Coordination – plans vs. reality

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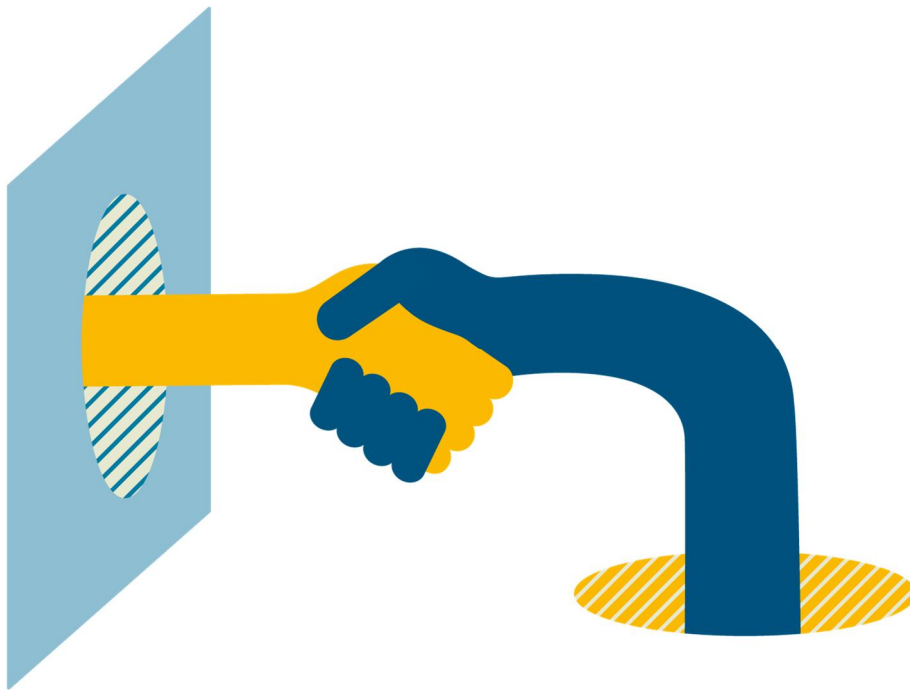
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List of Abbreviations

CBC	Cross-border cooperation
COSME	Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small-Medium Sized Enterprises
CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DG	Directorate-General
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
DG RTD	Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ERDF	European Regional and Development Fund
ESI(F)	European Structural and Investment (Funds)
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EWRC	European Week of Regions and Cities
FARNET	Fisheries Areas Network
FLAG	Fishers Local Action Group
HIT	Harmonised Implementation Tools
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JS	Joint Secretariat
LP	Lead Partner
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MRS	Macro-regional strategy
MS	Member State
NA	National Authority
NC	National Coordinator
NCP	National Contact Point
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Partnership Agreement
R&I	Research & Innovation
SBS	Sea basin strategy
SC	Steering Committee
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise

Introduction

This publication is a compilation of experiences from 2014-2020 Interreg programmes on coordination and cooperation with other (Interreg) programmes. It looks at which coordination measures programmes had planned in their Cooperation Programme (Section 6). It shows what worked well and could possibly serve as inspiration for others. But it also sets out what did not work well and could or should be done differently in the future.

A few key observations stick out when looking at the input from the programmes. Firstly, that coordination and cooperation is still often focused on overlaps and double funding. Secondly, that there is a strong expectation towards the national level in ensuring coordination and cooperation with other funding programmes within and beyond Interreg. Thirdly, that sometimes there is still the perception of "competition" between programmes, which hinders closer coordination and cooperation. And lastly, that coordination happens through very many small operational steps, and that there is no single all-encompassing 'coordination mechanism' ready to be applied by each and every Interreg Programme.

This 'Coordination – plans vs. reality' publication provides:

- Feedback from 2014-2020 Interreg programmes on which of their planned coordination and cooperation measures with other programmes were implemented and which not.
- Findings from programmes on why certain coordination and cooperation measures worked well and others not.
- A long list of small and specific coordination measures on different levels that can serve as inspiration for the future.

