

Communication of capitalisation in Interreg

December 2017



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Why it is important

As illustrated in our comprehensive thematic publication “Capitalisation approaches and practices in Interreg”, capitalisation is increasingly recognised as an essential programme management practice in Interreg. Thus far, experts working in the field of capitalisation have been mainly focused on developing sustainable capitalisation tools and processes, like the elaboration of practical guidelines and even development of e-learning platforms. Still, communicating capitalisation remains a challenge in Interreg, especially in relation to the general public. One of the common reasons why there is a lack of communication of capitalisation is the complex terminology we use, including the very definition of “capitalisation”.

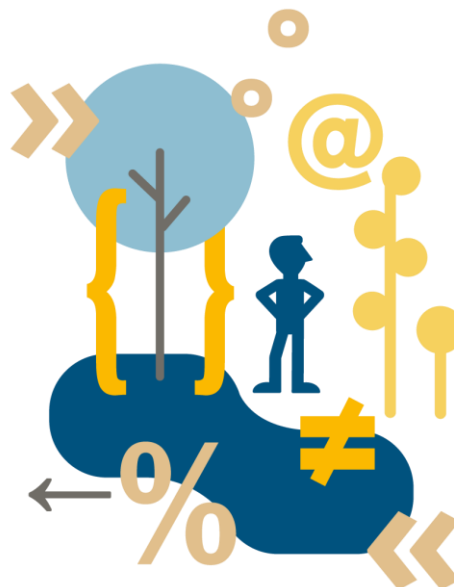


In simple terms, communicating capitalisation is about **SHOWING**, with concrete results and examples, that the Interreg programmes and projects are **RESOURCEFUL** and **EFFICIENT** in their work. Thus, better communication of capitalisation results can help promote Interreg as an effective cooperation instrument, both to the EU policy makers and to the citizens. In other words, communicating capitalisation is about telling good cooperation stories that will not end in a dusty brochure that no one reads. It is about telling relatable stories - stories that people will want to see, hear, and most importantly, retell.

1. The challenges of communicating capitalisation

1.1. Complex terminology

We have already mentioned that the complex language used can be an obstacle to effective communication. The term “capitalisation” is one of the more complicated terms, even for the people who are familiar with Interreg. Part of the problem is that the term “capitalisation” is often used in the fields of accounting and finance, with a specific technical meaning, which might seem very different from what we do in Interreg. But when we go beyond the dry definition of the term and start understanding the essence of its meaning, we can see that “capitalisation” is about making effective use of your “capital”, be it shares in a company or Interreg project results.



However, the problem with terminology does not stop here. Many of the terms used on a regular basis can be confusing to the audiences outside of our “bubble”. Here are just a few examples:

- “Programme” - With a variety of different meanings, this term can easily lead to misunderstandings;
- “Project” - this term can refer to almost anything that needs to be done, from school homework to constructing a skyscraper. People also get confused by the difference between a “programme” and a “project”;
- “Interreg” - used to have a different meaning before it became a part of the harmonised identity initiative. For people who have not heard of it before, understanding the term can still be challenging;
- “Call for proposals” - Understanding what the “Call” is requires the understanding of a complex process, with a lot of other confusing terms. But does it really matter for an average person under which Call a project was implemented? In general, people care much more about tangible results than bureaucratic details;
- “Priority Axis” - see “Call for proposals”;
- “Cross-border region” - this term is very often misunderstood by citizens, because many assume we talk only about a small territory that is right next to the border, which is not the case in practice. Clarifications which include terms such as “NUTS” are more likely to confuse instead of clarify.

All these terms can be an invisible barrier in our communication. Further difficulties arise when the terms are translated to local languages. Thus, complex terminology is a barrier not only for communicating capitalisation, but to communicating Interreg in general.

1.2. Lack of resources

This challenge includes the lack of time, and financial and human resources. If a programme lacks financial resources for communication, then even the most skilled experts and the best communication plans will not help to deliver the best results. Likewise, if a programme has sufficient financial resources but not enough competent experts, the resulting compromise with quality will be problematic. Since the topic of “capitalisation” is relatively new, both financial and human resources related to capitalisation within some programmes may be insufficient.



