Evaluation update
28-29 June 2018, Edinburgh

Status quo related to evaluation plan, operational and impact evaluations

At the start the participants did a dotting exercise on the status of the evaluation plan as well as operational and impact Evaluations.
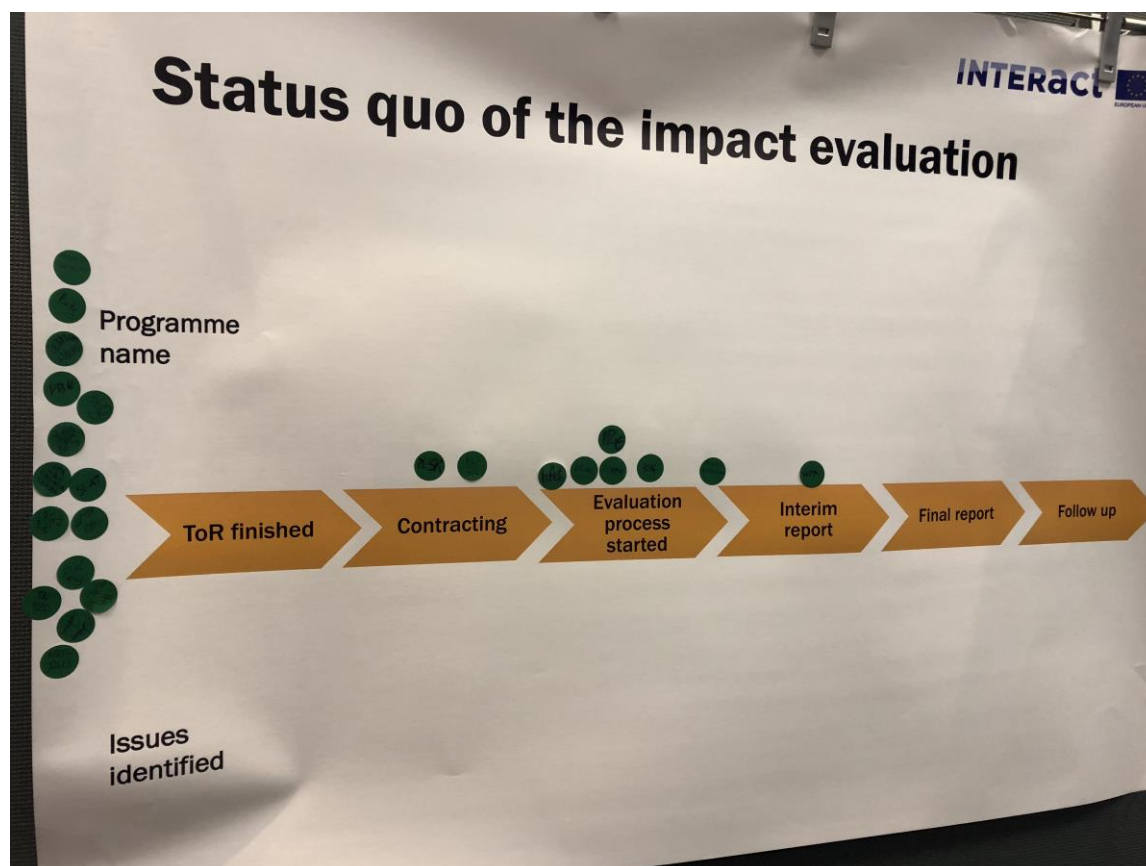
Evaluation plan

- The majority of participants/programmes confirmed that evaluation is a regular top in the agenda of the MC
- A few programmes (4) have undertaken modifications to the evaluation plan; in one case the incentive has been the elaboration of the Terms of References (ToRs) for the impact evaluation

Operational evaluation

- The majority of participants stated that operational (implementation) evaluation is currently being implemented

Issues raised & hints on solutions:
- **Added value of external experts**: It is an important element in the Terms of References (ToRs) to check the CVs of experts and that their commitment - are the proposed experts involved in the activity that require their expertise; consider that benchmarking with other programmes might be useful since experts coming from the leading county (MA) might be accustomed to administrative workload and might not be able to provide a new perspective on it

- **Critical findings:** There are many ways to communicate findings to the MC. Establishing commitment and trust in the Evaluation Steering Group is the decisive pre-condition in order to 'make room' for a serious debate on findings. This is of course a continuous process and mostly the MA/JS have to firstly plan and demonstrate a prudent approach to discussion and secondly develop and present scenarios for mitigation actions