1. Background and methodology

In their 2014-2020 Cooperation Programmes under Section 6, Interreg programmes had to describe how they intended to coordinate with the other ESI Funds (ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund, EAFRD, EMFF), particularly with programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs Goal. And programmes have extensively described where they saw possible overlaps with other funding sources, both geographical and content-wise, with other Interreg programmes and with funding sources outside of Interreg. However, these were the plans the programmes laid down during the programming process.

But what has implementation been like in reality? In the transition from the 2014-2020 to the 2021-2027 programming period, Interact was interested to find out which of the plans had been realised and which ones not (and why not). What are the lessons learnt both from the coordination plans that were implemented and from the ones not implemented?

Interact approached those Interreg programmes who had made their Cooperation Programme publicly available in English on their website. The programmes were provided with a programme-specific table, listing all their planned coordination measures from Section 6 of their Cooperation Programme. They were asked to indicate if they had implemented the plan. If yes, then they were asked to briefly describe how; i.e., if as planned, or differently. And to describe the lessons learnt from implementing the plan. If, however, the plan had not been implemented, they were asked to briefly explain why. Not in the meaning of an evaluation of the past, of programme performance. But rather with the aim of sharing experiences and providing food-for-thought for other programmes for the future.

Originally, it was planned to send out this request to the programmes' Managing Authorities in spring 2020. However, COVID-19 delayed this exercise in view of the more urgent issues programmes were dealing with at that point in time. A bit later, in autumn 2020, Interact sent the request to contribute to a total of 41 Interreg Managing Authorities. Responses were received as follows:

Strand (programmes addressed)	Responded	Not responded
CBC (24)	10 (42%)	14 (58%)
Transnational (13)	8 (62%)	5 (38%)
Interregional (4)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
TOTAL (41)	21 (51%)	20 (49%)

This publication now compiles the answers, key messages, best practices and lessons learnt from the programmes on their coordination with other programmes. When reading this document, there are a few points to be considered:

- The programmes' responses vary very much in their level of detail and how specific the information provided is. While some just answered for certain measures "Implemented as planned", others described in more detail exactly what was done. While some limited their response to describing what was done,

others also provided their own assessment of what went well and what went wrong. Such diversity in answers and inputs makes it difficult, if not impossible, to compare and analyse the inputs, and draw overall conclusions.

- As the aim of this exercise was to be as specific as possible, input provided along the lines of '*The MA closely cooperated with the MA of ...*' or '*Coordination happened on various levels as planned.*' were not included in this compilation. Such general statements do not necessarily help in identifying what really worked out and what didn't.
- In some cases, the same idea is repeated several times in the below compilation. However, this is done intentionally as long as there is a slightly different thinking/angle behind it (and not just a repetition).
- As this compilation is not an evaluation of programme performance, there are no references made as to which coordination practices or lessons learnt come from which programme. The programmes' findings are also presented in a neutral way, not assessing or judging whether they are valid or not, wrong or right.
- These are individual findings from individual programmes. They cannot be generalised, because in other circumstances the very same idea might not have worked out or would have worked out differently. And as different programmes have had different experiences, it is also possible that some of the findings contradict each other. Therefore, not every solution presented can be applied in every other (programme) circumstance. But hopefully, the coordination steps shared will still inspire others to consider them in their own programme reality.
- The compilation shown below sorts the programmes' responses, findings, messages, best practices and lessons learnt into general findings, general coordination arrangements, findings related to the programme cycle and findings related to the project cycle. This division has been made to provide structure and facilitate reading. It is not exclusive, as some of the points touch upon various different categories.
- Coordination is not about one single mechanism, but about the joint understanding that coordination and cooperation are useful and needed, requiring willingness, ambition and participation from everyone. Hence, the compilation of small bits and pieces that appears below should be taken as proof that a lot of coordination and cooperation between programmes is already ongoing.