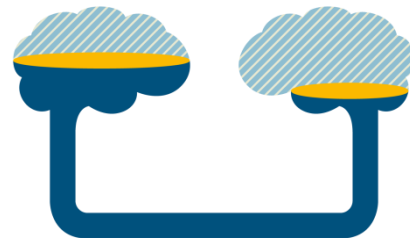
During our first event dedicated solely to the idea of linking capitalisation and communication, [“Cap&Com workshop”, \(Budapest, 5-6 July 2017\)](#), we did a group exercise on mapping the capitalisation and communication roles. The participants were asked to put different coloured stickers, representing communication, capitalisation and other experts, on a graph listing different phases of programme implementation (horizontal), and the required level of involvement of the experts in those phases (vertical). One of the interesting results of the exercise was that the participants themselves recognized the need that their level of involvement needs to be on a high level (upper half of the graph) in almost every phase.



This does not only mean that the programmes should have more communication and capitalisation experts. It also means that the work on capitalisation needs to be planned and implemented in all spheres of programme implementation. Furthermore, other experts should be able to assist the communication and capitalisation experts in their work, which leads us to the next challenge – lack of experience.

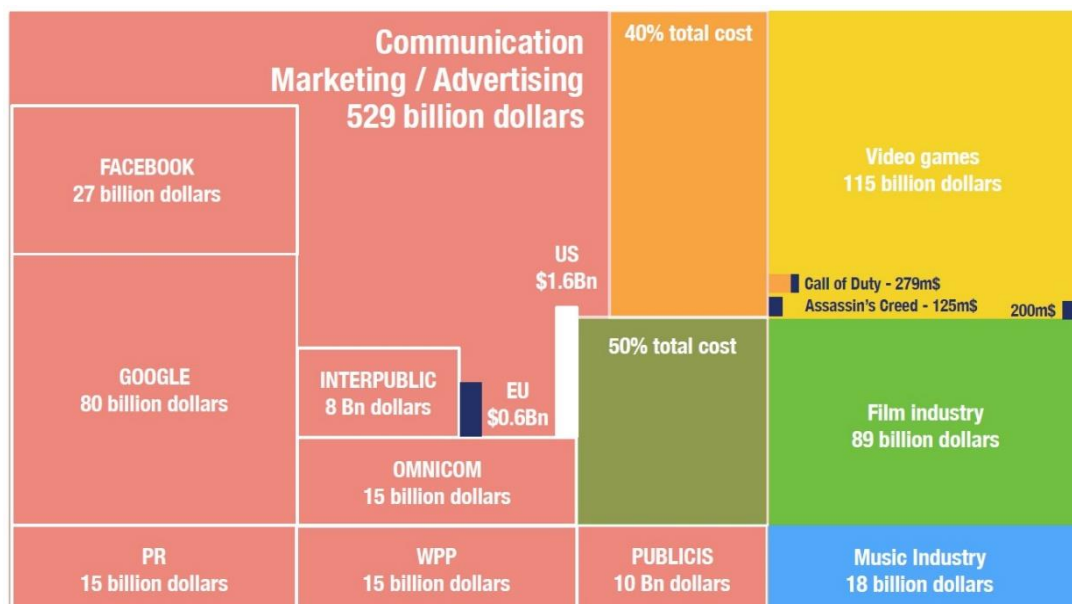
1.3. Lack of experience

While some of the programmes have already advanced in their efforts to promote and communicate the benefits of capitalisation, other still lack practical experience and know-how. Lack of experience can lead to mistakes and even discourage programmes/experts to take part in the initiative. The Interact programme has an active role in tackling this obstacle through the organisation of thematic events.



