits (can also be negative!). • Committed programme actors, good informal communication. • Possibility to submit project ideas, followed-up by exchange and consultation with programme actors.	requirements) • Bilingual applications (additional workload, source for mistakes). • Staff changes (between previous and new period) • Applicants resistant to guidance by programme actors • Increasing demand to financially support (public sector) institutions • Other funding sources available (easier, better access and conditions)
All programmes	• Mature partnerships, existing contacts and cooperation between partners • Attractive funding, high co-financing rates • Capacity of applicants to pre-finance activities and secure sustainability • New opportunities for cooperation due to disappearance of borders (Schengen)	• Lack of staff, knowledge and experience in public sector, NGOs • Administrative barriers, too much bureaucracy to obtain funding • Too burdensome application forms (many annexes) • Difficulties in identification of appropriate partners • Different administrative and economic situations on both sides of border

The generation of **joint projects** is a specific aspiration of ETC programmes, and it is increasingly being attempted in the current period (for more information see related publications on the INTERACT website). *Table 13* below contains the factors that have been mentioned most frequently as having an influence on joint project development, either as obstacles or success factors. Information is grouped along the various call system basing on information source.

Table 13: Main obstacles and success factors for joint project development[20]

	Obstacles	**Success factors**
All programmes	• Different needs and financial situation on both sides (e.g. co-financing rules and rates). • Language and cultural differences. • Ad-hoc partnerships for projects, hasty preparation of proposals.	• Realistic planning, budgeting, division of tasks. • Long-term relationships among partners (before / after submitted project). • Identification of suitable partners. • Knowledge of situation in partner country.
Calls	• Insufficient capacity of programmes to reach new areas, actors. • Uneven, unilateral support for project development. • Time limits of call (makes joint long-term planning difficult). • Limited capacities / readiness of institutions to provide support.	• Benefits for both sides / partners. • Sufficient time for planning and preparatory activities. • Timely partner search. • Strategic orientation or guidance by political level. • Common planning or joint strategies. • Availability of own funding by applicants.
On-going	• Dealing with revenues and running costs	• Applicants' openness for guidance.

[20] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

submission	(FLC). • Political tensions • Different national requirements and administrative procedures • Lack of time and capacity for coordination among programme actors (e.g. IBs). • Boundary of eligible area.	• Common financing during implementation. • Realisation of concrete, visible activities (micro-projects, pilot actions). • Early involvement of programme actors during preparation (IBs, JTS). • Topics mutually agreed upon and supported by political level / wider public.

There are mixed opinions about the influence of the newly introduced **lead partner principle**. Although most programmes agreed that it is conducive for achieving more joint projects, many point out its negative side effects, notably:

- The increase in administrative and capacity requirements, as well as the transfer of responsibility from partners to the lead partner, which acts as a disincentive for many actors to implement ETC projects.
- The bias or preference for experienced project owners with sufficient administrative and financial capacity and the resulting crowding out of smaller, less-experienced actors.
- The lead partner principle does not seem appropriate in every case, and it can cause tensions – for example in infrastructure projects or other projects where the impact is rather unevenly distributed.

As concerns the development of **strategic projects**, only one programme (RO-BG) claims to have a clear definition of strategic projects and to apply this in their implementation practice. It is remarkable that RO-BG also uses an open call system, because responses from several other programmes indicate that the selection of strategic projects does not work in open competitions. In an open competition, you cannot favour certain types of projects or applicants.

Most of the programmes with on-going submissions stated that the strategic importance of projects may not be obvious in the beginning but is realised over time. For these programmes, criteria for considering projects as strategic include having a leverage effect, which is when a project paves the way for follow-up initiatives, or undertaking a project of large size and visibility, such as an infrastructure project. Others emphasise coherence with the programme strategy, an approach that ultimately means considering all selected projects as being strategic. Programmes with a large geographical scope regard projects that cover the entire area as being strategic, because such a project has a larger impact. In all of these cases, strategic projects do not receive any special treatment or consideration in the assessment.

Several of these programmes would like to move more in the direction of implementing strategic projects, but the main challenge seems to be reaching a consensus between partner countries. In these programmes, the strategic importance of a project tends to be defined by the regional level (e.g. RBs), and authorities at this level tend to favour particular regional interests. One way forward is seen in the definition of joint criteria, which is done for certain types of projects in the AT-CZ-programme. Another possibility is to identify cross-border thematic strategies, as is done for tourism development in HU-HR. Assessments of strategy can also be made through on-going evaluation. There is only one case, Carinthia in IT-AT, where strategic projects are defined beforehand, at the political level.

Closely related with the idea of strategic projects are strategies focused on **coverage of programme topics**. All the programmes under study have a rather broad thematic scope (for more information see the report on thematic cross-programme evaluation). The wide range of themes is seen as one of the assets of ETC programmes. The concern for adequate coverage of various topics has mainly been articulated by programmes with on-going submissions, and reactions so far go in two ways: Reallocating funds to priorities or areas of intervention that demonstrate strong “bottom-up” demand, or intensifying information activities as well as project generation support in areas of low uptake. Some also want to use on-going evaluations for assessing thematic coverage. A few programmes have introduced “umbrella” projects, which bundle funding – and focus attention - on specific topics. For example, this is done to encourage cooperation of schools in AT-CZ. Programmes with call systems predominantly favour targeted, or thematic calls, as a measure to assure adequate coverage. This approach is even being considered by some programmes with on-going submission.

Avoiding an excessively high number of applications is mainly a concern for programmes that have a call system – and large budgets. Practices that have proven successful in this regard are information and training activities and other efforts to raise awareness on the requirements of ETC programmes, an approach that cautions, and even discourages, unprepared applicants. Another measure is to play it low key, for example by reducing publicity and information events. In programmes with on-going submissions, the guidance and advice to applicants acts as an effective filter that eliminates project ideas considered inappropriate (by IBs/RBs) at early stages. This filter is even more effective when coupled with national co-financing, as is the case in Austria: Applicants that cannot assure co-financing are discouraged or even rejected before submission. Another option that is practiced by these programmes is to merge project ideas or bundle similar proposals as “umbrella projects”, which in both instances leads to fewer, but larger projects.

Databases are only used to a limited extent, and their utility is often seen as dubious. The most common use of databases or similar electronic systems is for partner search. On the other hand, the use of ICT for programme management, involving for example an intranet, was seen favourably, and its use seems to be spreading, as it can reduce the need to send and track documents.

The interviews also investigated **differences between partner countries/regions** within the same programme. These are mentioned in detail in the programme synthesis reports, because it is predominantly at the level of the individual programmes that these differences must be resolved. They are mostly found in programmes that involve EU 12-15 member states, and they are mainly due to different management traditions (sometimes dating back to the legacy of INTERREG or PHARE CBC), administrative skills and cultures, or national legislation requirements. The differences mentioned most frequently are:

- Differences in capacities for project development and financing.
- Different laws, regulations and procedures for financial matters, in particular between EU member states and non-EU members.
- Different systems for obtaining national co-financing, required before or obtained after project selection.
- Different preferences for particular types of projects, such as infrastructure vs. soft projects.
- Different levels of ambition and/or quality of projects; for example a focus on “true” cross-border projects.

The programmes also differ in the way they have been able to **harmonise approaches or ambitions** between partners – and in their attempts at doing so. Achievement of joint understanding appears to be an important factor, both for successful management of ETC programmes and the projects they support. Programmes seem to fare better through the sometimes rough waters of implementation if both sides are well familiar with the situation and conditions on the other side of the border. And it is even more advantageous if they can mutually agree on needs or priorities, and if mutual awareness and understanding can be found, not only at the level of programme actors, but also among the representatives in the decision-making body, ie. the MC.

The interviews also sought to gather **ideas for improving project generation**, and the most important ones are listed in *Table 14* below. They have been clustered according to the approach of the type of programme that most frequently mentioned these ideas.

Table 14: Ideas for improving project generation, grouped by approach to project generation[21]

Calls	On-going submission
• Maintain similar co-financing conditions on both sides (regarding rules and rates). • Hold information events about the situation in partner countries (regarding institutions, competencies, needs, etc.) • Handle politically supported project ideas outside call procedure. • Give joint advice / support (for partners on both sides) for projects of joint interest. • Host forums to exchange project ideas. • Limit call system to project types where competition is appropriate. • Foster pro-active project development on both sides of the border. • Create a joint definition of strategic priorities. • Have more direct contact with applicants. • Foster early exchanges at the idea stage of proposals • Hold information days to improve outreach towards new areas / target groups. • Clarify eligible expenses. • Provide focused / streamlined application forms. • Avoid last minute application "rush-hour".	• Follow a thematic approach with focused dissemination of information. • Allow more geographic flexibility; take larger cooperation space into account. • Apply top-down "deductive" approach to obtain more strategic projects. • Lower co-financing rates for higher leverage. • Allow more time for project development and shared understanding of project actors. • Involve supra-regional actors, and obtain inputs from outside. • Provide additional support services for applicants (e.g. coaching, interpreting). • Increase awareness of joint cross-border area. • Install a task force to discuss project ideas (involving regional representatives, applicants). • Offer a support system for applicants (documents, databases, success stories, internet forums). • Provide training for applicants (in project management, requirements).

With respect to improving project generation – and programme management altogether – there were two strands of thought that were frequently mentioned, and therefore seem to be of major concern to the programme actors interviewed:

- There is a need to simplify procedures and administration of ETC programmes, in order to alleviate the workload of programme actors as well as applicants. This notably involves improvements at the level of FLC, for instance by allowing more lump sums and by seeking exemptions for the need to submit original invoices.
- In the future, more attention should be put on content, not just administration. "Doing the right things" should be more important than simply "doing things right."

Good / interesting practice:

- **Generation of strategic projects (RO-BG):** Strategic projects were defined by the programme bodies, and it was agreed that they have to meet the following criteria: have an impact on the entire eligible area; cover all four cooperation criteria; and obtain a high score during the assessment process. Two approaches were used to generate strategic projects: 1) top down identification of the needs of programme bodies; and 2) a call for ideas, which lead to the submission of 50 ideas. As a result, four

[21] Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.

strategic projects will now be developed on themes established by the programme bodies.

- **Criteria for defining co-finance in Lower Austria (AT-CZ, AT-SK):** This region has established quality criteria for determining the co-financing rates for ETC-projects (from 50%-85%). These criteria include: coherence with regional development strategies, the financial volume of the project, the applicants' own funding, the degree of innovation, the intensity of cooperation and whether the proposal is a follow-up project.
- **Criteria for transport projects (AT-CZ):** In the AT-CZ programme, criteria were elaborated for transport projects. These criteria are meant to prevent a "first-come-first-serve" practice in project selection and focus on mostly real cross-border transport infrastructure.
- **Top down political agreement of strategic projects between Carinthia and Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions (IT-AT):** Tri-partite government meetings are held twice a year between Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and Veneto. They discuss issues of joint interest and define strategic priorities for cross-border cooperation.
- **Electronic forum for partner search (PL-SK):** This is an IT tool with the possibility to develop an offer for cooperation within a partnership framework. Each institution may fill in a form, which will be later published on the website. Should this option fail, the JTS has a good knowledge of possibilities for matching partners from both countries, and it is very efficient.

4.4 Assessment of project generation process

Table 15 below shows the importance that programme actors give to five key factors affecting project generation. Respondents ranked the factors from 1 to 10, where 1 stands for not effective at all and 10 for very effective. The ratings of the various five types of actors have been aggregated at programme level, and average ratings have been calculated for each of the four programmes categories.

Table 15: Comparative overview of five key factors for project generation (Ratings by programme actors)[22]

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12-15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**
Communication strategy and dissemination of information	7.7	7.8	**7.8**	6.6	8.3	7.0	6.8	6.6	**7.0**	8.0	7.8	6.5	8.3	**7.7**	8.5	8.3	8.8	**8.5**
Capacity and skills to co-ordinate activities across administrative departments	8.1	7.2	**7.7**	6.6	7.2	7.0	7.6	6.4	**7.0**	8.0	7.2	6.3	8.0	**7.4**	8.5	8.5	8.5	**8.5**
Experience and acceptance by persons responsible for cross-border co-operation	8.3	7.6	**7.9**	7.8	7.4	7.0	8.0	7.2	**7.5**	8.2	8.6	7.8	7.0	**7.9**	7.5	8.5	9.3	**8.4**
Provision of advisory services to applicants	8.6	7.6	**8.1**	7.6	7.2	7.3	5.7	7.2	**7.0**	8.8	8.8	7.5	9.0	**8.5**	8.5	9.0	9.3	**8.9**
Capacity for project development at local/regional level	6.1	7.3	**6.7**	5.7	6.6	5.8	5.7	6.8	**6.1**	8.8	8.2	6.3	6.7	**7.5**	6.0	6.5	7.0	**6.5**

[22] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

When interpreting this table, it must be kept in mind that the number of interviews – and the range of actors interviewed –for the programme categories EU 12 and IPA CBC are significantly lower than that for the other programmes. Thus it was not possible to adequately "triangulate" this information with a broad variety of sources, and the data for EU 12 and IPA CBC programmes do not have the same degree of validity as those for other programmes. This is probably the main reason why these two programme categories consistently rank highest for all five factors.

Table 16 below summarises the points of view of project owners/partners expressed through the online survey. The left column shows the percentage of respondents who declared having received support from the programme for developing their project idea. The middle column contains their rating for a specific type of support received, advisory services, with 1 representing ineffective service and 10 representing very effective service. The right hand column shows the standard deviation for these ratings, reflecting how varied the opinions were. The table includes information for 11 programmes only. Two programmes decided not to participate in the thematic evaluation and one had no projects approved at the time of the study.