2. General findings on coordination and cooperation

2.1. What supports coordination and cooperation

- It is important to strike a balance where coordination is secured but "gold plating" avoided.
- It is important to continue and to intensify the cooperation between programmes, but also to keep it at a stage where it is manageable and where coordination does not hinder the programme from delivering the anticipated results.
- Coordination initiatives will be more relevant and achieve more if initiated jointly by the EC and the respective MRS, rather than by a single programme.
- The cooperation can be very smooth based on goodwill without the need for an MRS/SBS.
- Planning of coordination and cooperation with other programmes should be done at the beginning of a programming period.
- To ensure sufficient resources, it is important to build in cooperation from the start of the programme period, and not after several years of implementation.
- When there is no competition between programmes, exchanges can be interesting and certainly fruitful, especially exchanges on approaches to complex issues (e.g., State Aid, SME involvement).
- When defining the programme we need to focus very much on ensuring that what is in there is really something only Interreg can do (and not something which can be done also on the local/regional/national level).
- Clear division of work between programmes. Plan the programme well from the start, considering its niche, possible overlaps, focus. Having a focused programme helps to ensure that ideas are developed for this programme in particular and don't fit under other programmes.
- Programmes having different target groups for their interventions.
- Location of programme bodies [of different programmes] in the same city/location (can) facilitate coordination and cooperation.
- The same national ministry hosting the MA of several Interreg programmes. And one institution hosting several JSs.
- If certain measures are entirely left to the MS/national level, ensure a good information flow between national and programme level (to avoid that the programme does not know if certain planned measures on the national level were implemented or not).
- One national ministry coordinating all EU-funded national/regional programmes while at the same time being the NA of Interreg programmes.
- A national 'coordination committee' (or suchlike) ensuring coordination of the implementation of EU funds programmes, preparing national policy decisions for the government and serving as a forum for consultation and cooperation among the MAs of both Interreg and national/regional programmes (e.g., requesting further negotiations between relevant line ministries, if needed).

- Strong historic ties of cooperation between the region that is the MA (both for regional programmes and Interreg) and other European regions and structures of cooperation between regions.
- Organisations in the regions having worked in cross-border cooperation projects and entering into a transnational project with this experience.
- Besides coordination by the programmes, complementarity is also ensured on the projects' institutional level, with the beneficiaries following strategic plans, national/regional development policies.
- Besides coordination by the programmes, it is in the good interest of projects to activate synergies and link up their activities, such as organising joint events.
- Key requirement for identifying and making use of synergy effects is communication. Improve the cooperation with other programmes through electronic means.
- Interact and EC events and initiatives enabling collaboration. Interact has an important role in establishing networks between Interreg programmes. Crucial role of Interact as coordination hub. Regular exchanges between programmes on calls, events and how programmes are progressing through Interact networks.
- keep.eu helps a lot in finding information about projects (of other programmes), especially in view of avoiding duplication and double financing.

2.2. What hinders coordination and cooperation

- CPR and ERDF regulations do not impose in any way that MAs should cooperate to find new solutions.
- Programmes would in principle welcome such coordination, which remains limited in practice, due to lack of resources.
- Individual coordination and cooperation actions by a single Interreg programme are a drop in the ocean.
- We need to acknowledge the limits of coordination with regional funds (nothing surprising, though). It stays a matter that is or is not ensured at MS level. An Interreg programme cannot do much during its implementation phase beyond a) encouraging applicants to develop proposals that are in synergies with existing initiatives, b) assess these aspects in the selection phase, and c) ask MS to do their job in ensuring synergies and pointing out overlapping.
- 'Competition' between programmes (geographic and thematic overlaps) hinders coordination and cooperation. Where there is no competition, exchanges on complex issues (e.g., State Aid, involvement of SMEs) can be beneficial.
- Competition between programmes hinders coordination and cooperation.
- Centrally-managed programmes and Interreg programmes operate separately and there is little interest from the centrally-managed ones in changing that.
- Some "foreseen" (and, in CP Section 6, stated) overlaps with other funding programmes (esp. other than Interreg) never materialised – hence whatever was planned did not need to be done in view of coordination and cooperation.
- Despite the potential relevance of links and synergies between programmes (Interreg and beyond), it is quite difficult to move to a more formal level.

3. Coordination and cooperation – General arrangements

Before going into specific coordination and cooperation arrangements in the programme and project cycle, this chapter will provide a non-exhaustive list of which overall arrangements worked well and supported the coordination and cooperation, and which not so much.