1.4. The competition

Our endeavours to communicate capitalisation and Interreg in general have to face a fierce competition from commercial brands and companies, and even other EU institutions, programmes and policies. It is important to note that while we do compete for attention of people, we do not necessarily compete with the brands. We do not sell products or services like companies – we do not chase commercial profits. Instead, we are involved in providing an important public service and promoting the principle of cooperation for the common good of all European citizens. It is the purpose of Interreg that is a distinguishing factor on which we can capitalise. Furthermore, we can extract the know-how and apply the best practices from the private sector, such as the use of social media, graphic design trends, infographics, short videos, storytelling, etc.



Annual promotional budgets by some of the leading industries, companies and brands in the world. © Old Continent communication agency: www.oldcontinent.eu

2. Overcoming the challenges

2.1. Interact events

Interact had organised two major Capitalisation events in the first half of 2017, and is in the process of preparing the third event before the end of the year, due to the high level of interest from the programmes. The first major event was the conference “Let’s practice capitalisation: from theory to practice, paving the way for consolidating results in the 2014-2020 period”, on 7-8 June 2017 in Rome, Italy. As a major capitalisation event of the year, the conference offered a very rich and diverse type of content to the participants, such as: the overview of the best capitalisation practices from the previous programming period, programmes’ testimonials, presentations of practical capitalisation tools (such as KEEP), group discussions and exercises, presentation of the capitalisation networks, and the new communication tools, two capitalisation videos produced by Interact. Find all the presentations, videos and materials of this event HERE: <http://www.interact-eu.net/#o=events/lets-practice-capitalisation>.



Photos from the Interact Capitalisation conference, 7-8 June 2017, Rome, Italy

The second major capitalisation event, “Cap&Com workshop”, took place on the 5 and 6 June 2017, in Budapest, Hungary. The main goal of the workshop was to explore how to link capitalisation and communication, especially through using good stories and results to reach relevant target groups, including policy makers. Participants exchanged their experiences related the most effective approaches to extracting and communicating capitalisation content from a multitude of thematic projects to the appropriate target groups – i.e. lobbying, and how it can help making Interreg more visible in the policy context. The main content and topics covered at the workshop are:

- Defining the role of the communication officers in the capitalisation processes and the role of capitalisation officers in the communication processes;
- How to integrate capitalisation within the communication strategies on both the Programme and project levels;
- Using the storytelling techniques for effective communication of capitalisation results – via training by an external expert;
- How to select and communicate the relevant capitalisation results to different stakeholder and policy-maker groups – lobbying training by an Interact expert.

Interact will continue to work with programmes and organise new Cap&Com events in the future. Find all the presentations, videos and materials from this Cap&Com HERE: <http://www.interact-eu.net/#o=events/capcom-workshop>

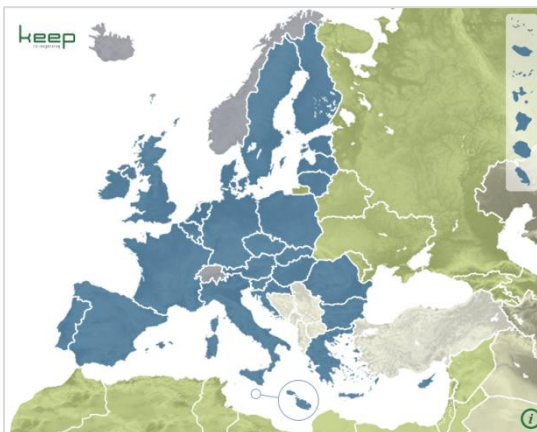


Photos from the Interact Cap&Com workshop, 5-6 July 2017, Budapest, Hungary

2.2. Useful tools

2.2.1. KEEP

As described on the Interact website, KEEP is the definitive source of aggregated information regarding the territorial cooperation projects and beneficiaries in Europe. It includes data at programme and project level as well as project partner level. KEEP allows you to search projects and project partners by country, region, theme and keyword, among other criteria. Results can be exported as spreadsheets, maps or charts.



Since it is regularly updated with more information and the interface and functionality is continuously improved, KEEP is an indispensable tool for both capitalisation research and communication. One of the most useful communication aspects is the ability to visualise the search results on an interactive map and extract custom statistical reports. Find out more about how KEEP has evolved over the past years and different ways it can aid your capitalisation efforts, including communication HERE: <http://www.interact-eu.net/download/file/fid/7098>.