Table 16: Cross-reference between rating for advisory services and degree of support[23]

	Applicants supported by the programme: "YES"	Provision of advisory services to applicants[24]	Standard deviation (of rating for provisions)
Italy - Austria	81%	7.60	2.07
Austria – Hungary	71%	7.56	1.33
Austria – Slovakia	85%	7.20	3.11
Czech Republic - Austria	83%	7.30	2.16
Slovenia - Austria	46%	7.20	2.77
Czech Republic - Poland	77%	8.80	1.30
Poland - Slovakia	77%	8.80	1.30
Slovenia - Hungary	62%	7.50	1.00
Romania – Bulgaria	55%	9.00	1.00
Slovenia - Croatia	38%	8.50	0.71
Hungary - Croatia	85%	9.00	0.82
Correlation	-0,056		

Overall, there is very low correlation between the two data sets. This means that the degree of support received is not closely linked with the degree of satisfaction with this support. Looking at the results in more detail, the table shows for instance that the three programmes with Slovene participation (SI-HR, SI-AT, SI-HU) are considered to provide the least support to applicants. The advisory services provided by two of these programmes (SI-AT and SI-HU) also display the lowest ratings. On the other hand, it must be taken into account that the

[23] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations*

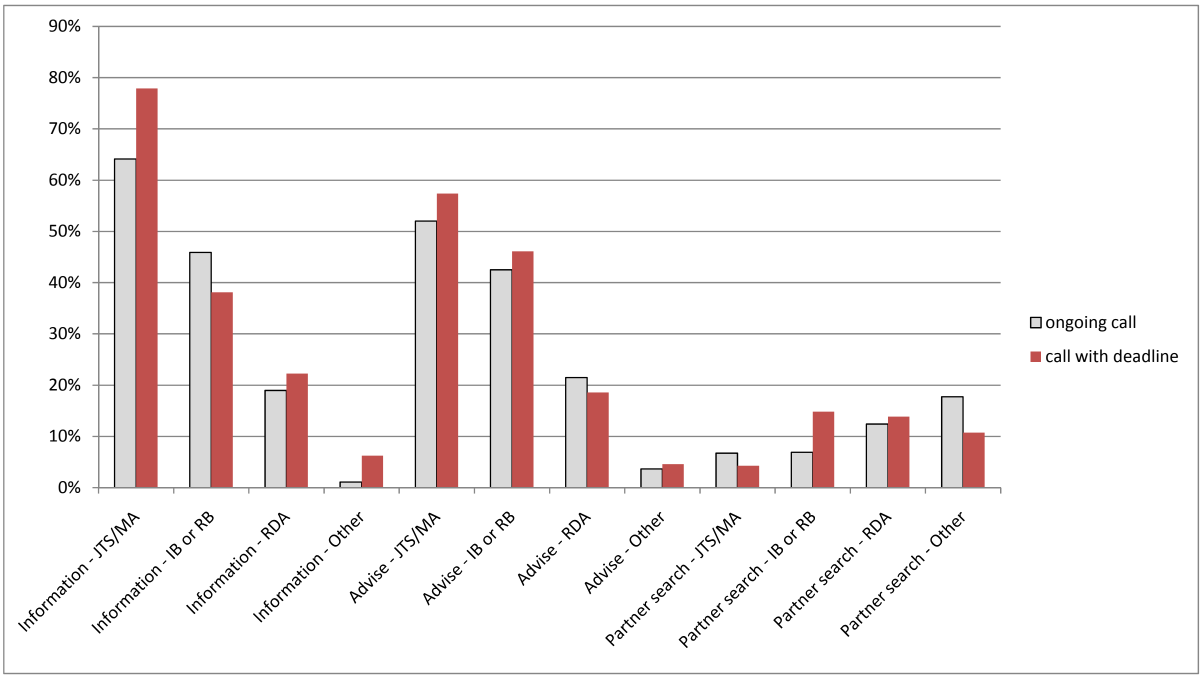
[24] *In 1-10 scale, where 1 stands for not effective at all and 10 for very effective*

ratings for SI-AT have a high standard deviation – in other words, the opinions expressed by the respondents vary considerably.

Table 17 **indicates which actors are predominantly providing which type of support: information, advice or partner search. Since it is important here to differentiate between the two sides of a border, the respective responses for each of the partner countries were retained. This makes it possible to detect significant differences within the programmes in relation to the provision of these support types (see questionnaire in Annex 4).**

Figure 1 below represents the same information in a different and more synthesised form. It shows the average percentage of actors providing the three types of support (programmes were clustered by approach). This figure shows, for instance, the relative share of JTS/MA and IB/RBs for the various types of support. Irrespective of the approach, RDAs/Euregios are the most important service providers beyond (formal) programme actors. Partner search is the service that is provided the least. If it is provided, JTS/MA are the actors least involved, especially in programmes using a call system.

Figure 1: Types of support and delivery by actors, clustered by project generation approach[25]



[25] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculation.*

Table 17: Overview of type of support and their providers (JTS/MA, IB/RB, RDA/Euregio)[26]

		Information				Advise				Partner search				
		JTS/MA	IB or RB	RDA	Other	JTS/MA	IB or RB	RDA	Other	JTS/MA	IB or RB	RDA	Other	Approach 0..ongoing 1..call system
Italy - Austria	AT	30%	74%	22%	4%	17%	83%	22%	4%	4%	22%	13%	9%	
	IT	57%	70%	9%	0%	43%	61%	9%	0%	4%	35%	9%	4%	1
Austria-Hungary	AT	76%	48%	24%	0%	48%	62%	19%	5%	10%	14%	14%	33%	
	HU	62%	38%	15%	0%	69%	23%	8%	0%	0%	8%	15%	8%	0
Austria-Slovakia	AT	71%	41%	18%	6%	59%	47%	18%	6%	12%	12%	12%	0%	
	SK	67%	56%	6%	0%	67%	33%	6%	6%	0%	6%	0%	17%	0
Czech Republic - Austria	AT	36%	50%	39%	0%	21%	46%	43%	4%	7%	0%	36%	25%	
	CZ	58%	52%	16%	0%	42%	55%	29%	6%	13%	13%	10%	13%	0
Slovenia-Austria	SI	33%	33%	33%	33%	67%	33%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
	AT	67%	100%	33%	0%	33%	100%	33%	0%	0%	67%	0%	33%	1
Czech Republic-Poland	CZ	59%	34%	22%	0%	41%	28%	47%	0%	9%	3%	9%	25%	
	PL	85%	48%	12%	3%	70%	45%	3%	3%	3%	0%	3%	21%	0
Poland-Slovakia	PL	80%	20%	10%	0%	50%	20%	0%	10%	0%	20%	20%	30%	
	SK	57%	79%	43%	0%	43%	57%	43%	0%	14%	14%	7%	7%	1
Slovenia-Hungary	SI	83%	17%	0%	0%	67%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
	HU	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%	100%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1
Romania-Bulgaria	RO	100%	25%	25%	0%	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	
	BG	100%	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%	1
Slovenia-Croatia	SI	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	
	HR	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	1
Hungary-Croatia	HU	83%	17%	17%	0%	83%	0%	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%	17%	
	HR	100%	0%	20%	0%	100%	0%	20%	0%	20%	0%	20%	0%	1

[26] Percentages: Sum of indicated support (each) divided by sum of all responding projects in the country who indicated support from the programme.
Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations.

For nine programmes, it was possible to calculate the correlation of different types of support with available resources by programme and support structure (person-months/year). *Table 18* **a, b and c**, below, show the respective figures for JTS/MA, IB/RBs and RDAs / Euregios.

Table 18a: Comparative table for types of support and available resources (JTS and MA)[27]

Programmes	Information	Advice	P. Search	Pm / year
Italy – Austria	43%	30%	4%	48
Austria-Hungary	69%	58%	5%	60
Austria-Slovakia	69%	63%	6%	39.6
Czech Republic - Austria	47%	32%	10%	72
Slovenia-Austria	50%	50%	0%	96
Czech Republic-Poland	72%	55%	6%	132
Poland-Slovakia	69%	46%	7%	120
Slovenia-Hungary	92%	83%	0%	60
Romania-Bulgaria	100%	25%	0%	168
Slovenia-Croatia	100%	75%	0%	72
Hungary-Croatia	92%	92%	18%	90
Correlation	0.344	-0.333	-0.073	

Table 18b: Comparative table for types of support and available resources (IBs/RBs)

Programmes	Information	Advice	P. Search	Pm / year
Italy - Austria	72%	72%	28%	132
Austria-Hungary	43%	42%	11%	36
Austria-Slovakia	48%	40%	9%	76.8
Czech Republic –Austria	51%	51%	6%	72
Slovenia-Austria	67%	67%	33%	28
Czech Republic-Poland	41%	37%	2%	180
Poland-Slovakia	49%	39%	17%	108
Slovenia-Hungary	58%	58%	0%	12
Romania-Bulgaria	13%	38%	0%	n.a.
Slovenia-Croatia	0%	50%	25%	n.a.
Hungary-Croatia	8%	0%	0%	n.a.
Correlation	-0.204	-0.295	-0.052	

[27] *Percentages: Average of countries. Correlation: correlation coefficient of each support source with available resources. Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations*

Table 18c: Comparative table for types of support and available resources (RDAs Euregios)

Programmes	Information	Advice	P. Search	Pm / year
Italy – Austria	15%	15%	11%	36
Austria-Hungary	20%	13%	15%	24
Austria-Slovakia	12%	12%	6%	84.6
Czech Republic - Austria	28%	36%	23%	108
Czech Republic-Poland	17%	25%	6%	228
Poland-Slovakia	26%	21%	14%	36
Slovenia-Hungary	0%	25%	0%	72
Slovenia-Croatia	50%	25%	50%	12
Hungary-Croatia	18%	10%	10%	10
Correlation	-0.266	0.433	-0.347	

Table 19 below provides an overview of the ratings for the effectiveness of the current process for project generation, subdivided in three phases. It contrasts the ratings by MC members with those of the programme actors (JTS, MA, IBs/RBs, national actors). The ratings are from 1 to 10, where 1 stands for not effective at all and 10 for very effective. The ratings by regional actors were too sparse and are not included here. Where data is missing, it means that the institution was either not interviewed or no information was provided on this topic.

Table 19a: Ratings of the effectiveness of the project generation process - Project ideas[28]

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12 - 15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**	**Total**
JTS	10.0	6.5	**8.3**	8.0	8.0		7.0	5.0	**7.0**	6.0	6.0	8.0	9.0	**7.3**	7.0	6.0	7.0	**6.7**	**7.2**
MA	4.0	8.0	**6.0**	8.0	7.0	6.0	8.5	7.0	**7.3**	7.0		3.0	8.0	**6.0**	5.0	7.0	10.0	**7.3**	**6.8**
IB/RBs	7.5	4.0	**5.8**	6.4	8.0	6.3		6.7	**6.9**	7.5	7.0	6.0		**6.8**					**6.6**
National Actors	9.0			5.0		8.0			**6.5**	8.5	9.0	7.0	6.0	**7.6**			9.0	**9.0**	**7.7**
Av. Prog. Actors	**7.6**	**6.2**	**6.7**	**6.9**	**7.7**	**6.8**	**7.8**	**6.2**	**6.9**	**7.3**	**7.3**	**6.0**	**7.7**	**6.9**	**6.0**	**6.5**	**8.7**	**7.7**	**7.0**
MC Members	6.1	6.7	**6.4**	8.0	6.0	7.3	7.2	6.0	**6.9**	8.3	7.9		7.4	**7.9**		6.5		**6.5**	**7.0**

[28] Source: Interviews of programme actors, Survey of MC members; own analysis and calculations.

Table 19b: Ratings of the effectiveness of the project generation process - Identification of partners

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12 - 15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**	**Total**
JTS	8.5	7.0	**7.6**	6.0	10.0		7.0	5.0	**7.0**	6.0	5.0	7.0	10.0	**7.0**	7.0	7.0	9.0	**7.7**	**7.3**
MA	7.0	9.0	**8.0**	8.0	7.2	4.8	8.0	6.0	**6.8**	8.0		3.0	7.0	**6.0**	9.0	7.3	10.0	**8.8**	**7.3**
IB/RBs	7.0	7.0	**7.0**	6.0	7.9	5.8		5.7	**6.3**	8.0	8.5	6.0		**7.5**					**6.9**
National Actors	8.0	7.0	**7.5**	6.0		8.0			**7.0**	8.0	8.0	7.0	6.0	**7.3**			8.0	**8.0**	**7.3**
Av. Prog. Actors	**7.6**	**7.5**	**7.6**	**6.5**	**8.4**	**6.2**	**7.5**	**5.6**	**6.8**	**7.5**	**7.2**	**5.8**	**7.7**	**6.9**	**8.0**	**7.1**	**9.0**	**8.1**	**7.3**
MC Members	6.6	6.2	**6.4**	7.0	6.0	7.7	6.0	6.0	**6.5**	7.8	8.3		6.9	**7.6**		6.0		**6.0**	**6.8**

Table 19c: Ratings of the effectiveness of the project generation process - Preparation of application

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12 - 15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**	**Total**
JTS	8.5	8.0	**8.3**	4.0	8.5		7.0	7.0	**6.6**	7.0	5.0	8.0	9.0	**7.3**	7.0	7.0	9.0	**7.7**	**7.3**
MA	7.0	9.0	**8.0**	7.0	7.8	6.3		8.0	**7.3**	6.0		5.0	6.0	**5.7**	7.0	7.3	8.0	**7.4**	**7.0**
IB/RBs	6.9	7.5	**7.2**	6.1	8.0	7.7		6.3	**7.0**	7.0	8.0	6.0		**7.0**					**7.1**
National Actors	10.0			7.0		7.0			**7.0**		8.0	6.0	6.0	**6.7**			8.0	**8.0**	**7.4**
Av. Prog. Actors	**8.1**	**8.2**	**7.8**	**6.0**	**8.1**	**6.9**	**7.0**	**7.1**	**6.9**	**6.7**	**7.0**	**6.3**	**7.0**	**6.7**	**7.0**	**7.1**	**8.3**	**7.7**	**7.2**
MC Members	6.2	6.2	**6.2**	6.0	6.0	7.7	6.6	3.0	**5.9**	5.8	8.0		7.3	**7.0**		6.5		**6.5**	**6.3**

The ratings by project owners/partners for "identification of partners" were compared with the average percentage of actors providing partner search support (taken from *Table 17*). The ***Table 20*** below presents this data for all 11 programmes, where such a comparison was possible. The rating scale is from 1-10, where 1 stands for not effective at all and 10 for very effective.

Table 20: Comparative table of actors providing support and ratings for "identification of partners"[29]

	JTS/MA (relative involvement in partner search)	IB or RB (relative involvement in partner search)	RDA (relative involvement in partner search)	Identification of partners (rating by project owners)	Standard deviation (identification of partners)
Italy - Austria	4%	28%	11%	7.25	0.35
Austria-Hungary	5%	11%	15%	6.67	1.15
Austria-Slovakia	6%	9%	6%	8.00	1.32
Czech Republic - Austria	10%	6%	23%	5.50	0.42
Slovenia-Austria	0%	33%	0%	5.60	
Czech Republic-Poland	6%	2%	6%	7.65	0.49
Poland-Slovakia	7%	17%	14%	7.75	0.35
Slovenia-Hungary	0%	0%	0%	5.75	1.06
Romania-Bulgaria	0%	0%	13%	7.25	1.77
Slovenia-Croatia	0%	25%	50%	8.00	
Hungary-Croatia	18%	0%	10%	7.5	0.71
Correlation	0.174	-0.037	0.324		

This shows that, overall, there is a rather low correlation between the two data sets. Therefore, the ratings for "identification of partners" do not follow a clear pattern and cannot be attributed to support being provided by a particular actor, though it can be stated that, in the programmes with the best ratings (SI-HR, AT-SK, PL-SK, PL-CZ), partner search was predominantly supported by IBs/RBs. On the other hand, the picture is made more fuzzy by the high divergence of opinion among respondents, as measured by standard deviation. Exceptions are the programmes IT-AT, PL-SK, AT-CZ and PL-CZ, where the deviation was lower.