3.1. What worked well

3.1.1. Monitoring/Steering Committee

- Composition:
  - Have the national ministry in charge of the overall coordination as observer in the MC.
  - Representatives of institutions responsible for the implementation of other Interreg strands are included in the MC.
  - Ensure presence of representatives of mainstream programmes and other EU funds that overlap programme's interventions.
  - To include representatives from relevant national/regional programmes' MAs and from line ministries/authorities in charge of managing national level funding in fields related to those financed by the programme.
  - MAs of regional programmes are also Interreg/ENI CBC MC members.
  - NC of territorial cooperation programmes (ministerial level) involved in the work of the MC (focus on project selection).
  - Representatives of the MAs/NAs implementing funding programmes/ schemes in fields related to those financed by the programme are members of the MC.
  - Regional programmes through participation in MC meetings and as part of the respective national delegation involved in the project selection.
  - Involve relevant line ministries (at least) in advisory capacity, consult with them personally on decision-making material before MC meeting (e.g., during national preparatory meetings).
  - National line ministries as MC members with voting rights to ensure coordination on national level and avoid overlaps.
  - Involve relevant thematic actors (e.g., NGOs) as MC members providing thematic expertise and input.
  - NCs and Contact Points of MRSs are MC observers with an advisory capacity (ad hoc upon request).
  - NUTS III regions responsible for generating and selecting (large scale) regional development projects in national territorial development programmes (co-financed by ESI funds) are voting members of the MC.
  - Representatives of regions taking part in the planning of regional OPs (esp. those involving border regions) are voting members of the Interreg MC and hereby can influence the coordination between regional OP and Interreg programme.
  - Regional coordinators/development agencies who are MC members and aware of applicants' already ongoing (EU-funded) projects monitor in their

countries synergies between mainstream and Interreg projects (both in view of drafting the calls for proposals and the project selection).
o Use a transparent and public selection procedure to select NGOs/ foundations/associations' representatives from relevant thematic fields.
o Have as members representatives from civil society and/or institutions responsible for the implementation of an MRS.
o Strategic coordination through overlapping MC members in more than one programme MC.
o MA of one programme is MC member of the other programme.
o One region is the MA of several regional programmes and at the same time a member of the MC of Interreg programmes.
o SC members participating also in other programmes (all relevant Interreg programmes covered by members participating in several programmes).

- Processes:
o All relevant national and regional policies are referred to in the CP, and the rules of procedure of the SC emphasise that all decisions on projects must be in line with the provisions made in the CP.
o If not possible to involve line ministries/thematic stakeholders as MC members, at least consult with them before MC meetings and decisions. If relevant ministries, for example. are not members of the MC, discuss relevant topics during national consultations prior to MC meetings.

3.1.2. Coordination on the national level

- National coordination responsibilities and bodies/structures:
o A national group for ETC made up of representatives of central and regional administrations and the economic and social partners, with the aim of ensuring coherent and synergic actions between territorial cooperation activities and those supported by national/regional programmes.
o Setting up on the national level a working group bringing together ETC stakeholders (MA, members of programming task force) with macro-regional actors, in order to discuss ways to strengthen ETC programmes' support to the MRS and to ensure a stronger coordination among programmes of the area in the next programming period.
o Coordination (incl. exchange of information and best practices) between stakeholders involved in the implementation of different programmes is ensured through a thematic subcommittee (on ETC and MRS) to a national coordination committee.
o National committee meetings involving representatives from institutions that deal with the set-up or implementation of national/regional/local funding instruments with regular meetings; e.g., prior to funding decisions.
o To establish a national coordination authority as an umbrella body for all operational programmes in the country.
o A central national coordination authority responsible for the coordination of management of ESIF programmes (incl. complementarity and a working committee on risk elimination).

o To establish (under a national coordination authority, under the roof of one national institutional framework for coordination of Cohesion Policy) national coordination platforms for ERDF – hereby ensuring exchange not only within but also in between the coordination platforms: e.g., a 'Managing Authorities' Working Group of regional/national programmes, a 'Cross-Border Cooperation' Working Group (bringing together CBC MAs, line ministries, economic and social partners, NCP for transnational and interregional/networking programmes) or a national committee for transnational and interregional/network programmes.

o National ministry responsible for the monitoring of the state of play of programmes (regional/national, as well as Interreg) reporting regularly (incl. recommendations) to the government.

o Changing national coordination body/committee (and its working groups) for programming the future programme into a permanent coordination mechanism/body/committee on the national level – possibly also substituting existing coordination and monitoring platforms.