2.2.2. European Commission “Cross-border review”

The “Cross border review” is an initiative by the European Commission aiming to explore and resolve the challenges still persisting in border regions, despite 25 years of funding through the Interreg programmes. The initiative can support the capitalisation process by providing a new set of data, policy solutions, and research results, such as:

- The “Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions” study;
- Summary results of the “Consultation on overcoming obstacles in border regions”;
- The study “Boosting growth and cohesion in the EU border regions”;
- Video and text summaries of the four “Border obstacles review” workshops.

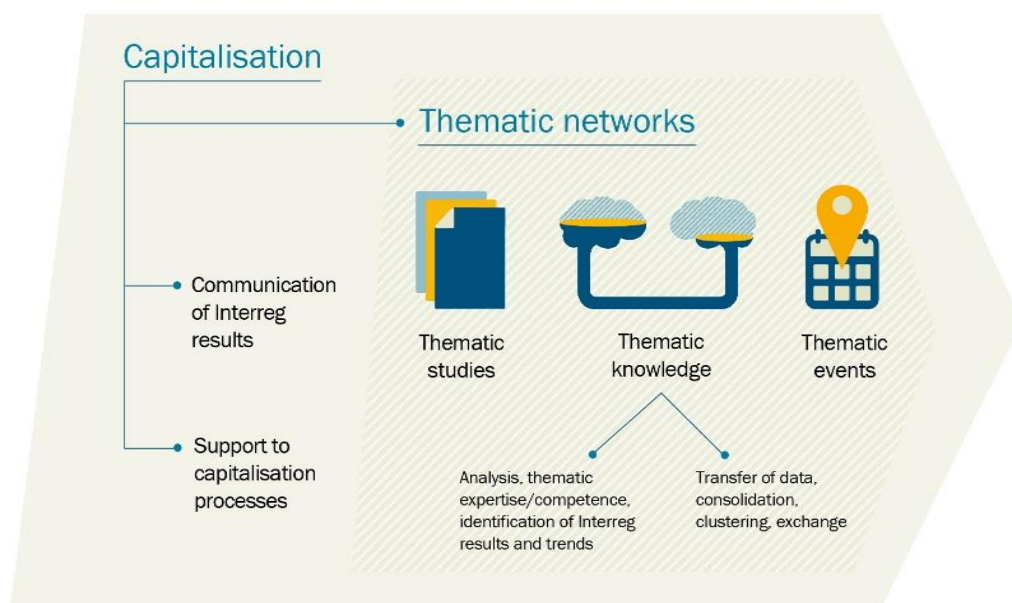
Results of this initiative, especially in the form of case studies and concrete examples, can be used to illustrate the types of problems our programmes aim to overcome. The review can help us communicate what we do and in which areas we could do more, especially through capitalisation. The concrete examples of cross-border obstacles and potential solutions are an excellent source of real stories that people can understand and relate to – the stories we can communicate. Find out more about this initiative HERE: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border/review/#3.

2.3. Capitalisation networks

WHAT: They provide thematic knowledge and expertise. Coordination of the networks is an Interact service which supports policy learning in the field of a specific topic.

WHO: Each network involves programmes' representatives; thematic experts and stakeholders to ensure provision of qualitative thematic knowledge; a supporting team composed of Interact staff as a facilitator providing services to the network members; and an online, collaborative tool providing solutions for knowledge management in order to facilitate networking and knowledge exchange.

HOW: The networks facilitate ongoing EU-wide transfer of knowledge and capitalisation of Interreg programmes' and projects' results.



Find your network!

Knowledge of the seas

The aim of the network is to both gain knowledge of the seas by thematic learning events as well as to promote what can be achieved through maritime (Interreg) cooperation. Past learning events focused on coastal and maritime tourism as well as blue skills while the network actively promoted maritime Interreg cooperation at the European Maritime Day.