[29] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations*

5. Assessment of proposals

5.1 Provisions, approach and procedures for assessment

Apart from programme-specific differences, management of project assessment largely follows the approach used for project generation: In programmes that practice call systems, the JTS is the dominant actor for organising assessments; whereas in programmes with on-going submissions the assessment task is more decentralised, with a stronger involvement of RBs, who carry out the assessment in collaborative arrangements with the JTS.

Table 21 presents on overview of core elements, which, taken in combination, characterise the way in which assessments are conducted in each programme. These elements are:

- Assessment type: one step procedure, two step procedure and a two-step procedure with pre-selection at the idea stage.
- Involvement of external experts in the assessment process.
- Amendments during the assessment procedure.

Table 21: Core elements of assessment approach[30]

Categories	**EU 15**		**EU 12 & 15**					**EU 12**				**IPA CBC**		
Programmes	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY) -PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
1-step procedure			X		X			X			X		X	X
2-step (eligi-bility check)		X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X		
2 – step (pre-selection of ideas)	X													
External Experts[31]		P	Y			P	Y	P	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Amendments	X			X	X			X	X				X	

This overview shows that two-step procedures are used in programmes of almost all categories except for IPA CBC programmes. A similar picture appears for the use of external experts. Only three programmes do not involve external experts, but in four programmes, expert involvement is limited to one partner country only (respectively PL and SI). Only few programmes allow for making amendments, but no clear pattern is visible.

Table 22 contains a comparative overview of key statistical data on the assessment processes, including:

- Number of applications received on average in a call/application round.
- Average number of weeks o between submission and assessment result.
- Ratio between applications received and projects assessed positively (in %).
- Ratio between applications assessed positively and projects finally approved (in %).

Average time span between the finalisation of the assessment and the selection of projects (in weeks).

[30] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

[31] *Y: Yes, P: Practiced by one partner country only.*

Table 22: Key statistical data on the assessment and selection processes[32]

Number of applications received on average in a call/application round

AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY) -PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RP-RS
15-20	61	20-25	10-12	~35	8-11	50-60	135	173	51	55	112	67	166

Average duration of the assessment process in weeks (between submission and assessment result)

AT-DE (BAVARI A)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
8-10	10	8	8	10	26	16	18-20	18-20	24	28	28	18	n.a. (24)[33]

Ratio between applications received and the projects assessed positively (in %)

AT-DE (BAVARI A)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
95 % [34]	75 %	40-50%	n.a.	70%	n.a.	33 %	~50 %	67.86 %	37%	22.5%	~80 %[35]	59%	n.a.

[32] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

[33] *Estimation by JTS, as first call for proposal is not finalised no exact data is available.*

[34] *85 % if 1st step (assessment of ideas) is taken into account.*

[35] *Eligible for co-financing.*

Ratio between applications assessed positively and projects finally approved (in %)

AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
98 %	Max 50%	~ 90%	85-90%	98%	96 %	100%	100%	52.63 %	50 %	~95 %	28%	~100%	n.a.

Average time span between the finalisation of the assessment and the selection of projects (in weeks)

AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZPL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS
3	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	4	4	3	5	4	n.a. (2 weeks)[36]

[36] *Estimation by JTS, as first call for proposal is not finalised no exact data is available.*

For a meaningful interpretation of this data, these figures should not only be compared across the four programme categories; they should also be viewed in relation with other factors that can explain differences between programmes (explanatory variables). Therefore we refrain from interpreting each data set, but give some suggestions for meaningful future cross-analyses.

- The figures on the number of applications received should be seen in conjunction with the programme budget and the approach for project generation, and it is especially important to consider whether pre-screening of project ideas takes place.
- The average duration of the assessment process in weeks is a measure of the time-efficiency of the assessment process. It should be analysed by taking the assessment approach and the resources available for programme management (notably for JTS and RBs) into account. Also, the number of applications received should be kept in mind.
- The two ratios are a measure of the up-stream workload of the assessment process in each programme. Taken together, they indicate how many applications must be assessed in relation to the projects that are finally approved. This data should notably be seen in relation to the assessment approach.
- The average time span between the finalisation of the assessment and the selection of projects is a measure of the effectiveness of decision-making and should be interpreted in the light of the selection process.

5.2 Selected aspects of assessment

The interviews investigated **key differences between partner countries/regions** within the same programme. These are mentioned in detail in the programme synthesis reports because it is predominantly at the level of the individual programmes that these differences must be resolved. Just as in the analysis of project generation, differences in partner countries/regions are mostly found in programmes that involve EU 12-15 member states, but they also appear in the EU 12 category. Again, these variations are mainly due to differences in management traditions, administrative skills and cultures or national requirements. The differences mentioned most frequently involve:

- Actors working as assessors – external experts, internal experts, the JTS.
- Participation of regional-level actors – including administrators, intermediaries, politicians – in assessments.
- Systems for obtaining national co-financing (required before or obtained after project selection).

The **major pressures and constraints** seen as influencing the assessment process are summed up in **Table 23** below. Significant differences emerged between programmes that use only external experts for assessments and others that predominantly use other actors, but also make use of experts for specific purposes. Therefore, the responses are grouped in the table below within these two categories.

Table 23: Major pressures and constraints during assessment[37]

Assessment by external experts	Predominantly other actors
• Identifying impartial experts. • Poor skills, knowledge or information base of experts. • Conflicts of interests of experts (e.g. if they are involved in other projects). • Political influence (especially from the	• Interventions by administrators (sectoral departments, ministries) or politicians. • Time required to adequately coordinate between actors (RBs JTS), delays. • Time required by the JTS to finalise or synthesise assessments.

[37] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

national level). • Pressure to accept even poorly rated projects. • Time pressure and unrealistic deadlines for assessment. • JTS is too formalistic – "lost in details".	• Extra work and time pressure due to amendments (documents sent later). • Willingness, expertise and availability of administrators acting as assessors. • Bias of regional level actors (e.g. RBs), sometimes due to political pressure or varied comprehension of specific indicators.

Although it would be useful to know which **assessment criteria** correspond most closely to successful projects, the interview responses do not reveal a clear picture in this area. Respondents whose programmes rely on external experts mainly referred to the criteria contained in the programme documents, saying they consider all of them equally important. Only some of the other programmes were able to outline the criteria that have proven to be most relevant and useful. These include:

- Quality of co-operation and partnership;
- Cross-border impact or added-value;
- Financial or economic criteria (e.g. budget, costs);
- Coherence with programme objectives;
- National co-financing – in countries where this has to be assured in advance.

A similarly vague picture emerged with respect to the **assessment of specific aspects**. Respondents in many programmes simply referred to the assessment criteria or provisions made in the programme documents (or the absence thereof). Most of specific aspects – such as quality of partnership and co-operation, cross-border-dimension and sustainability – continue to be a challenge for assessment in practically all programmes under study. Issues of state aid and competition law seem to be less of a problem because adequate expertise for judging these issues can be found within administrations, and this issue is not as relevant as had been originally anticipated. But beyond that, it is not possible to identify any meaningful patterns across the programmes or highlight particular practices. Nonetheless, all of the information collected is retained in the programme synthesis reports.

Some of the issues mentioned above re-appear in the responses to another question: "Which kind of **expertise or clarification** is currently not available but would be needed for improving project assessment?" (see also Annex 2). On the top of the list are "Quality of co-operation and partnership" and "State aid and competition law". Other areas where there is a lack of expertise for making assessments include:

- Generation of revenue in projects;
- Juridical support (especially rapid clarifications!);
- Public procurement;
- Specific expertise (e.g. for assessing research projects);
- Good practice examples from other programmes / countries.

Ideas for improving the assessment process were gathered and the most important ones are assembled in **Table 24** below, clustered according to the same logic as in table 21 above *(pressures and constraints)*:

Table 24: Ideas for improving the assessment process[38]

External experts	Predominantly other actors
• Use external experts for technical assessment only, leave strategic assessment to others. • Foresee direct contacts/interviews with applicants during assessments. • Improve quality of external experts (e.g. through training, better selection and payment). • Improve methods for assessing programme budgets, cost items and eligible costs. • Ensure sounder economic/financial analysis. • Build stock of knowledge (e.g. on unit costs). • Simplify administrative/eligibility check. • Calibrate or adjust scales for assessment criteria. • Strengthen role of JTS (e.g. synthesising results, competence to change experts). • Use mixed teams (one external expert and one from JTS). • Use consortia of evaluators, expert panels. • Joint assessments (with experts from both sides). • Carry out assessment at a single site, with the presence of the JTS. • Assess technical aspects of infrastructure projects separately.	• Hold more formalised assessments, with clear explanations. • Establish joint criteria (e.g. on content, quality), also for non-eligibility. • Assess content independently from co-financing decisions (depending on type of project). • Pay more attention to assessments by RBs. • Introduce deadlines for submissions (in line with calendar of MC meetings). • Define milestones/time periods for submitting additional documents. • Involve external experts for assessment (to address specific issues and project types or to help during work peaks). • Strengthen the role and involvement of the JTS (e.g. give it responsibility for the entire process, finalising assessment results). • Introduce stop/go criteria as a filter. • Shorten and simplify assessment process, ease administrative work. • Use expertise from other programmes (e.g. Objectives 1 and 2). • Communicate assessment results to applicants (same applies for refusal of national co-finance).

Good / interesting practice:

- **Expert panels (PL-CZ):** The expert assessment is carried out separately on the Polish and Czech sides, and their assessments are combined afterwards. The Polish experts assess the Polish part of the application only. There is a panel of three Polish experts representing each of three Polish regions involved in the programme. This practice ensures greater impartiality. The JTS is considering introducing this practice on the Czech side as well.
- **Pre-selection phase (DE (SAXONY)-PL):** Assessments at this stage serve to verify preliminary concepts for project proposals. Considering the complexity of the programme, and the long assessment and selection procedures with several amendment and feedback loops, this seems to be a good solution. On the other hand, this phase serves as an in-depth consultation of submitted proposals and is non-obligatory.
- **Assessment of strategic projects (RO-BG):** The strategy used for assessing and selecting strategic

[38] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, own analysis.*

projects consisted of two steps: First interested organisations had to submit a fiche (maximum three pages) containing a brief description of the idea; then the ideas were discussed by the Joint MC. Those projects selected were developed into applications and submitted for full assessment. This approach was very useful because it helped avoid the assessment of a great number of applications. It also allowed the development of projects in specific fields of strategic importance and the selection of projects with the biggest impact for the cross-border region.

- **Combination of scoring and verbal assessment (AT-SK):** The procedure and criteria were developed jointly and have been tested successfully during several approval rounds. Scores are considered useful as they indicate the quality of the proposal, but pure ranking lists are considered insufficient. Therefore, these lists are complimented with verbal assessments that capture the specifics. The assessment process is managed by the JTS and the formal check is without knock-out criteria. Two JTS members, one from each country, are always involved in the assessment, to ensure that the specific needs of both countries are being considered.
- **Consistency between assessment grid and application (SI-HR):** The assessment grid is clear and follows the logic of the application form. Every criterion is described and there is clear further referencing to specific sections of the application. The assessment grid is therefore aligned with the application form and offers a great deal of support to the assessors.
- **Assessment of partnership (SI-AT, IT-AT):** The partnership criteria contained in the regulation – joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing – are included as assessment criteria and have been clarified further. Guidelines for applicants specify thoroughly what is understood under each criterion, and they define standards, for instance for joint staffing.

5.3 Reflection on specific assessment issues

During the three synthesis workshops, participating programme partners exchanged their experience on some issues that had emerged from preliminary analyses. The main findings of these reflections are summarised in this section, grouped under the following headings.

Actors in assessment

- **Assessing effectively with external experts**
  - External experts are independent experts contracted for assessment, whereas expert from within the administration (e.g. ministries) or programme management (e.g. JTS, RBs) are considered as internal experts.
  - The main advantages of using external experts include their expertise (often not found within the administration), commitment and availability. On the other hand, they are expensive; working with them requires more time (due to the need for coordination); they are sometimes less thorough (cost-conscious); and often only know technical aspects and lack understanding of cross-border co-operation. Moreover, external experts do not bear any consequences for their assessments.
  - In order to make better use of external assessors, it is recommended that programmes establish a pool of experts and select by random choice. When experts are nominated by (regional) government, their assessments may be biased.
  - The quality of external assessments depends very much on the individual expert. Training experts on aspects other than their professional background (e.g. cross-border co-operation, information on the respective programme) can improve their assessment.
  - To make external assessments more effective, programme actors (especially the JTS and IBs/RBs) should be involved as well. They can supplement expert knowledge with other important information – such as information on applicants or relevant context. This ensures that not only the quality of the written application but the entire proposal is assessed.
  - Only technical aspects should be assessed by external experts, and they should mainly be asked to provide opinions or qualitative assessments, not scores.

- **Assessing effectively without external experts**
  - The main advantages of using internal experts are their background knowledge and experience, including experience with the programme. Their involvement requires less work, as they do not have to be trained, and fewer resources, as they are usually not paid for their services. They can also be called upon on short notice, and their assessments are often provided in a less formalised manner, such as short statements via e-mail.
  - On the other hand, internal experts may be reluctant to incorporate this task into their normal work schedule, or they might not have the required expertise. For instance not all internal experts are familiar with ETC. They might be biased and subject to political pressure or influences. And, contrary to common belief, internal assessors are *not* considered a more reliable, secure alternative to external assessors.
  - Assessing without external experts is also part of a distinctive management philosophy that tries to involve as many actors/stakeholders as possible. But this can turn into quite a complex task: Calling upon various actors from different levels demands time and coordination efforts by programme management.

- The logic behind Involving regional-level actors is that they can choose projects that are of interest for the specific region. This is particularly true when internal assessments are tied to co-financing decisions, as in Austria. Such a mechanism is thought to assure that projects are incorporated into the respective regional policies. But it also has some drawbacks with respect to biased opinions and the lack of sound professional assessment, irrespective of – and/or in addition to – co-financing decisions.