o A central structure/authority coordinating ESIF programmes (mainstream and Interreg) on a national level (where MAs are in that country).

o Coordination on the national governmental level through a dedicated coordination committee as a forum for consultation and cooperation among MAs.

o Coordination at the level of the PA, including cross-border areas, through a PA coordination committee supporting the minister responsible for regional development in the PA strategic coordination process. Committee chaired by the minister responsible for regional development and consisting of representatives from government, local and regional authorities, managing authorities of relevant operational programmes and socio-economic partners (incl. NGOs). In addition, sub-committees for specific fields of implementation of European funds in the country (on efficiency of EU-funds, on monitoring partnership rules, on coordination of EU structural and investment funds and programmes managed by the EC).

o National Contact Points
  § Close relation and regular contact between Contact Points from Interreg programmes and NCPs of other European programmes.
  § NCPs working part-time on two or more programmes.

o The same unit/department/structure performing the task of NA for (close to) all ETC programmes.

o Having both ETC programmes and national/regional programmes in the same department/section, hereby ensuring regular exchange both on management and working level.

o The same representatives involved in the national commission for the supervision of the respective MRS and in programme implementation.

o National coordination/collaboration network created by the ministry in charge of European funds, with separate working groups on specific topics relevant for ESI funded programmes – and Interreg MA(s) participating.

o Responsibility of one structure (department, unit) for all measures (hence funding) in one thematic field.

- Processes on the national level:
  o A national agency responsible for cohesion policy, organising events and meetings of Interreg with national and regional funding instruments (possibly with a focus on/under the umbrella of an overarching MRS).
  o MSs organising regular meetings for national and regional partners as part of a wider stakeholder involvement informing on the MS position on the development of the programme and its projects, including the coordination and transfer of results between funding schemes.
  o Body/committee responsible for the implantation of the PA organising regular meetings between the structures responsible for ESI and other funding instruments' implementation.
  o Weekly meetings of heads of sectors within ministry responsible for EU funds, and monthly ETC meetings.
  o Establishing a national (online) helpdesk dedicated to EU funding opportunities and programmes, providing information/input regarding funding opportunities in their eligible area.
  o MSs developing databases of approved projects and information websites to spread the information and hereby enable communication between Interreg and national/regional programmes.
  o National structural funds monitoring system used by all institutions administering EU Structural Assistance and allowing to accumulate, exchange and analyse information on EU-funded programmes and projects in the country, hereby helping to ensure complementarity and reduce the risk of double financing.
  o Good communication between programme authorities with the central entity for managing EU funds on the national level.
  o Creating links between Interreg programmes and national/regional programmes by MSs making use of their own structures for the coordination of the different regional/national programmes (as described in their PAs).
  o Communication about funding opportunities in a number of programmes through national information platforms.
  o Bringing together on a national level all stakeholders on a certain topic.

3.1.3. Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat

- Several programmes managed by the same MA and the latter being also the chair of the respective MCs. Several programmes having the same MA, enabling harmonisation in – for example – templates and eligibility rules. One organisation/structure being the MA for both regional programmes and Interreg programmes.
- Programme bodies (esp. MA/JS) having frequent contact with programme bodies from other programmes in the cooperation area.
- Regular meetings of programmes' project unit coordinators (every 3-4 months).
- Working contacts between JSs (even if less ambitious than planned), especially regarding projects (generation and assessment).
- Active exchange of experiences and coordination with other programmes via the Heads of Secretariat meetings facilitated by Interact. MA and JS involved in

numerous Interact groups and communities, ensuring active exchange and coordination with other programmes.

- A system of persons functioning as "thematic resources" set up in the JS with two persons per thematic priority, tasked with following the relevant thematic programmes in their sector, to establish direct exchange with (external thematic programmes, but also external thematic experts and specialised networks), and to coordinate the evaluation of project proposals under their specific theme – leading to centralised information and contacts in favour of the best possible dialogue and capitalisation. These "thematic resources" staff contribute to specific (thematic) terms of reference for each call and make sure that the terms of reference already take into account the complementarity and orient the project proposals accordingly. This concentration of knowledge is important, to coordinate as much as possible project assessment and thematic community activities during their implementation. This mechanism will ensure that project proposals take into account the activities financed in thematic programmes, and build complementarities and synergies with them.