Interreg response to migration-related challenges

This platform makes available relevant data, spreading knowledge about current experiences and/or practices of programmes; facilitating exchange and peer learning about programmes' migration-related measures and projects, aiming to support the adoption of possible Interreg response and actions in this respect.



Sustainable transport

It focuses on how this topic is dealt with in several Interreg programmes. In the future there is a need to link these activities to the work done on TEN-T networks and corridors as well as seeing potential benefits from working together with the transport coordinator network of macro-regional strategies.



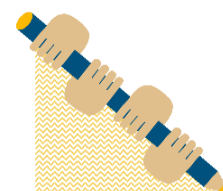
Climate change

The network goal is to accumulate information and facilitate exchange of expertise in the field, with the aim to support a common Interreg response to the EU Sustainable Growth policy. Some of the topics addressed are: joint risk management systems and environmental emergencies related to climate change, joint initiatives, awareness raising, etc.



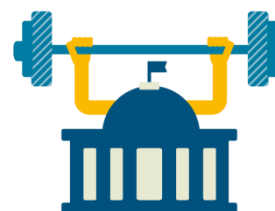
Inclusive growth

The network aims to bring together experts working on topics such as employment and self-employment, labour mobility, social inclusion, improving professional skills and lifelong learning. The network will focus on making available relevant data, facilitating the exchange of practices and gaining knowledge about the current experiences and themes, with the aim to support a common Interreg response to the EU Inclusive Growth policy.



Better governance

It deals with institutional capacity and focuses primarily on Interreg programmes, while considering other funding options in this field and more generally institutional change in countries with low levels of institutional capacity. It brings together practitioners and experts, as well as other stakeholders e.g., from macro-regional strategies or academia.



Learn more HERE: <http://www.interact-eu.net/#o=programme-life-cycle/capitalisation>.

2.4 The use of storytelling

Interreg programmes often fall into the trap of using too much formal, bureaucratic communication practices. We try to communicate best results we have with long press-releases, full of complex terminology, unnecessary details, and dry statistical data which are not appealing to our target audiences. In order to get people's attention we need to show them why they should care about the information we are trying to pass-on, and then present our message in a clear, simple and relatable manner. We need to engage our audiences on an emotional level, and that is where the storytelling comes in.

Humankind has been using storytelling to pass-on information since the dawn of civilisation. Starting from our early education, we learn through stories about right and wrong, about history and the world in general. Today, the big brands use storytelling to sell us everything, from bubble gum to mortgages. They use stories with colourful examples and emotional triggers. Interreg needs to catch up to the trend and use the best practices from the world of advertising. We need to stop communicating programme progress reports and start telling stories about how and why our work matters.

Imagine for a moment a cross-border programme trying to communicate results from a project that has managed to clean the banks of a small river on the border. A typical press release about results of such a project would start by quoting the full project title (sometimes up to one paragraph long) and the programme name, and the number of the Call for proposals, the exact dates during which the project was implemented and the tons of trash that was collected. An average reader would stop reading/listening to such a report and likely not remember or care to communicate this information to anyone else.

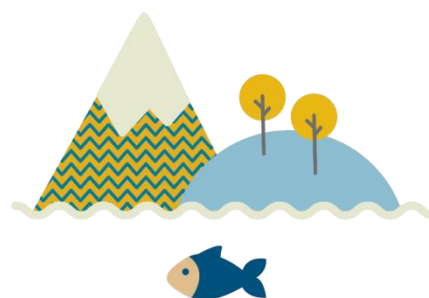
A different approach could look like this:

Imagine a video recording of an old man living in the village next to the river, telling the story of how he grew up playing with friends by the river, fishing from it and swimming during summer.

Then the camera shows the river before the project, the banks littered with plastic bags, with old car tires breaking the surface of the muddy water. And the next camera scene shows the people

working on the project to clean up the area. The final scene shows the same

grandpa/grandma from the beginning of the video, once again at the river bank, clean as it used to be, fishing with his/her grandchild.



Which of the two ways do you think would be more effective to communicate that project – the press release or the story?