- **Combining external and internal experts**
  - Internal assessments should only be envisaged if enough capacity and adequate expertise are available – within the public sector, at regional level. On the other hand, it is often hard to find suitable external experts and to accommodate their demands, in terms of fee, time required, etc. For MC members, it is not important who is carrying out the assessment, as long as it is sound and transparent.
  - Combining both internal and external experts has the advantage of blending public sector knowledge (on institutions, regions and programmes) with the professional expertise of external actors. The following division of tasks seems appropriate: Internal experts assess coherence with public policies and the programme, and external experts assess the professional quality and technical aspects of the application.
  - The JTS should manage the entire process, as well as contacts with applicants – for example, when there is a need to obtain additional information or make amendments. The JTS should synthesise expert assessments, including negotiating a joint opinion or a compromise, but it can also be asked to provide its own opinion.

Assessment methodology

- **Effective Scoring / Ranking**
  - Scoring involves rating specific aspects or an entire proposal on a quantitative scale of a given range of numbers. Effective scoring requires a system that is clear and well-defined, and applicants should understand and know what they can expect as an assessment outcome.
  - Scoring seems to work best when there is a large number of projects, strong competition among applicants – as in a call for proposals – and poorly prepared projects. Scoring is not very effective when project generation is thoroughly guided and only well-prepared and harmonised projects are presented: Under such conditions, qualitative assessment would be better.
  - There are problems with scoring systems that just contain points without any further explanations. When practiced in this manner, scoring is a “black box”, neither transparent nor useful for guiding MC decisions. In programmes where different cultures/traditions of project generation and assessment are brought together, scoring in this form can disturb and even undermine a climate of trust between partners.
  - Scoring scales should be calibrated, specifying properties for the numbers on the scale, to provide a joint information base for assessors. Long scales should be avoided, scales from one to three are considered most effective. Sometimes qualitative ratings – such as “good”/“bad”/“neutral” – applied to a larger number of criteria/questions are more appropriate and give more reliable results than scores.
  - Certain aspects are difficult to score as they do not lend themselves to being rated in terms of numbers. Examples include innovation, quality of partnership and cooperation. If scoring is used for such aspects, a checklist, with background information, should be provided, and these aspects should not be treated as “knock-out” criteria.

- **Effective verbal assessment**
  - Verbal assessments rate specific aspects or an entire proposal in a qualitative manner. This can be done, for instance, by checking proposals against a list of criteria, or indicators defined in the programme document. In this manner, projects are neither compared in terms of their scores nor ranked, but they have to meet certain (minimum) requirements, and priorities can be defined.
  - Verbal assessments are particularly suited when there are not too many applications to be dealt with, when the applications are of good quality, and when a set of assessors with similar background can be relied upon (e.g. RBs).
  - On the down side, qualitative assessments may be rather time consuming. Also, the argumentation might be hard to follow, unclear or ambiguous. The assessment result is often conceived as a recommendation or suggestion.
  - Verbal assessments leave more flexibility for interpretation by MC members, but they also represent a more demanding information base for decision-making. The experience of MC members often becomes a key factor for interpreting assessments and making decisions.

- **Combining scoring and verbal assessment**
  - This combination currently seems to be a favoured tendency, and many programmes are already practicing – or embarking upon – such a formula. The idea is to avoid the unsatisfying “black-box” aspect of scores and combine the advantages of both methods. This combination is recommended if one or more of the partners had a bad experience with scoring and they hold reservations about that method.
  - A combination is often introduced implicitly, when someone involved in assessment asks for comments or justifications for scores – or an explanation for a rejection. Sometimes scoring is deliberately limited to certain aspects of the assessment process: For instance it can be used to rate cross-border co-operation by giving points to corresponding criteria. Or it can be used to carry out checks of questions (with Yes/No answers) against a pre-defined list.

Quality of the assessment process

- The most common elements of quality assurance for the assessment process include elaboration of assessment grids, manuals or guidelines and the training of external experts. The design of documents that guide the assessment is crucial: They must describe criteria, calibrate scales and formulate good questions that make assessors think.
- The JTS is usually in charge of ensuring the quality of the assessment process. This includes handling tasks like reviewing assessments, checking justifications or negotiating agreements in case of divergent opinions.
- An important element of quality is transparency of the assessment process, not only for MC members but also for the applicants. Most programmes seem to provide only rudimentary (or no) information when applications are rejected. This is not only a less transparent approach, it also makes it difficult for applicants to learn from failed applications.
- A further element of quality assurance can be establishing a stock of knowledge for assessment, including sound estimates for unit costs or minimum standards for cost items. First- and second-level control might be a good source of information, and attempts should be made to transfer this information to the assessors.

Dealing with divergence in assessment

– One approach practiced is to harmonise the differences between scores of assessors. This can be done by requesting experts to discuss the application and come up with a unanimous score, with or without assistance of JTS. Alternatively, the JTS can take on this task by itself – simply using averages of the divergent scores.

- Another approach is to have a new assessment. Either by bringing in an additional opinion of a “referee assessor”, such as a third expert, who usually does not have to take the original assessment into account. A new assessment can also be handled by the initial pair of assessors.

- A third approach is to change the assessment process in order to avoid/minimise differences. This can be done by training assessors more extensively beforehand and by ensuring joint training of assessors and MC members. It can also help to have external experts together at the same location for the entire duration of the assessment and request harmonisation of opinion or a final single score. Alternatively, the JTS can act as main assessor, with external experts complementing their work, for the entire application or specific parts of it.

5.4 Assessment of the assessment process

Table 25 below provides an overview of the ratings (from 1 to 10) for the **effectiveness of the assessment process**. It contrasts the ratings by MC members with those of the programme actors, and that group has been further broken down into four categories (JTS, MA, IBs/RBs, national actors). Again, the ratings by regional actors have been too sparse, so they do not lend themselves to cross-programme comparison, and thus are not included here.

Table 25: Ratings of the effectiveness of the of the assessment process[39]

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12 - 15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**	**Total**
JTS	9.0	8.0	**8.5**	9.0	9.5	5.0	5.0	7.0	**7.1**	7.0	6.0	8.0	7.0	**7.0**	3.0	6.0		**4.5**	**6.9**
MA	8.0	8.0	**8.0**	6.0	9.0	2.0	8.0	8.0	**6.6**	7.0	8.0	3.0	6.0	**6.0**	7.0	8.0	8.0	**7.7**	**6.9**
IB/RBs	5.8	8.0	**6.9**	6.0	8.0	6.3		3.3	**5.9**	8.0	7.0	4.0		**6.3**					**6.3**
National Actors	8.0	5.0	**6.5**	7.5		6.0	5.0		**6.2**	7.0	6.0	7.0	6.0	**6.5**		8.5	6.0	**7.3**	**6.6**
Av. Prog. Actors	**7.7**	**7.3**	**7.5**	**7.1**	**8.8**	**4.8**	**6.0**	**6.1**	**6.5**	**7.3**	**6.8**	**5.5**	**6.3**	**6.5**	**5.0**	**7.5**	**7.0**	**6.5**	**6.7**
MC Members	6.7	6.7	**6.7**	10.0	8.0	7.7	5.8	7.0	**7.7**	6.0	7.3		5.6	**6.3**		7.0		**7.0**	**7.1**

As with the table on “project generation”, the differences on data validity caused by the number of interviews and the range of actors interviewed, must be borne in mind when interpreting this table.

Table 26 shows the ratings by MC members on the relevance of specific criteria for assessment and selection Ratings range from 1 to 10, where 1 stands for not relevant at all and 10 for very relevant. Please note that, in programmes where assessment and selection is done by a steering committee (e.g. IT-AT), ratings by the steering committee would have been more relevant than those of the MC.

[39] Source: Interviews of programme actors, Survey of MC members; own analysis and calculations. Rating from 1 to 10 where 1 stands for not effective at all and 10 for very effective.

Table 26: Relevance of specific criteria for assessment and selection (Ratings by MC members/dots signify number of replies)[40]

Criteria	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	PL-CZ	PL-SK	RO-BG	HU-HR	Sum
Quality of cross-border co-operation (joint develop-ment, implementation, staffing and financing)	●●●● ●●●●	●●●	●	●	●●	●●●●	●	●●●●	●●●● ●●	●●●● ●●	●●	38
Cross-border added value	●●●● ●●●	●●●	●		●●	●●●●	●	●●●	●●●● ●●●	●●●●	●●	34
Quality/relevance of partnership	●●●●	●●●	●		●●●	●●●		●●●	●●●● ●●	●●●	●●	28
Contribution to programme goals	●●●● ●	●●●	●			●●●	●	●●	●●●●	●●●● ●		24
Detailed budget	●●●● ●●	●●	●	●	●	●		●●●	●●●● ●	●●	●	23
Sustainability of results	●●●	●●●	●		●	●	●	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●	21
Coherence between activities and project goals	●	●●●	●		●●	●●		●●●●	●●●	●●●●		20
Coherence with regional/national strategies	●●	●●●●		●		●●	●	●	●●●	●●●		17
Environmental protection/sustainability	●●●	●●●	●		●	●●		●	●●●●	●●		17
Economic and organisational capacities for project implementation		●●●			●			●●	●●●	●●●● ●	●	15
Innovativeness	●●	●●			●	●●	●	●	●●		●	12
Gender-equality and non-discrimination	●●●	●●	●			●		●	●●	●●		12
Cost-benefit ratio	●●	●●		●		●	●	●	●	●●		11

In the online survey, project owners/partners were asked whether they were informed about assessment criteria and assessment results. These responses were clustered with respect to other programme features assumed to be relevant and then were cross-referenced with other data in order to identify main patterns or to test some prior hypothesis by the evaluators.

[40] *Source: Survey of MC members, own calculations.*

The **degree of information about the assessment criteria** was clustered against two programme features: The approach to project generation (on-going or call) and whether amendments were possible during the assessment process. This resulted in the following programme typology:

		Amendments	
		No	Yes
PG approach	On-going	A	B
	Call	C	D

Table 27 summarises the responses by project owners/partners to the question of whether they were informed about assessment criteria and cross-references that information with other features. The left column shows the percentage of respondents who said they were informed about assessment criteria prior to submitting an application. The two middle columns specify the approaches used in the programme. And the right-hand column shows the programme type, in line with the grid above.

Table 27: Classification of programmes according to degree of information about assessment criteria[41]

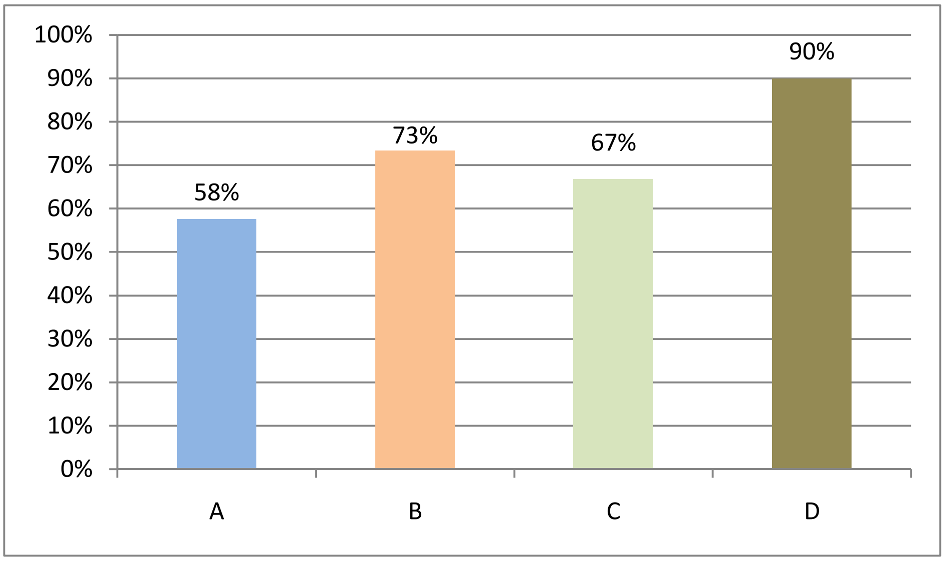
	Applicants informed about assessment criteria 'Yes' (in %)[42]	**Amendments** 0…No 1…Yes	**PG Approach** 0… ongoing 1… Call	Type
Austria-Hungary	58%	0	0	A
Czech Republic-Austria	66%	1	0	B
Austria-Slovakia	69%	1	0	B
Czech Republic-Poland	85%	1	0	B
Italy-Austria	65%	0	1	C
Romania-Bulgaria	90%	0	1	C
Slovenia-Austria	67%	0	1	C
Slovenia-Croatia	57%	0	1	C
Slovenia-Hungary	55%	0	1	C
Hungary-Croatia	83%	1	1	D
Poland-Slovakia	97%	1	1	D

This table shows, for instance, that applicants in programme type D (call system with amendments) are the best informed about assessment criteria, whereas those in programme type C (call system without amendments) are the least informed – with the exception of RO-BG. Since programme categories B and D (allowing amendments) display the highest percentages (see **figures 2 and 3**), the approach to project generation seems to have less influence on the degree of information about assessment criteria than the possibility to make amendments during the assessment process.

[41] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners (of 11 programmes that participated in the thematic evaluation), own calculations.*

[42] *Percentage of "yes" answers compared to all answers for this question.*

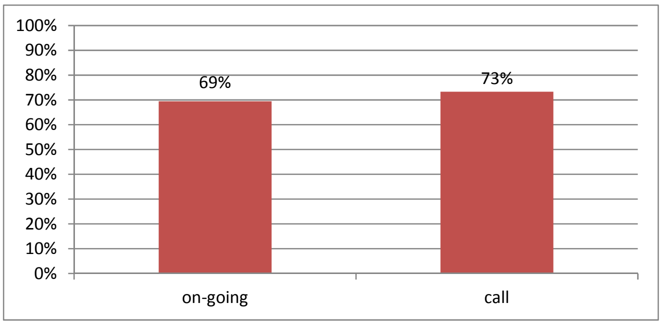
Figure 2: Average percentage of "yes" answers to the question: "Were you informed about the assessment criteria beforehand?", aggregated by programme type[43]



As can be seen, the approach to project generation (open call or ongoing submission) has little influence on the perceived information of applicants on assessment criteria (ie there is no significant difference between A and C).

Figure 3 below also supports this finding.

Figure 3: Average percentage of "yes" answers to the question: "Were you informed about the assessment criteria beforehand?" aggregated by approach to project generation[44]



The **degree of information about the assessment results** was clustered against two programme features: The approach for project generation (on-going or call) and whether external experts were involved in the assessment process. This resulted in the following programme typology:

[43] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations. See also Annex 4.*

[44] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations. See also Annex 4.*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">External experts</td></tr>
<tr><td>No</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">PG approach</td><td>On-going</td><td>A</td><td>B</td></tr>
<tr><td>Call</td><td>C</td><td>D</td></tr>
</table>

Remark: Type C is not applicable to any of the programmes analysed.