3.1.4. Networking, exchange of information and best practices

- Before beginning to draft any important programme document, identify and study (where relevant) examples of good practice from other programmes.
- Cooperation agreement between the Interreg programme and other actors/institutions/platforms dealing with the same issues.
- Working contacts/meetings between JSs established in the previous programming period organised at the beginning of programme implementation (while cooperation continued via e-mail later on).
- Annual meetings of transnational programmes with participation from the same country by the national ministry of that country.
- Establishing a regular exchange (meetings) between programmes from the same strand (network of Heads/Directors of Programme).
- Interreg programmes establishing a regional group with neighbouring Interreg programmes (sharing information and knowledge, harmonising practices, rules, templates, etc.)
- Informal cooperation mechanism with EC Services in place through the Programme's Desk Officer (DG REGIO), enabling participation of the programme in different events for exchanging good practices and promoting project results.
- On a technical level, programme participating in meetings on coordination organised by Interact with participation from other programmes (e.g., COSME, Horizon 2020, LIFE).
- One programme mandated to coordinate a network of programmes in one region (Interreg and ENI CBC), adding a regional development angle to the respective regional EU policy and at the same time raising the strategic importance of that very programme.
- Making use of exchange and networking opportunities provided by Interact services (e.g., thematic networks).

3.2. What did not work so well and could be improved

3.2.1. On the national level

- MSs taking care of the dissemination of project information and assurance of complementarity of different projects.
- National structural funds monitoring system collecting/providing data only from mainstream programmes projects, but not Interreg or other EU-funded projects. Hence, Interreg JS needs to request from other programmes/collect information separately (list of projects, project websites, etc.).
- National committees: regular real visibility of their members, meetings, etc. towards the programme.
- Information and findings from monitoring coordination on the national level possibly not shared with specific programme implementation level.
- NCPs keeping the MA informed about the implementation of national and regional programmes where relevant for the Interreg programme did not work out. NCPs have different means and budget following the respective country and its administrative levels of regional and national ERDF implementation. To organise and harmonise is too difficult.

3.2.2. On the Monitoring Committee level

- Creating an ad-hoc working group for coordination in the MC involving representatives of relevant programmes (foreseen if needed, no such group created).

3.2.3. On the Managing Authority level

- The same body/structure being MA for several programmes does not automatically lead to coordination and cooperation between programmes – but overarching strategic framework like MRSs might help.
- Agreements with other relevant MAs/NAs implementing funding programmes /schemes in order to award the JSs read-only access to the respective electronic management systems were not concluded. The aim would have been that this access would have enabled the JS to check for possible double-financing with projects of the other programme.
- Change of responsibilities hindered implementation of coordination plans.
- MAs of regional/national programmes in some countries are more in charge of administrative and financial implementation of the programme and are therefore not always the relevant body when focusing on thematic policies. Their need is to exchange on these processes rather than on thematically-related topics.

3.2.4. On other levels and issues

- Absence of an EU-wide approach and specific tools put forward by the EC (e.g., common databases, exchanges on information at the application stage and not only for approved projects, etc.).

- No systematic and structured exchange of information (esp. not in selection phase, as programmes do not publish information before approvals). This is a structural problem that needs to be tackled at EU level to realistically happen.
- Joint data sharing planned but realised only in some cases.
- An online tool with data on funding sources for the implementation of actions in line with the respective MRS was set up in order to ensure appropriate coordination between different programmes. However, this tool, despite extensive promotion, did not receive sufficient user interest, and it was decided to discontinue it.
- Where the work of the one programme can feed into the work of the other programme, closer coordination ex-ante so that the one programme really produces what the other one would need.
- Research for complementarity or joint analysis only very occasional and set on specific needs rather than on a common shared strategy.
- Despite participating in several informal meetings organised by Interact with other programmes, the exploitation of synergies was visible only at the level of exchange of lessons learned and good practices and not at the level of programming or implementation.
- Creating links between transnational projects serving as "think tanks" or testing grounds for innovative ideas, and large-scale implementation from ESI and other national funding is not possible within the capacities of a programme secretariat, but would need to be done on national level/regional level.
- The risk of overlap with certain funding programmes turned out to be less relevant than may have originally been anticipated.
- Despite a general mutual interest in cooperating between Interreg programme and EIB, given the specificities of the Interreg programme, an EIB involvement was not suitable for projects.
- An initial attempt to coordinate with the EIB was dismissed because the understanding of investment projects in the EIB is very different from the needs of Interreg stakeholders.
- Establishing direct contact with the EMFF support unit (FARNET) for information on activities financed in the framework of Fisheries Local Action Groups.