- **Low response rate in survey**: plan and design the survey carefully; evaluators with an academic background need support from experienced communication people to make the survey simple and understandable; commit the evaluation team to apply quality control prior to sending draft questionnaires to MA/JS; consider the option of a two-step survey – in a first step get a quick overview on critical positions in the programme management delivery chain from MA/JS over NCP to FLC (5-minutes quick survey – in a second step do phone interviews with a small selection); explain ex-ante what is going to happen with the results and confirm to them ex-post what has been done with the results

Impact evaluation

- The majority of participants/programmes stated that they did not start the process of drafting the ToRs; only a few programmes have selected their bidders

Issues raised & hints on solutions
- **Timing:** a solid impact evaluation needs a considerable lead-in time in particular to revisit and build the intervention logic along Specific Objectives, if the ToRs are being prepared now it might be a major incentive to raise the interest of the Steering Group Evaluation to interlink the evaluation process with the programming process (see statement of David to consider 'lessons learned' in the programmes post-2020)

- **Selection and check of questions:** a check along the 5 evaluation criteria might help to clarify whether questions are meaningful or not: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability – depending on the type of activities in the projects only some of the criteria might be used to formulate evaluation questions since e.g. efficiency of certain types of activities is in the end hard to assess/evaluate

Update current period
(David Alba, Evaluation and European Semester Unit, DG REGIO)

See presentation

Explanations given:

- The performance review should encourage and feed discussion on what worked and what did not work

  Q: What to do in case of under- or overachievements?
  A: There is still the option to modify targets based on justified reasoning but first of all it is in case of Interreg an invitation to self-review and self-evaluation; this approach will be strengthened in future

Evaluation
- Evaluation plan (EP): when revisiting the EP it is useful to consider revising/updating the methods and data availability
- Evaluation: reports should not only provide qualitative information but also pay attention to triangulate findings, i.e. to use several sources to underpin findings; when discussing timing in the evaluation approach the data availability should be taken into account
- A new evaluation library has been developed (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/member-states/)

Data
- Data control is important: quality issues might have a range of possible reasons; overachievement might also be due to wrong measurement units; data are subject to a plausibility check when being published on the Open Data Platform

- **Q:** Is there a Manual on the use of SFC for Reporting?
- **A:** The Q & A has been revised and is now available; it is also available in the Interact community on *Evaluation & Results*

Example of an operational (implementation) evaluation
(Gianluca Ferreri, JS, 2 Seas Programme)

See presentation

Example of an impact evaluation
(Phil Heaton, JS, UK-FR Channel/Manche Programme)

See presentation

Explanations given:

- Evaluation culture in UK: in general evaluation is considered as an option for a good record of results; the expert is expected to provide a readable and understandable report
- An important element in the team culture of the JS are team-building events which include elements of evaluation related to implementation issues
- Programme stakeholders agreed to evaluate the future potential for cooperation with a view to Brexit

Example of an impact evaluation
(Fiona Woo, JS, Baltic Sea Region)

See presentation

Explanations given:

- Aggregate evaluation budget: 280,000. - thereof 120,000. - for the mid-term impact evaluation
- Evaluation of bids: 25% price, 40% method, 15% experience in evaluation of CBC / TNC programmes, 15% experience in evaluation of EU policies, 5% involvement of experienced evaluators
- Builds on results of an evaluation done in 2014/15 on changes in the region – thus allows for comparative analysis
- MC was asked to provide thematic experts to assess progress in cooperation along Investment Priorities (assessment along ordinal scale from 1 to 5)
- Currently only 8 out of 17 Specific Objectives will be part of the Impact Evaluation (in others so far numbers of advanced projects are not sufficient)
- Findings will include visuals and reports will consist of modules and have summaries (which is much easier to present and digest …)

Example of an impact evaluation from the evaluator's perspective (Andreas Resch, Metis Vienna)

See presentation

Explanations given:

- Total budget 400,000. -; 4 years' evaluation exercise
- When developing the seven impact models it was important to agree on impact dimensions which are actually accountable to the programme interventions
- Result indicators have been set up at the macro-level and one of the approaches has been to set-up results indicators at the project (micro) level to bridge the gap; i.e. indicators reflecting achievements which can be attributed to the project and which can be collected from the projects and feed the Result indicators at the macro level
- In the course of case studies, a selection of project LB and PPs (usually those with the highest budget) will be interviewed several times on an annual basis in order to document the achievements