Table 28 below summarises the responses by project owners/partners to the question of whether they were informed about assessment results and cross-references that information with other features. The left column shows the percentage of respondents who said they were informed about assessment results. The two middle columns specify the programme's use of external experts and project generation approach. And the right-hand column shows the programme type, in line with the grid above.

Table 28: Classification of programmes according to degree of information about assessment results[45]

	Applicants informed about assessment results "Yes" (in %)[46]	**Involvement of external experts** 0…No 1…Yes	**PG approach** 0… ongoing 1……… Call	Type
Austria-Hungary	81%	1	0	B
Czech Republic-Poland	91%	1	0	B
Czech Republic-Austria	76%	0	0	A
Austria-Slovakia	88%	0	0	A
Hungary-Croatia	92%	1	1	D
Italy-Austria	76%	1	1	D
Romania-Bulgaria	90%	1	1	D
Poland-Slovakia	93%	1	1	D
Slovenia-Austria	67%	1	1	D
Slovenia-Croatia	86%	1	1	D
Slovenia-Hungary	73%	1	1	D

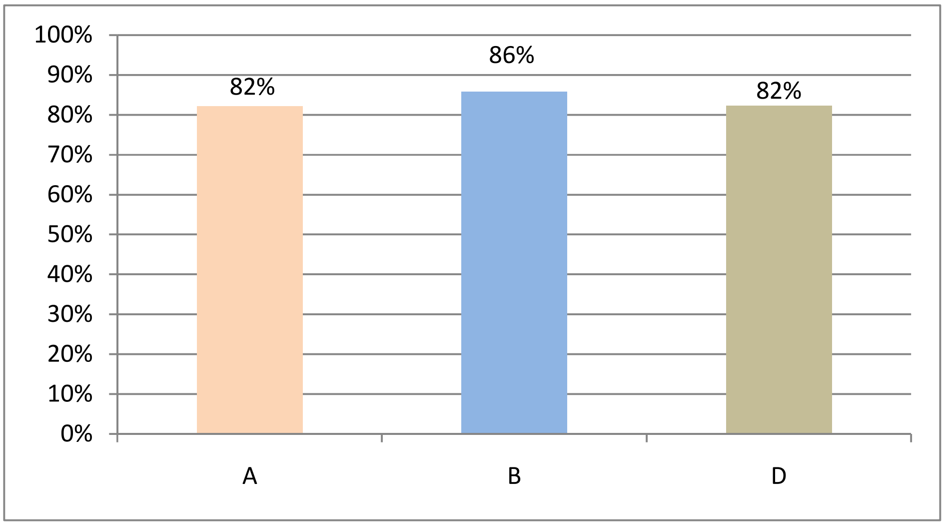
This table shows, for instance, that most of the programmes fall under category D (call system with external experts), but there are considerable differences in the degree of information about assessment results: There are programmes where a high percentage of applicants consider themselves informed (e.g. PL-SK, HU-HR and RO-BG), but also programmes where applicants are much less informed (e.g. SI-AT, SI-HU). When looking at the overall picture (see *Figure 4* below), applicants are quite well informed about assessment results, and there are only slight differences between the three programme types. Therefore both constituting features (programme

[45] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations.*

[46] *Average percentage of "yes" answers concerning information about assessment results by approach.*

approach and involvement of experts) are insufficient as explanatory variables, and other factors - perhaps programme specific ones – are more likely to explain the differences found between programmes.

Figure 4: Average percentage of "yes" answers to the question: "Were you informed about the results of the assessment?", aggregated by programme type[47]



The same holds true when comparing the degree of information with the approach to project generation alone: As shown in *Figure 5* below, the percentage of "yes" answers are similarly high for both approaches, which means that the type of approach is insignificant:

Figure 5: Average percentage of "yes" answers to the question: "Were you informed about the results of the assessment?", aggregated by approach to project generation[48]

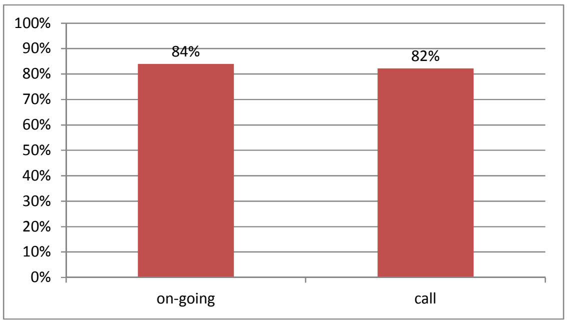


Table 29 below cross-references the degree of information about assessment results with the effectiveness of the assessment process, as rated by programme actors. The left column shows the percentage of respondents who said they were informed about the assessment results. The middle column contains the aggregated average ratings per programme of the effectiveness of the assessment process, and the right-hand column shows the standard deviation for these ratings. Effectiveness is rated from 1 (not effective at all) to 10 (very effective).

[47] *Type C not applicable. Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations. See also Annex 4.*

[48] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations. See also Annex 4.*

Table 29: Cross-reference between programme actors' rating for assessment process and degree of information about results that project owners said they received[49]

	Applicants informed about assessment results "Yes"	Effectiveness of the current assessment process:	Standard deviation (effectiveness of assessment process)
Italy - Austria	76%	7,40	1,34
Austria-Hungary	81%	5,88	2,23
Austria-Slovakia	88%	8,44	1,01
Czech Republic - Austria	76%	5,50	2,01
Slovenia-Austria	67%	5,00	2,74
Czech Republic-Poland	91%	7,40	0,55
Poland-Slovakia	93%	6,80	0,84
Slovenia-Hungary	73%	5,50	2,38
Romania-Bulgaria	90%	6,33	0,58
Slovenia-Croatia	86%	5,00	2,83
Hungary-Croatia	92%	7,75	1,26
Correlation	0,589		

Overall, there is a modest correlation between the two data sets. This means that the effectiveness of the assessment process is only somewhat connected with the degree of information about assessment results, and there must be other factors that can explain the differences between programmes. Looking at the results in more detail, the table shows that the positive self-assessment of programmes that consider themselves as being most effective (e.g. AT-SK, HU-HR, PL-CZ, PL-SK) is mirrored by the points of view of project owners/applicants (with the exception of IT-AT). And that, among programmes that rate themselves as less effective, two of them (SI-AT, AT-CZ) are cited by respondents as giving a low degree of information. But, two other programmes that rate themselves as less effective (SI-HR, AT-HU), are judged by respondents as giving a rather high degree of information.

[49] *Source: Interviews and Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations.*

6. Selection of projects

6.1 Provisions, approach and procedures for selection

In most programmes, the **decision-making on projects** is the task of the MC (monitoring committee). Only two programmes (IT-AT, RO-BG) have set up a steering committee for this purpose. All of the programmes apply the consensus principle in decision-making, which means that both represented partner countries must take decisions unanimously. Although this principle has some inconveniences, such as the possibility of long discussions or stalemates, the advantages prevail, and none of the programmes consider applying majority votes.

But the programmes do differ regarding the role of the MC in project generation: Programmes with call-systems predominantly see the MC as an ad-hoc body that makes decisions on its own, and there is little or no (informal) communication between programme actors leading the selection decision. On the other hand, most programmes with on-going submission gradually develop a joint opinion, and the MC meeting is simply the final step in this process. Quite a few of them, including some programmes with call systems, hold pre-meetings before the actual MC meetings. These pre-meetings give programme actors a chance to discuss applications and form opinions for decision-making, and in most cases they take place unilaterally, and only involve members representing one partner country in the MC.

The comparative overview of key statistical data (*Table 22*) also contains two data-sets that are of interest for analysing the programme's selection processes:

- Ratio between applications assessed positively and projects finally approved (as a percentage).
- Average time span between the finalisation of the assessment and the selection of projects (in weeks).

See comments on interpretation of this data and possible cross-referencing with other factors on page 40.

As was the case with respect to assessment criteria, the responses from interviews did not reveal a clear picture concerning the **relevance of selection criteria**. Programmes with call systems mainly referred to the criteria contained in the programme documents, considering all of them as equally important. On the other hand, programmes with on-going submissions and gradual opinion-building do not seem to distinguish very strongly between assessment and selection, since these are phases in a continuous process, and selection is not simply based on formal criteria laid down beforehand.

The **factors influencing project selection** and so-called "unspoken" rules that were most frequently mentioned include:

- Regional interests and political pressures, predominantly by regional-level representatives.
- Regional balance, i.e. distribution among sub-regions in line with "shadow tables".
- National co-financing, for countries where this has to be assured in advance.
- Interests of the country/region of the lead partner. There were even concerns about possible conflicts of interest when RBs are also involved in project generation.
- Influence of the national level, especially ministries.
- A desire to avoiding repetition of similar projects, or projects by the same applicant on the same topic.
- An open atmosphere and climate of trust in the MC, informal contacts among programme actors – and between them and MC members.

Political influence seems to be mainly exerted outside and before MC meetings, and to a lesser degree at MC meetings themselves. This is also due to the fact that only a few programmes have political representatives as MC members (e.g. AT-CZ, PL-SK). Political influence can also be a positive factor, and agreements established (outside the MC) at political level can be a driving force for generating and selecting projects. Political influence tends to be an "unspoken" factor that is rarely discussed openly and is therefore difficult to deal with.

The consensus principle in MC decision-making is seen as good practice in mitigating political pressures, as it limits the influence one side can exert and requires decision makers to reach a compromise or find allies. Another practice that reduces political influence is limiting the MC's margin of manoeuvre, with methods such as ranking applications or using thresholds. For example, projects that are selected may be required to meet minimum conditions or ratings.

Most programmes practice **conditional approvals**, but the type of conditions vary considerably – from documents to be submitted or changes in the project design before starting, to requirements that must be fulfilled during implementation. Follow-up of conditions during implementation is mainly the task of the JTS, and it does not seem to pose major problems. Opinions on the utility of conditional approvals are quite mixed, but they seem to be one way to prevent MC stalemates, which can arise due to the consensus principle. Another option in these situations is to put projects on hold.

Ideas for improving the selection process were predominantly put forth by programmes that practice on-going submissions, the most important ones are listed below:

- Modify composition of the MC, so that there are fewer members and/or more balanced representation.
- Modify MC decision-making, to ensure there are no voting rights for regional actors or RBs.
- Better instruct MC members on their tasks, using training, manuals, etc.
- Speed up the selection process and get information to MC members early.
- Practice pro-active project development and associated filtering of project ideas at the early stages.
- Treat politically agreed upon projects differently – outside the routine assessments/selection process.

Good / interesting practice:

- **Project presentation in MC (AT-DE (BAVARIA)):** All projects receiving more than EUR 1 million in ERDF money have to present themselves at the MC meetings to allow everyone to become better acquainted with the proposals and give MC members a chance to question applicants.
- **Ranking list of project proposals (PL-SK, PL-CZ):** The MC can only consider projects that are put on the ranking list, and highest ranked projects must be considered first. The ranking is based on expert assessment, and projects receiving less than 60% in points are not recommended for co-financing. This implies there is a minimum threshold below which the MC is actually not allowed to approve projects. This is a good tool to maintain the significance of applied selection criteria.
- **Criteria defined by SC (IT-AT):** The criterion "Coherence between project costs and contribution to programme goals" can only be applied by the steering committee. It is considered a "last exit" when the essence of proposals is not really addressed in the assessment. Some proposals have already been refused funding because of this criterion.
- **Online database for MC Members (PL-SK):** Full sets of application documents are available online, with access restricted to MC members only. This is an innovative solution facilitating access to a full version of project proposals. Until recently, MC members only received a final grid after the expert assessment.
- **Bilateral working group (AT-HU):** This is an "operative body" of the MC, which meets around four times a year. It prepares the decisions of the MC and takes decisions in minor matters, such as acceptance of fulfilment of preconditions set by the MC.

6.2 Assessment of the selection process

Table 30 below provides an overview of the ratings (from 1 to 10) of the **importance of assessment results for the final selection of projects**. And *Table 31* shows the ratings for the **effectiveness of the selection process**. Both tables compare the ratings by MC members with those of other programme actors. Comparisons were also further broken down into four categories (JTS, MA, IBs/RBs, national actors). Again, the ratings by regional actors have been too sparse, and do not lend themselves to cross-programme comparison, so they are not included here.

Table 30: Ratings of the importance of assessment results for the final selection of projects[50]

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12 - 15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**	**Total**
JTS	9.0	9.0	**9.0**	6.0	8.0	3.0	10.0	9.0	**7.2**	7.0	8.0	9.0	10.0	**8.5**	10.0	10.0		**10.0**	**8.3**
MA	5.0	10.0	**7.5**	7.0	9.0	3.0	9.0	7.0	**7.0**	10.0	8.0	7.0	9.0	**8.5**	10.0	10.0	10.0	**10.0**	**8.1**
IB/RBs	6.0	8.5	**7.3**	4.5	6.3	5.4		3.0	**4.8**	9.0	9.5	7.0		**8.5**					**6.6**
National Actors	7.5			6.5		8.0	8.0		**7.5**	8.0	9.0	8.0	9.0	**8.5**		9.0	9.0	**9.0**	**8.2**
Av. Prog. Actors	**6.9**	**9.2**	**7.9**	**6.0**	**7.8**	**4.9**	**9.0**	**6.3**	**6.6**	**8.5**	**8.6**	**7.8**	**9.3**	**8.5**	**10.0**	**9.7**	**9.5**	**9.7**	**8.1**
MC Members	**6.5**	**7.6**	**7.0**	**5.0**	**8.0**	**5.7**	**7.3**	**8.0**	**6.8**	**9.0**	**9.0**		**7.8**	**8.6**		**9.0**		**9.0**	**7.5**

Table 31: Ratings of the effectiveness of the selection process[51]

	AT-DE (BAVARIA)	IT-AT	**EU 15**	AT-HU	AT-SK	AT-CZ	DE (SAXONY)-PL	SI-AT	**EU 12 - 15**	PL-CZ	PL-SK	SI-HU	RO-BG	**EU 12**	SI-HR	HU-HR	RO-RS	**IPA CBC**	**Total**
JTS	7.0	8.0	**7.5**	6.0	8.5	8.0	7.0	8.0	**7.5**	7.0	7.0	8.0	9.0	**7.8**	3.0	6.0		**4.5**	**7.1**
MA	8.0	9.0	**8.5**	7.0	8.0	4.0	9.0		**7.0**		7.0	6.0	5.0	**6.0**		8.0	8.0	**8.0**	**7.2**
IB/RBs	8.0	5.0	**6.5**	4.3	7.0	6.2		2.7	**5.0**	8.5	7.0	6.0		**7.2**					**6.1**
National Actors	9.0	9.0	**9.0**	6.0		6.5	7.0		**6.5**	7.0	8.0	7.0	6.0	**7.0**		8.0	6.0	**7.0**	**7.2**
Av. Prog. Actors	**8.0**	**7.8**	**7.9**	**5.8**	**7.8**	**6.2**	**7.7**	**5.3**	**6.5**	**7.5**	**7.3**	**6.8**	**6.7**	**6.9**	**3.0**	**7.3**	**7.0**	**6.5**	**6.7**
MC Members	**5.7**	**6.5**	**6.1**	**6.0**	**7.0**	**6.7**	**6.0**	**5.0**	**6.1**	**7.3**	**6.8**		**5.9**	**6.7**		**7.0**		**7.0**	**6.4**

As was noted with previous tables, the differences on data validity caused by the number of interviews and the range of actors interviewed must be borne in mind when interpreting this table.