4. Coordination and cooperation throughout the PROGRAMME cycle

4.1. What worked well

4.1.1. Programming

- Define programme priorities (and target groups/beneficiaries) different from other programmes so that the same idea could hardly receive double-financing.
- A clear division of work between programmes written down in the programme document.
- Involve NA, regions and socio-economic partners in the programming process to ensure synergies between programme priorities and respective MRS.

4.1.2. Implementation (general)

- Later stage of programme implementation (e.g., elaboration of calls for proposals) provides more flexibility for the management bodies for setting up coordination mechanism (or rules for avoiding overlapping).
- NC for territorial cooperation (ministerial level) monitoring programme development on daily basis, especially during MC meetings/written procedures related to projects (esp. selection) or programme implementation progress.

4.1.3. Programme Communication

- Active coordination of communication activities with other EU programmes promoting joint activities.
- Common initiatives bringing together transnational programmes mainly to promote and give visibility to project results at events (e.g., EWRC, EU Sustainable Energy Week). Joint annual workshop at the EWRC by programmes (e.g., from same strand).
- At bigger regional events such as annual fora of MRS, co-organising together with other programmes workshops respectively inviting other programmes as speakers/to contribute to own workshops.
- Event on ETC within a macro-region bringing together ESIF programmes, macro-regional and other regional strategy actors, and DG REGIO.
- Joint regional project competition.
- Joint publications or joint contributions to publications; joint communication campaigns on social media; joint participation in exhibitions at bigger events (joint stand).
- Joint promotional tools such as a brochure on transnational programmes' added-value, transnational programme story map, etc.
- Different Interreg programmes publishing a common booklet presenting their activities.
- Promoting each other's relevant events through social media.
- Applying the 20% geographical flexibility rule and involving partners from outside the programme area enabled umbrella institutions located in Belgium to act as multipliers, and supported a Europe-wide dissemination of project results.

- Inviting other Interreg programmes to take part in programme annual events or thematic webinars.
- One Interreg JS hosting the annual teambuilding of another Interreg JS, including hosting programme project visit.
- Programme using horizontal projects and governance axis to consolidate and share results.
- Presenting programme and project results to geographical units of EC DG REGIO.
- Communication Officer regularly taking part in the Communication Group facilitated by Interact.
- National communication network set up by the NC of ESIF, enabling programmes to communicate about calls in an integrated manner.
- Regularly informing and supporting NCPs in communicating to the national level. NCPs to reach out to ENI and IPA stakeholders.
- Updated, publicly-available information (either on granted projects, or database concerning project data on eligibility, etc.) provides flexibility and quick access for programme management bodies for double-checking relevant data of the (potential) beneficiary without asking them to provide supporting documents.
- Programme on a regular basis submitting/uploading data on projects under implementation to keep.eu.

4.1.4. Programme capitalisation

- Cooperation with macro-regional actors to link and promote projects to and in the context of MRSs (e.g., receiving flagship project label).
- Sharing of results and projects through Interact's thematic networks.
- Thematic project platforms run by one Interreg programme, including projects from other programmes.
- Cross-programme initiatives taken at national level by Contact Points, bringing together all stakeholders on a certain topic.
- In some cases, preparatory actions implemented within Interreg projects led to larger investments supported by EIB loans.
- A system of persons functioning as "thematic resources" set up in the JS with two persons per thematic priority. This concentration of knowledge is important to coordinate, as much as possible, thematic community activities during their implementation.
- When synergies between projects are identified, beneficiaries are invited to exchange in order to improve the added-value of their projects. This work done by the JS and NCPs has had a very positive impact in the capitalisation of results.
- Involving CBC project partners in the framework of transnational project platforms (e.g., inviting to preparatory seminars of project platforms).
- Calls for capitalisation where existing projects can invite new stakeholders (from other programmes, potentially) to join their consortium to strengthen/roll-out results.