As we mentioned earlier, the first Cap&Com workshop featured a training on how to use the storytelling for better communication of Interreg results. The external expert explained why storytelling is important and how it is used not only to tell stories but how to tell a story about a story – a technique which aims to motivate and support our audiences to become storytellers themselves and pass-on the information to other people. The technique is especially important when communicating to journalists, but can be applied to other target groups as well.

The training covered many important aspects of successful storytelling, from research and definition of a specific target audience, through choosing the right format, and applying templates for building stories. Here is an example of a template for structuring the content of a good story:

For	Target audience, e.g., – policymakers
Who have	(a problem to solve – e.g. - do not have time to read a 40 pages report)
We created	(project title)
Which is a	(market category – e.g. - an interactive infographic)
That	(key benefit – what it does which is “particular”)
And that unlike	(competing solution / company)
Offers	(something very different from the competing solution)

And here is how the structure is filled with content:

For the people who want to produce the most interesting stories about European projects, but have a problem to make these stories appealing, we´ve created “the Perfect Script”. The “Perfect Script” is an interactive website to craft your story for impact and create your script with proper timings. It offers you templates, building blocks, words and images to fit any story. Unlike companies proposing to do the work for you in a commercial way, the script offers a one-stop affordable solution to make sure your next public communication tool find its audience and makes an impact.

As you can see, this story is not of the “once upon a time” format, but looks more like an “elevator pitch” – a concise and clear explanation of an idea that carries an important message and which could lead the target audience to action.

Find more explanations and tips from the storytelling workshop here:

<http://www.interact-eu.net/#o=events/capcom-workshop>.

2.5. Communication of results to policy makers

For the period 2014-2020, the EU is investing in Interreg more than 350 M € on projects and producing results that could and should feedback to EU policy. Giving evidence on concrete project results to the decision makers could contribute to demonstrate the added value of Interreg in certain issues such as Innovation, Energy, Climate Change, Social Inclusion, transport, etc., at EU level, being able to influence the mentioned policies.

Interreg project results could be capitalised on and in the longer run even impact the EU decision making process. This publication aims to highlight some of the lobbying¹ concepts explained by Mercedes Acitores from Interact during a workshop dedicated to this topic at the first Cap&Com event. She explained that as cohesion policy is more result-oriented over 2014-2020, there is a crucial need to showcase the results. Among the few tips given during the session, she highlighted the importance of looking for a win-win situation when lobbying, knowing the legislative agenda in order to find the right timing and identify the relevant interlocutor.

Besides, when promoting Interreg results, it is key to highlight the different type of outputs Transnational and Cross border projects provide. This will lead us to emphasis on best practices, in the case of Cross border while transnational projects will usually focus on policy papers and recommendations.

Acitores explained the following key steps for making a lobbying strategy:

1. DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVE – What is your policy proposal?
2. IDENTIFY INTERLOCUTORS – Mapping (influence – high-low / proximity high-low)
1. TIMING (we have to follow the policy agenda)
2. ALLIANCES (never lobby alone – ensure multiplying/community effect)
3. PREPARATION – Lobbying means 90% of the preparatory work for 10% of effective lobbying
4. METHODS – Letters, meetings (need to know the regional officers)
5. FOLLOW-UP – Keep track of the issue
6. EVALUATION – Adjust and regroup



Find all the expert tips from the workshop HERE:
<http://www.interact-eu.net/#o=events/capcom-workshop>.

¹ Definition of lobbying - an action to influence a public decision.

3. The next steps

Interact will continue to actively support programmes in the efforts to apply and promote the best capitalisation practices. We will continue our work in the thematic networks, improving the KEEP database, and organising thematic capitalisation events including the Cap&Com type of workshops.

In addition to this, Interact will closely engage Interreg programmes into specific working groups to define and streamline, as far as possible, the challenges of a capitalisation exercise into a “capitalisation toolkit”, including harmonised templates for a capitalisation process and strategy/plan.

Furthermore, Interact is in the process of transitioning to using new and improved IT tools, including a custom platform for exchange of know-how and expert networking which will replace Basecamp.

For the latest information on the Interact events and services visit our website:

www.interact-eu.net