In the online survey project, owners/partners were asked how transparent the selection process was for them. These responses were cross-referenced with other data in order to identify main patterns or test some prior hypothesis by the evaluators.

Table 32 below shows the aggregated ratings per country (mean average and standard deviation) and programme. The rating scale was from 1 (not transparent at all) to 10 (very transparent).

[50] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, Survey of MC members and project owners/partners; own analysis and calculations.*

[51] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, Survey of MC members and project owners/partners; own analysis and calculations.*

Table 32: Ratings of the transparency of the selection process[52]

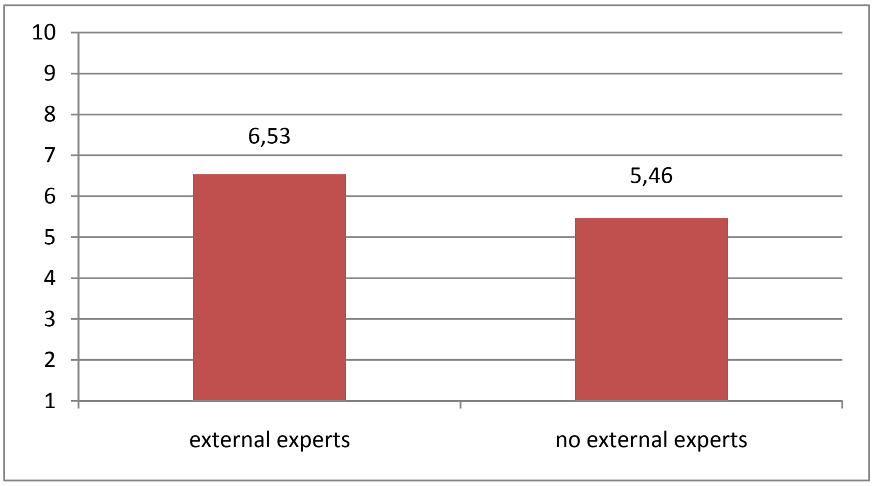
		Average	Std. dev.	Average per programme
Italy - Austria	AT	5,.89	2.47	5.65
	IT	5.41	2.69	
Austria-Hungary	AT	4.70	2.45	5.63
	HU	6.56	2.34	
Austria-Slovakia	AT	5.24	2.86	5.91
	SK	6.58	3.22	
Czech Republic - Austria	AT	4.32	2.36	5.31
	CZ	6.30	3.38	
Slovenia-Austria	SI	5.83	1.72	5.62
	AT	5.40	3.65	
Czech Republic-Poland	CZ	6.08	3.11	6.70
	PL	7.32	2.08	
Poland-Slovakia	PL	6.70	2.10	6.94
	SK	7.18	2.79	
Slovenia-Hungary	SI	6.80	3.39	6.23
	HU	5.67	3.21	
Romania-Bulgaria	RO	10.00	0.00	8.50
	BG	7.00	2.45	
Slovenia-Croatia	SI	7.25	2.22	7.29
	HR	7.33	1.53	
Hungary-Croatia	HU	7.25	3.45	7.00

In general, this overview shows that the opinion among project owners/partners (measured by the standard deviation) differs substantially for practically all programmes – and also between the partner countries within the same programmes. Therefore the mean average per programme in the right hand column should be interpreted with great care, and these divergences should be taken into account.

The ratings for transparency were cross-referenced against the **involvement of external experts** in the assessment process. As can be seen in *Figure 6* below, the level of transparency was rated significantly higher in programmes where external experts were involved. But this difference might also be influenced by the fact that this sample only included two programmes that assess without external experts (AT-SK, AT-CZ).

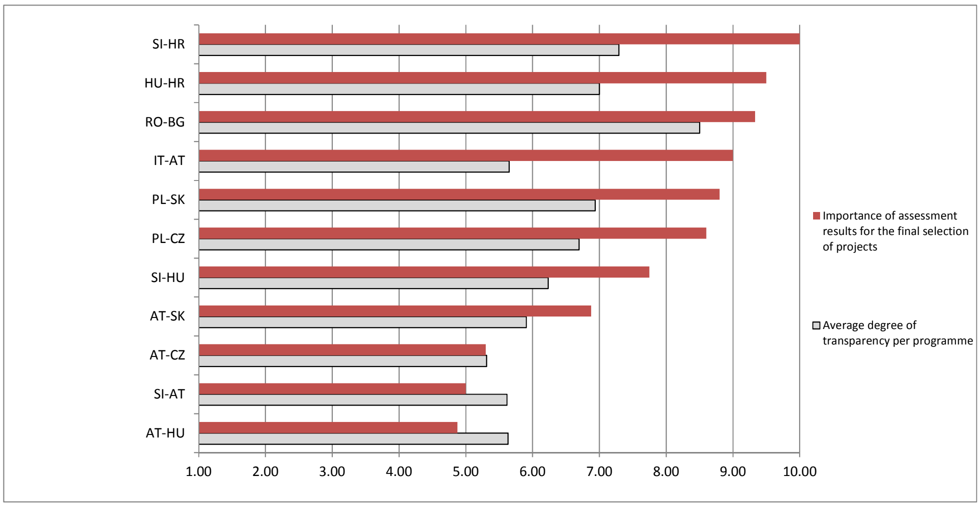
[52] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations.*

Figure 6: Transparency of the selection process and involvement of external experts[53]



The ratings for transparency were also compared to the "**importance of assessment results** for the final selection of projects" (taken from **Table 30**). **Figure 7** below ranks the programmes according to the importance of assessment results and places the average degree of transparency alongside.

Figure 7: Cross-reference of importance of assessment results and degree of transparency[54]



As a general tendency, programmes where assessment results are of high importance also have higher perceived transparency. An exception is the IT-AT programme, where the assessment results are of high importance for the final selection but the perceived transparency is rather low. In the AT-CZ, AT-HU and SI-AT programmes, both the importance of assessment results and the perceived transparency of the selection process are rated low. This is an indication that improvements are needed in both aspects.

The "importance of assessment results for the final selection of projects" was compared with the degree of information applicants received about assessment results in **Figure 8**.

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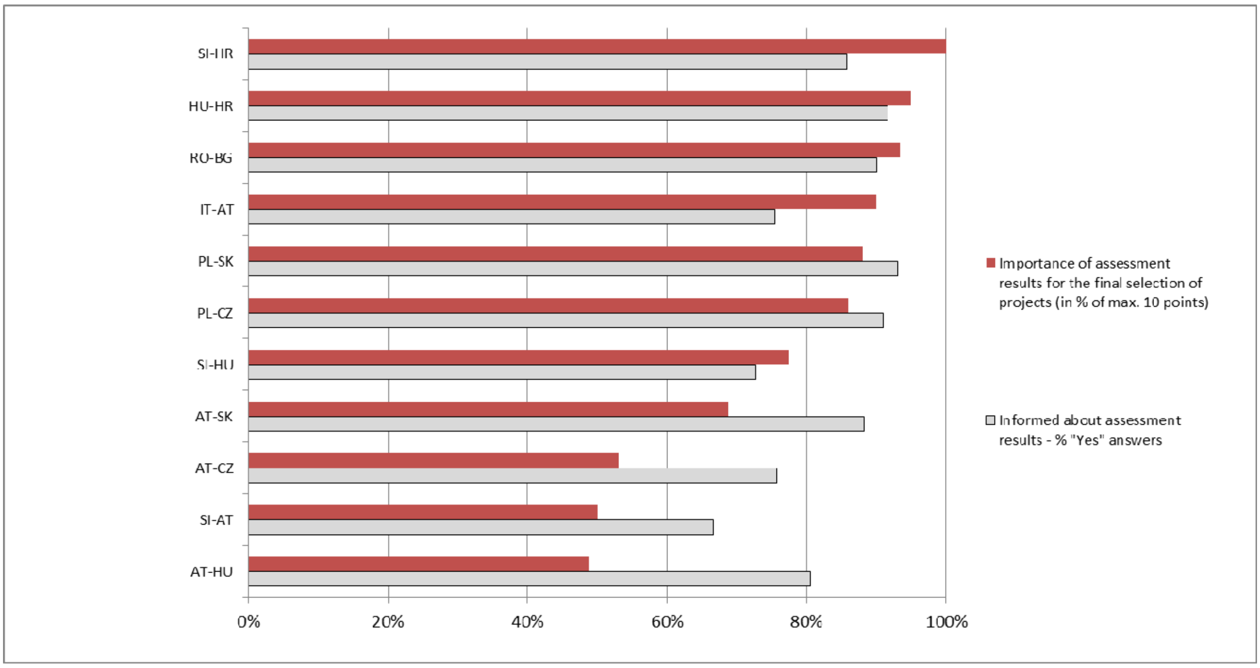
[53] *Source: Survey of project owners/partners, own calculations.*

[54] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, Survey project owners/partners; own calculations.*

Figure 8: Cross-reference between importance of assessment results for the final selection and degree of information given to applicants about results[55]



This figure shows that, in some programmes (e.g. AT-HU, SI-AT, AT-CZ), importance of assessment results for the selection is rated rather low and the perceived information about assessment results is rated rather high. This could indicate that applicants are well informed about assessment results but not about the reasons for final selection /rejection – but this hypothesis should be investigated further at programme level.

[55] *Source: Interviews of programme actors, Survey project owners/partners; own calculations.*

7. ETC and the wider context

7.1 Co-ordination and liaison with other programmes, in particular Objective 1 and 2

Contacts and information flows are predominantly established with adjacent ETC CBC programmes, and, to a lesser degree, also with Objective 1 and 2 programmes, according to the survey. In Austria and Bavaria, the linkage with rural development programmes, in particular the LEADER axis, is also of importance. This pattern is mainly due to administrative proximity, as the same institutional actors can be involved with several programmes, but it is also the similarity of issues addressed by these programmes that encourage contacts.

Most programmes think that these contacts should first of all be established at the regional level, and that is indeed where they mainly take place – in particular within programmes that have a decentralised implementation system and/or on-going submissions. But there are also some cases where such contacts are rarely established at all.

The main mechanisms for these contacts and information flows are informal ones, and they often take place between colleagues inside the administration or because the same person, perhaps working for a regional body, is involved in more than one territorial cooperation programme. More formal contacts take place in regular meetings or periodic cross-programme meetings at the regional level. There are also trilateral arrangements, such as events involving several ETC programmes or exchanges between adjacent Small Project Fund managers. In a few countries, cross-programme contacts are even facilitated at the national level, either through a National Committee (SK) or Coordination Body (RO) or at a gathering like the annual “Forum of European Projects” in Poland, involving more than just ETC programmes. Such exchanges can be exclusively for ETC programmes, like the annual Conference of ETC programmes in Czech Republic and the informal working group of ETC programmes in Austria.

INTERACT also plays an important role in establishing contacts and information flows, especially between territorial cooperation programmes that are not located next to each other. Programme actors either meet through attending INTERACT events or by maintaining regular contacts with INTERACT Points.

The **mechanisms to ensure added value** of territorial cooperation programmes in relation to Objective 1 and 2 programmes can take place during the project generation phase: For instance applicants can be asked to give information on synergies with other programmes – or they may be asked why it is not possible to obtain funding from another programme. (Sometimes such a declaration is also requested from the respective programme.) Assessment consultations with other departments or a coherence check with other programmes can serve to distinguish a project’s added value – and to prevent double funding or curb duplication of projects. Some territorial cooperation programmes have also installed a mechanism for communication with other programmes at the selection stage, and they involve representatives of these programmes - mainly Objective 1 and 2 – as MC members.

Apparently it is much more common for project partners to be referred to territorial cooperation programmes by other programmes than the other way round. Territorial cooperation programmes have a much broader focus and are harder to delineate, so that many “stranded” projects attempt to obtain funding from territorial cooperation as a last resort – even though the administrative and managerial requirements are much more demanding. In some programmes with on-going submissions, there is explicit guidance for applicants about the programmes best suited for their project idea. It is still quite rare to see combined funding between territorial cooperation and other mainstream programmes – though it is possible for an investment funded by Objective 1 or 2 to have a corresponding “soft” activity through territorial cooperation.

The potential for co-operation and linkages with other programmes is mainly seen in information flows and exchange of experience. Other opportunities for exchange include the sharing of technical solutions – like information systems, monitoring systems, project databases – or the provision of expertise.

This potential for cooperation is predominantly expected to occur between various territorial cooperation programmes, particularly between adjacent cross-border cooperation programmes working in "trilateral" areas or between cross-border cooperation and trans-national cooperation programmes. Linkages with Objective 1 and 2 programmes are less promising, because they differ in thematic focus, administrative routines and understanding of cooperation. Nevertheless, efforts should be made to coordinate with these programmes on aspects like innovation, competitiveness and accessibility. If contacts are to be established, they should mainly focus on the (operative) level of IBs/RBs or co-financing authorities, and not at the level of MAs – because those authorities are usually too distant from project generation.

Ideas for better co-ordination / liaison were, again, mainly proposed with regard to other territorial cooperation programmes. Most of the ideas focus on improved articulation between cross-border and trans-national strands Transnational programmes should, in particular:

- Inform MAs/JTSs of cross-border cooperation programmes on applications they have rejected, as some of these applicants later seek funding from cross-border cooperation programmes.
- Invite project owners/partners of cross-border cooperation programmes to their events.
- Favour articulation at the project level by thinking along "project chains" – transnational projects leading to follow-up projects at the bilateral level, and vice versa.

Ideas for better liaison between cross-border cooperation programmes include reducing formal obstacles to allow for the implementation of more trilateral projects and the establishment of cross-programme (project) databases. It is proposed that INTERACT play a stronger role in this direction, for instance, by supporting exchanges across territorial cooperation programmes, or by organising joint trainings – but also through the knowledge management tool called KEEP.[56]

Better liaison with other programmes should start with mutual information, which could lead to increased awareness about the possibilities for collaboration. Coordination platforms should predominantly be established at the regional level. Other ideas were the elaboration of regional strategies with subsequent top-indication of suitable EU programmes for their implementation. It was also suggested to use the transnational cooperation strands in LEADER, or the interregional cooperation component in Convergence and Competitiveness programmes,[57] whenever present, as well as the connection of projects funded by ETC and LEADER.