Evaluation post-2020 (David Alba, Evaluation and European Semester Unit, DG REGIO)

See presentation

Explanations given:

- The goal for Common Indicators is to cover 80% of expenditures in post 2020 (compared to 60% in this period)
- The Mid-Term review will be the basis to decide on the final 2 annual tranches (since for Interreg neither Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) nor performance reserve is an issue the key element should be considerations on new socio-economic needs; it should be a meaningful and pragmatic exercise; it is good to support the least bureaucratic approach
- The term _retrospective evaluation_ is the same as ex-post evaluation

Q: Will the intended changes in the overall approach to evaluation for post 2020 raise or lower the profile of evaluation?
A: There are indications that evaluation culture has changed over the past years and that is the decisive change; if evaluation is perceived as Commission requirement it will have limited impact in terms of learning; to maintain and continue the positive momentum is a matter of constant awareness-raising

Q: Will the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) be required post 2020?
A: (Andreas Resch, Evaluation Expert Metis): most probably the requirement to elaborate ex-ante a SEA for the programme will remain unchanged since it is anchored in a different legal framework, i.e. the EC Directive on EIA and SEA

Q: Each programme will include a socio-economic analysis - what does the term enhanced SWOT mean?
A: Details will be developed

Updates ESPON
(Zintis Hermansons, ESPON)

See presentation

Explanations given:

- The main element of the TIA tool is an expert judgement (usually provided by a panel of experts) on the intensity of exposure of certain territories and the intensity respectively likelihood of an impact of certain policy interventions
- The TIA tool can be applied ex-ante and ex-post and the method can be adjusted to the needs; it is not an evaluation but it can be a supportive instrument when analysing the territorial impact
- The experts are usually proposed by the Client, not by ESPON
- A new version of the TIA tool will soon be out

Exercise: discussion of methods and evaluation question

Sound preparation upfront saves a lot of time and prevents frustration at later stages!
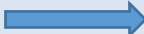
- Revisiting the intervention logic and outlining the underlying theory of change thoroughly is essential for coming up with good evaluation questions and the choice of adequate methods
- When choosing the appropriate methods, the data availability deserves due attention; mere qualitative approaches might not be convincing; quantitative aspects should help to understand scale and scope of challenges and achievements
- Better concise and to the point than overly broad: the evaluation questions shouldn't be too broad and answerable; the five evaluation criteria might be a useful grid in order to 'distil' the essential questions related to each of the Specific Objectives
- Plan from the beginning how and to whom to communicate the evaluation results; this requires clarity about mutual expectations, an understanding of the expectable nature of findings plus a prospective view on probable developments in order to establish a proper time schedule which ensures the maximum impact of the evaluation on stakeholders

Thus we recommend to foresee and invest time and capacity on the part of MA/JS in the inception phase of the evaluation in order to build a solid fundament for the evaluation work.

Use of findings

Andreas Resch presented a basic grid outlining the major evaluation steps, the usual deliverables for consultation as well as the bodies respectively the stakeholder groups involved in the evaluation process.

The key factor for success in evaluation is of course the sustained commitment among the inner circle of programme stakeholders – provided that mutual learning, the reinforcement of interest in the programme and changes to outdated or burdensome programme features are shared objectives of the evaluation exercise.

STEP	SUBJECT FOR CONSULTATION	BODIES INVOLVED
Method	Inception Phase	• MA/JS, Intermediate Bodies (IB) • MC • Eval. Steering Group
Analysis Findings	Interim results Final results	• MA/JS, Intermediate Bodies (IB) • Eval. Steering Group • other technical bodies
Conclusions Recommendations	Draft version Final version	• MA/JS, Intermediate Bodies (IB) • Eval. Steering Group • MC • Beneficiaries
LEVEL OF COMMITMENT		

Follow-up

↳ short-term → implementation

↳ long-term → programme group

↳ AIR reporting → EC

Examples for the use of findings:

- 2 Seas programme: findings in used in guidance for applicants, amendment to the template for progress reports in order to collect more relevant information for the impact assessment
- Example DE-CZ: selection method revisited; scenarios for eventual introduction of majority voting in MC; use of intervention logic along Specific Objectives for clarification on projects prior to selection etc.