7.2 Transfer of projects and experiences beyond the immediate programme area

The programmes are open to participation of actors from outside the programme and all of them apply the so-called **20% rule**, which allows involvement of partners beyond the eligible area. Some programmes have specified the conditions under which this rule can be used – at times only on one side of the border – by, for example, prioritising certain sub-regions or establishing clear definitions of eligible actors.

This wide-spread application of the 20 % rule is an indication of the willingness of programmes to take a broader territorial perspective and to overcome the new "programme borders" and to make them more permeable. Some also regard it as a means to modify problematic demarcations of programme areas. However, the 20% rule is also seen by some as a rather random extension of eligible areas. For certain topics, a much wider territorial coverage would be appropriate. For instance it may be logical to include functional regions or adjacent agglomerations.

Trilateral projects would be an interesting way to tap the potential for co-operation in a wider area, but they are too difficult to implement. They require consensus by all participating countries, and involving partners from a

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[56] One of the key objectives of the INTERACT knowledge management initiative KEEP is to facilitate the creation of links between projects and programmes through a central database and web portal, where projects are stored and can be searched by theme and region. Unfortunately, the limits and challenges of such a central database (language, data entry and quality check, etc.) are clear. Moreover, at the moment, INTERACT can only include territorial cooperation programmes and not other objectives.

[57] As provided by article 37/6/(b) of Reg. (EC) No 1083/2006. INTERACT Point Valencia has provided programmes with several opportunities to discuss the possible implementation of this option.

country not participating in the programme leads to considerable FLC problems. Therefore, transnational programmes are seen as a better alternative. Another option would be to involve actors from other countries as experts contracted by the project, not as actual project partners.

Replication or "cloning" of projects to other cross-border cooperation programmes is seen as a useful way to transfer ideas and good practice, but it is only practiced occasionally. At present it is mainly used for transfers to adjacent cross-border cooperation programmes in trilateral constellations, which is often facilitated by means of trilateral projects. A specific case of replication is the establishment of Small Project Facilities or Euregios in adjacent areas, but this arrangements need to be supported by all sides in order to achieve good territorial coverage instead of an inconvenient patchwork.

When replicating projects, differences in context must be taken into account, which is why "automatic" transfers should be avoided. And care should be taken to check that only proven and good practice is transferred. That means it is important to warn others about bad practice or poor project ideas. If this is not done, mistakes and problems might be transferred as well. The same holds true for follow-up projects, and in both cases an additional challenge is avoidance of double funding for same or similar activities.

Private actors, such as project partners or consultants, who are motivated by the business generated through copying successful project ideas, are seen as the driving force behind replication. But replication is also supported by programme actors (notably RBs), and their networks and forums are important places for transferring good practices or project ideas.

Fast track or capitalisation approaches are rarely taken into consideration for transfers to other programmes/areas, and survey respondents expressed strong doubts about their utility. At best, they are seen as a method for transfers between territorial cooperation programmes, in particular between cross-border cooperation and transnational strands. It is suggested that INTERACT should play a stronger role in supporting capitalisation between territorial cooperation programmes.

But transfers to other mainstream programmes, like Objectives 1 and 2, are not seen as feasible, because their focus, dynamics and structures are quite different. Changes would be needed in these latter programmes to improve the conditions for capitalisation.

The need and interest for cross-programme transfer and learning has been clearly expressed by many programme actors. And a range of **other transfer mechanisms** is already in use. Many of them are informal exchanges, but more formalised mechanisms are also practiced, for instance:

- Exchange and meetings with adjacent programmes;
- Periodic meetings of actors involved in programmes in triangular border areas (e.g. CZ-PL-DE);
- Invitation of representatives from other ETC programmes as guest "observers" at MC meetings (e.g. IT-AT);
- Coordination and exchange between ETC programmes at the national level (e.g. CZ).

Ideas for additional transfer mechanisms include:

- Establishing cross-programme forums of beneficiaries or forums covering specific thematic areas;
- Encouraging thematic exchanges in wider areas, for example Alpine Space;
- Using new media – digital social networks, competence pools, websites and internet online forums.

7.3 Territorial cooperation programmes and macro-regional strategies

Most programme actors interviewed agreed that territorial cooperation programmes should be placed in a wider context. There are, however, considerable differences regarding the potential role of cross-border cooperation programmes in macro-regional strategies, such as the EU strategy for the Danube Region, which is currently under preparation. For many it is still **too early** for such deliberations, because the strategy is not yet concrete enough and there is a need for more information, both on content and implementing mechanisms.

Also at this stage many **doubt** the added value of macro-regional strategies and fear this might just turn out to be another case of "planning hype", which ends with a strategy that is too broad and vague to be operationalised. Some point out the bad timing of the EUSDR preparation process, which is too late for the current programming period and still too early for the next one. And there are fears that the entire strategy process will shortly be discredited and not of much use for the elaboration of the 2014+ programme architecture.

Most respondents consider **transnational programmes as the most important tool** for implementing macro-regional strategies, but transnational progammes would need to be designed differently in order to suit the strategy. There is also widespread concern that cross-border cooperation programmes will come under increasing pressure, neglecting the achievements gained so far and the value of direct bilateral co-operation on a smaller scale.

More concretely, there is **resistance** against tendencies to **use cross-border cooperation programmes for co-financing** macro-regional strategies, as their financial resources are rather small and they have a different mission or focus. Concerns were expressed about attempts to **interfere with the programmes' decision-making process**, through actions such as requiring macro-regional aspects as assessment criteria, influencing project selection or top-down imposition of project ideas. There are also concerns about spreading of a macro-regional "virus", whereby projects try to sell themselves with a "macro" label without sound justification. Moreover, additional strategies are likely to be prepared at an intermediary level (e.g. Centrope, Danube-Vltava), which represents more functional transnational areas. This tendency could further complicate decision-making at the level of individual programmes, because all of these strategies would have to be considered.

On the other hand, there are also many positive views regarding macro-regional strategies: They are seen to offer new opportunities and perspectives for successful ideas on a larger scale, while providing impulses for know-how transfer beyond the respective programme area. They can be treated as an additional framework that needs to be taken into account, similar to NSRFs. Cross-border cooperation programmes and their projects can be seen as smaller pieces of the puzzle – synergetic parts of a bigger picture, contributing to broader topics.

Ideas for incorporating macro-regional strategies in programme decisions include:

- Focusing on topics of joint interest between macro-regional strategies and territorial cooperation programmes;
- Indicating topics of wider interest from the top-down, but generating corresponding projects from bottom up, with guidance and control from the territorial cooperation programmes;
- Having MCs identify topics from macro-regional strategies that are considered appropriate for their respective territorial cooperation programme;
- Reflecting the relevance of macro-regional strategies for the respective cross-border cooperation programmes at the programming stage for the new period;
- Using the remaining programme period for pre-defining appropriate projects for 2014+.

There were many requests for establishing a macro-region-level steering mechanism, which is capable of addressing and co-ordinating territorial cooperation and other ERDF programmes. This should include the establishment of national interfaces (contact points) to coordinate the various inputs of Structural Funds in the respective country. Such a transnational governance structure, which is capable of liasing between macro-regional strategies and territorial cooperation programmes - and between territorial cooperation strands – would offer a new framework for the implementation of territorial cooperation programmes. On this basis, their **decision-making in view of macro-regional strategies** could be modified even further. For example:

- Member states, in particular the national interfaces, could encourage and support ERDF and territorial cooperation programmes in contributing towards macro-regional strategies.
- Programmes could incorporate issues of macro-regional relevance in their assessment and selection procedures.
- Programmes could earmark part of their programme budget for co-financing macro-regional strategies.

8. Concluding remarks and outlook

It is not feasible to draw conclusions from the manifold findings of this cross-programme evaluation, and this was not the intention of this report. Since the main objective was to provide learning opportunities for the participating programmes, the advisory group has agreed that neither judgements nor recommendations by the evaluators were to be provided. Therefore the various sections of this report contain a range of material (e.g. comparative tables, interesting practices, ideas for improvement) to assist the participating programmes in their learning, reflect upon their own practice and draw conclusions – in the light of the broader picture provided by this cross-programme analysis.

"Same, same but different", that's how one of the participants in a synthesis workshop characterised the exchanges that took place there. And this could well be the motto for the overall picture. Because, on the surface, many commonalities can be found between the programmes, and only a second look, into the details, reveals the differences. This is hardly surprising, since this evaluation deals with the same type of programmes that are based on the same regulatory framework, but are **implemented under different contextual conditions**.

Many of these differences are rooted in different national requirements or administrative traditions that are hard to change – at least in the short run. This situation was not only emphasised in the analysis, it should also be taken into account for comparisons and exchanges. Simply transferring a practice found interesting elsewhere will hardly work. Instead, the challenge lies in adapting a practice to fit with the respective context, so it will suit the specific conditions or requirements.

Regarding utility, evaluations offer two types of use, which can contribute towards learning and drawing conclusions: They provide learning opportunities for participants who are engaged in the evaluation process ("process use"); and they provide evaluation findings as documented in the various evaluation products, such as documents, ("product use").

From the point of view of the author, the main features of these types of use in this specific cross-programme evaluation were or still are:

- **Process use:**
  - Interviews: These were not just intended to collect information from respondents, but also provided opportunities for feedback from relevant actors or reflection of individuals or groups. The programmes used this opportunity to varying degrees: Some were keen to capture a range of perspectives by proposing interviews with a variety of actors. Some explicitly used interviews for reflection purposes, in particular in the form of group interviews (some of them lasted more than three hours!). Others kept the effort to a minimum, in terms of interview time or actors to be included.
  - Synthesis workshops: In addition to providing feedback for the evaluation team, these workshops were intended as opportunities for learning and exchange among smaller groups of programmes. Again, this opportunity was used differently by the programmes taking part: Some participated in greater numbers, thus permitting wider learning effects and exchanges within and between the programmes, others were represented by one or two actors, which limited, but did not prevent, the learning process.
- **Product use:**
  - Programme overviews of selected aspects: These were produced by the evaluation team for the synthesis workshops, intended as cross-programme baseline information for discussion and exchange.
  - Programme synthesis reports: They contain all the information and data collected in the framework of the evaluation (interviews and surveys). They represent rich descriptions of the programme's reality and can be used for reflection and further exchanges (see below). They are not meant to be edited, published and distributed as such, but to serve as basis for future evaluation exercises or reflections on programmes.

- Final report: It assembles the main findings from a cross-programme perspective. The chapters and sections highlight significant patterns (commonalities or key differences), illustrate the experience gained on the ground through interesting/good practices and assemble the various ideas for improvement mentioned by programme actors.
- Joint executive summary: The two team leaders elaborated a joint summary of both cross-programme evaluations, highlighting those findings that can be generalised and the lessons learned from implementation. This could also serve as a stand-alone document for wider dissemination beyond the participating programmes, or even for the shaping of the next generation of programmes by policy makers.

As this evaluation is a pilot exercise, there is also a third type of use, which can be labelled a "**test use**". From the implementation of this evaluation, lessons can be drawn for designing and managing cross-programme evaluations in the future. In order to fully capture this use, the experience gained by the evaluation team and IP Vienna, as well as the participating programmes, should be taken into account. This was an important element of discussion at the final event, in particular for the concluding session of the advisory group.

Although this evaluation exercise is now finalised, the opportunities for learning and making use of the findings are not. From the point of view of the author, there is a range of **possible activities** in the immediate future, which are located at various levels:

- **Programme level:**
  - The programmes that have participated in this exercise can reflect on the experience gained and draw lessons or conclusions for their own practice. To this end, they should analyse both reports together and look at their own situation (or aspects thereof) in the light of cross-programme analysis and comparison.
  - It might be useful to carry out a combined reflection, by taking into account the findings of both cross-programme evaluations, thus dealing not only with operational but also thematic aspects.
  - Programmes that already have - or foresee – an on-going evaluation process, could incorporate the findings from the cross-programme evaluation(s) in their own evaluation activities. The programme synthesis reports, in particular, contain ample unedited material for this purpose. In this case, the content of these reports has to be further developed, improved and extended, as considered appropriate by each programme.
  - Such programme-specific evaluations can be used to investigate certain aspects in more depth, clarify specific points and interpret material, such as comparative tables, elaborated in the framework of the cross-programme evaluation.
- **Cross-programme level**
  - Participating programmes could have more in-depth exchanges with other programmes involved in this exercise, to reinforce their mutual learning on selected aspects. The contacts established, or the lessons drawn, from the synthesis workshops – as well as the practice examples of the final report – provide hints and ideas for further exchanges. And the respective programme synthesis reports contain a wealth of information for such focused follow-up exchanges. Again, these exchanges could also incorporate the findings from both cross-programme evaluations and also deal with thematic aspects.
  - Whereas the exchange during the synthesis workshops was pre-determined and took place with a certain group of programmes, further exchanges will have to be self-organised. One constellation that could prove particularly useful is the exchange between adjacent territorial cooperation programmes in trilateral areas, or between several programmes managed by the same country/MA.

 - Programmes that have not taken part in the cross-programme evaluation(s) could take the information of the final report(s), in particular the good/interesting practices quoted, and contact programmes that seem interesting for them in view of engaging in further exchanges.

 - The current cross-programme evaluation has revealed a great interest and need for targeted exchanges, but respondents have also cautioned about limited programme resources for such activities. INTERACT has frequently been addressed as the institutional actor/umbrella organisation for territorial cooperation that seems most appropriate for facilitating and organising such targeted exchanges. These could also involve further cross-programme evaluations, including other programmes or addressing other topics.

- **Meta - level**

 - At the European level, European Commission (DG Regional Policy in particular) could enhance and promote the findings of the cross-programme evaluation(s), by incorporating them in their stock of knowledge on territorial cooperation programmes. Further activities could include, for instance, cross-referencing the main findings with those of evaluations commissioned at EU level, such as the ex-post evaluation of INTERREG 2000–2006. This can include the shaping of the next generation of programmes as well.

 - In the Danube region, the actors involved in preparing the macro-regional strategy could reflect on the respective findings of the cross-programme evaluation(s), in particular the potential contributions of territorial cooperation programmes and their concerns or ideas for the governance architecture of this strategy.

 - INTERACT could incorporate the findings of the cross-programme evaluation(s) in their products (e.g. training, publications, events). Building on the experience gained, other INTERACT Points could initiate similar cross-programme evaluations in their respective areas.

9. Annex 1: Research Grid (Version 5 February 2010)

On 20 January 2010 a kick-off meeting took place with representatives of 11 programmes that had originally expressed their interest to be involved in this cross-programme evaluation. This advisory group has agreed on the objective, method and timeframe, including the topics to be covered by this evaluation. Two groups of topics have been defined:

1. Operational aspects along the programme cycle: The analysis will focus on three aspects respectively stages: Project generation, assessment of proposals and selection of projects.

2. Topics in relation to future macro-regional strategies (e.g. EUSDR): Some aspects were selected that might have an impact on the role and implementation process of ETC programmes, in order to collect baseline information on the current status and the points of views of ETC programme stakeholders on these issues.

These topics will be analysed by taking into account the perspectives of four distinct stakeholder groups. Information from them will be collected in the following manner:

- Programme actors (MA, IBs, JTS): Interviews (national language)
- Other relevant actors (e.g. at national level): Interviews (national language)
- MC Members: Questionnaire survey (English only)
- Project owners: Some questions to be included in the Questionnaire survey of the Thematic evaluation (national language)

The present Research Grid outlines the main issues to be dealt with under each of the topics, and who the information should be collected from. These issues will then be transformed into questions for interview guides and questionnaires. To facilitate aggregration and/or cross-programme comparison, use will also be made of pre-structured answer categories (i.e. multiple choice), scales and rankings.

1. Operational aspects along the programme cycle:

In addition to being addressed during the interviews with programme actors, some of these issues will be included in the Questionnaire Surveys with members of the Monitoring Committees (MC), Project Owners (PO):

1.2 Project generation	MC	PO
– Provisions for project generation (e.g. support & advisory services, publicity)		
– Approach for project generation (e.g. calls, pro-active project development)		
– Management of project generation, i.e. roles and tasks of programme actors		
– Effectiveness of current process (from project ideas to submitting applications)	X	X
– Information flows during this process, main weaknesses / bottlenecks		
– Roles and tasks of local / regional level		
– Capacities and resources for project development (at different levels)		
– Factors of influence for project generation (positive / negative)		
– Development of strategic projects (approaches, experiences)	X	X
– Obstacles and success factors for joint project development		X

– Key differences between partner countries/regions in the same programme – Strategy for trade-off between publicity and nr. of applications – Strategy with relation to coverage of programme topics (all topics, focus) – Ideas for improving project generation	X	X
1.2 Assessment of proposals		
– Management of project assessment, i.e. roles and tasks of programme actors – Involvement of external experts in the assessment process – Assessment approach (e.g. one-/two step procedures, pre-selection at idea stage) – Differences in assessment between programme partners (e.g. pre-assessments by certain partners / IBs) – Assessment criteria (originally foreseen, actually used, most relevant) – Transparency and effectiveness of current assessment process – Time-line analysis of assessment process (between submission and assessment result) – Major pressures and constraints during the assessment process – Ratio applications received / selected projects – Assessment of specific aspects (e.g. partnership, co-operation, cross-border-dimension) – Ideas for improving the assessment process	X X	X X
1.3 Selection of projects		
– Process from assessment to project selection, significance of assessment results – Selection criteria (foreseen in programme document, actually used, most relevant) – Effective decision-making on projects (programme bodies, institutions, individuals) – Major influences on project selection, 'unspoken' rules – Experience / practice in dealing with political influence – Effectiveness of current process (from assessment to selection) – Information flows during this process, main weaknesses / bottlenecks – Application of conditional approvals (experience gained, follow-up of conditions during implementation) – Time-line analysis (from assessment to selection) – Ideas for improving the selection process	X X X X	X X

2. Topics in relation to future macro-regional strategies

These issues will only be addressed in interviews with programme actors.

2.1 Transfer of projects and experiences beyond the immediate programme area, e.g.

- Replication or „cloning' of projects to other CBC programmes
- Application of 10% and 20% rule
- Use of fast track or capitalisation approaches for transfer to other programmes /areas

2.2 Co-ordination and liaison with other (Mainstream) programmes, e.g.

- Contacts, information flows between ETC and Objective 1 & 2 programmes,
- Mechanisms to ensure added value of ETC programmes (in relation to Objective 1 & 2 programmes)
- Potential for co-operation and linkages with Objective 1 & 2 programmes (which topics, areas of Intevention)
- Ideas for better co-ordination / liaison with Objective 1 & 2 programmes

2.3 Scope for modification of decision – making process

- Possibilities for incorporating macro-regional strategies in programme decision
- Major obstacles / constraints
- Ideas for modifying decision – making in view of ma macro-regional strategies

10. Annex 2: Interview Guide

Programme: **Country:**

Interview partner (s)	
Programme(s) Function	
Institution	
Date, location of int.	

General information on the programme

A. What are the resources available to implement your programme (expressed in person-months/year)?

Actor	Person-months/year
Managing Authority	
Joint Technical Secretariat	
Implementing Body/-ies Specify_______________	
Others Specify_______________	

B. If available, pls. include statistics on average project duration, project size and number of participants (can also be annexed)

C. Which documents are required for submitting applications?

D. Which language/s is/are used in the application procedure?

English	
National language(s)	

E. Please estimate the percentage of project types which correspond to project achievements listed below:

Type of project achievement	**% of total projects**
Research or analysis focus Studies and analysis where the main purpose is to develop new knowledge about the programme area as a framework for further cooperation.	
Process focus Change or significant improvement of working methods, practices and procedures, e.g. guidelines, strategies, tool kits.	
Context focus Changes to policy such as new or amended laws, regulations, and permanent cooperation structures. Also changes of public behaviour.	
Investment, product or service focus Delivery of concrete outcomes, such as new services, products or infrastructure	
Community integration focus Achievements on the local community level with the main purpose of integrating communities on both sides of the border and strengthening personal contacts (e.g. on cultural and social issues).	

I. Operational aspects along the programme cycle

1. Project generation

1.1. Which approach do you follow for generating projects in your programme?

Open calls for proposals	
Restricted call	
On-going call	
Call with deadline	
Other (Please specify):	

What was the experience gained with your approach?

1.2 How would you rate the present situation in your programme with regard to the following factors?

Factors *(and comments)*	Very low Very high									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Communication strategy and dissemination of information										
Capacity and skills to co-ordinate activities across administrative departments										
Experience and acceptance by persons responsible for cross-border co-operation										
Provision of advisory services to applicants										
Capacity for project development at local / regional level										

1.3 Are there other factors that have an influence on project generation in your case? If so, which ones?

Positive (stimulating) factors:	Negative (inhibiting) factors:

1.4 Please outline activities of the participating programme actors in project generation

Programme actors:	Concrete activities:
	–
	–
	–

1.5. What are activities of actors at regional/local level in project generation?

Regional/local actors:	Concrete activities:

1.6. What are the available resources at regional/local level in your country/region to carry out these tasks (person-months/year)?

Regional/local actor	Person-months/year

1.7. Please estimate, how much of this is co-funded through ETC or IPA cbc?

Regional/local actor	%

1.8. Were measures undertaken by the programme bodies to raise the capacity at local/regional level?

1.9. Concerning project development, where (in relation to which aspects) do you see the biggest differences in comparison to your partner country/region?

1.10 Which are at present the biggest obstacles to joint project development?

1.11 When you consider cases where joint project development has worked particularly well, what were success factors?

1.12 Please assess the effectiveness of the current process for project generation (rate from 1 – 10) and indicate areas of improvement

Phase	Rate	Major weaknesses / shortcomings
Project idea		
Identification of partners		
Preparation of application		

1.13 Do you aim at developing strategic projects in your programme? If so

a) Which approach and definition do you use?

b) What was the experience gained?

a) b)

1.14 How do go about avoiding excessively high numbers of applications?

1.15 Which strategy do you pursue in relation to covering programme topics? Do you aim to cover them all or do you focus on specific ones? If so, how do you focus?

1.16 How do you consider the usefulness of databases for project generation (also in relation to cost they incur)?

1.17 Are there any specific themes/topics for which the project generation is particularly challenging (regional knowledge base, natural heritage exploitation ...)?

1.18 Do you have concrete ideas for improving project generation? Which ones?

2 Assessment of proposals

2.1 Which assessment approach do you follow in your programme?

One step procedure	
Two step procedure (e.g. pre-selection at idea stage)	
Other (Please specify):	

2.2. How many applications do you receive on average in a call?

2.3 How much time does the assessment process take on average? (between submission and assessment result):….weeks

2.4 What is the ratio between applications received and the projects assessed positively?

2.5 Please outline activities of the participating programme actors in project assessment

Programme actors:	Concrete activities:
	–
	–
	–

2.6 Do you involve external experts in the assessment process? Y/N

If yes, specify their tasks:

2.7 Are there differences in assessment procedures between programme *countries*? If so, which ones?

2.8 Please indicate the relevance (i.e. usefulness) of your assessment criteria:

Assessment criteria foreseen in the OP	Most relevant

2.9. Do you use additional or different criteria for selecting projects? Y/N

If so, what are the most relevant criteria for selecting projects?

Selection criteria foreseen	Comments

2.10. Is it possible to make amendments of applications during the assessment? Y/N

If yes, what is the experience gained by allowing amendments?

2.11 Please assess the effectiveness of the current assessment process:

Not effective at all								Very effective	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Comments:									

2.12 What are major pressures and constraints during the assessment process?

2.13 How do you go about assessing these specific aspects of your programme?

Quality of partnership

Quality of co-operation

Cross-border-dimension

Sustainability of project

State aid relevance/competition law

2.14 . ETC-programmes in the context of other funding programmes

Do you co-ordinate and liaise with other programmes, e.g. (Objective 1, 2, other EU programmes, national programmes)

If yes, which programme: _______

If yes:

a) What are your contacts and information flows between ETC and the other programmes?

b) What mechanisms have you implemented to ensure added value of ETC programmes (in relation to the other programmes)?

c) How do you consider the potential for co-operation and linkages with other programmes (on which topics, Areas of Intervention)?

d) What ideas do you have for better co-ordination / liaison with other programmes?

a) b) c) d)

2.15. Are there any specific themes/topics for which the project proposals are particularly poor or particularly good (e.g. regional knowledge base, natural heritage exploitation)?

2.16 Do you have concrete ideas for improving the assessment process? Which ones?

2.17 Which kind of expertise or clarification is currently not available but would be needed for improving project assessment?

3. Selection of projects

3.1 Who effectively takes the decision on projects? (which body/institution/individuals?)

3.2 What is the ratio between applications assessed positively and projects finally approved?

3.3 How much time does it take (on average) between the finalisation of the assessment and the selection of projects?…..weeks

3.4 How important are assessment results for the final selection of projects?

Not important at all								Very important	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Comments:									

3.5 Are there other factors (beside assessment/selection criteria) that influence project selection? Are there 'unspoken' rules?

3.6 What is your experience in dealing with political influence? Are there certain practices that have proven to be successful in dealing with them?

3.7 Please rate the effectiveness of the current selection process? (in terms of times spent for the assessment and selection versus the quality of the selected projects)

Not effective at all								Very effective	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Comments:									

3.8 Do you make use of conditional approvals? Y/N

If Yes, what is your experience gained on this? Are these conditions followed-up during implementation? (By whom? How?)

3.9 Are different co-financing rates applied (e.g. for programme priorities, by partners)? Do you modify co-financing rates during implementation (e.g. related to available funds)?

3.10 Do you have concrete ideas for improving the selection process? Which ones?

II. Topics in relation to future macro-regional strategies

2.1. Do you make use of the 10% and 20% rule? Y/N

2.2 Have you considered approaches for the transfer of projects and experiences beyond the immediate programme area? Experience and or thoughts?

a) Replication or „cloning' of projects to other CBC programmes

b) Use of fast track or capitalisation approaches for transfer to other programmes /areas

a)   b)

2.3 Do you apply other practices for transferring projects and experiences beyond the delimited programme area? Do you have further ideas on that?

2.4 How do you consider the scope for modification of decision – making process?

a) What would be the major obstacles/constraints for incorporating macro-regional strategies in programme decision?

b) What ideas do you have for modifying decision – making in view of macro-regional strategies?

a)   b)

11. Annex 3: Questionnaire Online Survey MC Members

1. Please indicate the programme You are MC member in (If You are an MC-member in several programmes we kindly ask You to fill in one questionnaire per programme)

2. Please indicate Your country

3. Please specify the type of Your institution

4. Please rate the effectiveness of the current situation concerning project generation in Your programme (rate from 1-10, with 1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest)
   - Generation of project ideas
   - Identification of partners
   - Preparation of application

5. Please indicate major weaknesses or shortcomings in generation of project ideas:

6. Please indicate major weaknesses or shortcomings in identification of partners:

7. Please indicate major weaknesses or shortcomings in preparation of application:

8. Please state factors having an important positive influence on project development:

9. Please state factors having an important negative influence on project development:

10. If You have concrete ideas for improving project development, please list them:

11. Please rate the effectiveness of the current assessment process
(1... not effective at all, 10... very effective)

12. If You have concrete ideas for improving the assessment process, please list them:

13. Please indicate which of the following selection criteria are most relevant (i.e. used) in Your programme.
   - Quality of cross-border cooperation (joint development, implementation, staffing,financing)
   - Quality/relevance of partnership
   - Detailed budget
   - Economic and organisational capacities for project implementation
   - Contribution to programme goals
   - Coherence to regional/national strategies
   - Cross-border added value
   - Cost-benefit ratio
   - Coherence between activities and project goals
   - Sustainability of results
   - Innovativeness
   - Environmental protection/sustainability
   - Gender-equality and non-discrimination

14. How important are assessment results for the final selection of projects?
(1... not important at all, 10...very important)

15. Please rate the effectiveness of the current selection process (in terms of time spent for the assessment and selection versus the quality of the selected projects)(1... not effective at all, 10... very effective)

16. If You have concrete ideas for improving the assessment process, please list them.

12. Annex 4: Questionnaire Online Survey Project Owners/partners

Did you receive support from the programme for developing your project idea? Yes/No

If yes, please indicate what type of support and by whom (e.g. Joint Technical Secretariat, Regional Development Agency)?

Type of support		Provided by
Information		
Advise		
Partner search		
Other (please specify)		

Which factors had an important influence on project development in your case?

Positive (stimulating) factors:	Negative (inhibiting) factors:

Do you have concrete ideas for improving project development?

In case an assessment of applications was carried out:

- Were you informed about the assessment criteria beforehand? Y/N
- Were you informed about the results of the assessment? Y/N
- If yes, in which form (e.g. in writing, oral)?

How transparent was the selection process for you?

Not transparent at all							Very transparent		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Comments:									

Do you have concrete ideas for improving the assessment / selection process?

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