4.2. What did not work so well and could be improved

4.2.1. Programming and implementation (general)

- At planning phase of the programme document, it is a real challenge to set coordination mechanism between different OPs without having exact information on the content of the call for proposals (target group, potential applicants, timing of calls, implementation period of projects, etc.).
- Despite the territorial dimension being crucial in the programming and implementation of the Interreg programme, data provided by ESPON were not explicitly used.
- Despite participating in several informal meetings organised by Interact with other programmes, the exploitation of synergies was visible only at the level of exchange of lessons learned and good practices and not at the level of programming or implementation.
- As there are no macro-regional flagship projects financed by the programme, the linkage to the MRS is rather indirect.

4.2.2. Programme communication

- No formal tool was set between the EC Services and other European and national bodies involved in the management of EU instruments to jointly spread information targeting relevant stakeholders.
- It was not possible to mobilise the geographical units of DG REGIO although this would have facilitated the promotion of the programme towards this core target group.
- MSs, through relevant structures, disseminating information about the Interreg programme to the organisations within the country and vice-versa, making information about most relevant national and regional funding instruments available to the Interreg MC.
- Communication capacities of NCPs could be further developed.
- One specific programme communicating about funding opportunities in another programme confusing the programme's communication and risking a resulting endless stream of news (too much communication = no communication).
- Improve the communication between MA/JS and NCPs in order to capitalise their role in communicating the programme to EU citizens in all regions.
- A system of programme partners who are also involved in other ESI-Programmes in their regions, disseminating Interreg project information and ensuring complementarity of projects within their organisations.
- Specifically addressing the ESI funds with the programme communication.

4.2.3. Programme capitalisation

- Capitalisation should start from the beginning (programme elaboration) through bilateral exchanges (between Interreg and regional ERDF/ESF/EARDF programmes) in order to be effective later on.

- Taking into account the objectives and results of other identified programmes when implementing own capitalisation activities or strategic projects and during programme evaluation only partially done. Different timelines, targets, actors did not allow for a larger interaction.
- A platform project involving representatives of all programme country partners working on different components like mainstream, liaising, evaluation methodologies and approaches to implement a better governance and policies – this was too large and ambitious, particularly at the beginning because of some partners' lack of experience in the ETC framework (more used to bilateral cooperation). Good experience, but need to simplify objectives and expected results.
- Joint application events due to the timeframe and priorities of programmes not being equivalent. Needs to be planned and scheduled jointly from the beginning.
- The possibility to facilitate the exchange with and advice from the EIB on the possibility for beneficiaries to receive EIB funding as a means of capitalising the programmes' project results was not explored (although planned).

5. Coordination and cooperation throughout the PROJECT cycle

5.1. What worked well

5.1.1. Project generation (until submission of application)

- Projects to be implemented in a Territorial Action Plan, with geography overlapping with national programmes' geography and project partners to be double-checked in the granted projects' register of the regional programme.
- Programme offering seed money supporting the macro-regional project development for different funding sources.
- Clustering of projects from multiple programmes in the same themes through clustering project calls.
- The JS joining forces with a specific EC DG in charge of a directly-managed programme and designing a call for applications focusing on capitalisation through coordination, in particular regarding the up- and down streaming of previous Interreg projects' results and the directly-managed fund's project results: joint matchmaking event, joint publication on experiences from this pilot, highlighted in operational evaluation as good practice, and triggering further actions (DG RTD setting up a matchmaking tool between Interreg and R&I results based on data in keep.eu).
- Early kick-off meeting between regional/national programmes and Interreg programme to explore possibilities for synergies and complementarity and to avoid overlapping. Focus on calls for proposals.
- In the case of the same potential beneficiaries/development "targets" with another Interreg programme, agree beforehand on a division of beneficiaries/targets (in a specific topic, priority list).
- Agreement on national governmental level on list of investment beneficiaries.
- Starting from HIT glossary, drafting a trilingual glossary including definitions accepted and used by three neighbouring Interreg programmes, ensuring that terms mean the same for beneficiaries in all three programmes and languages.
- Regular inquiries from national programmes to identify possible synergies prior to launching calls for proposals by national programmes. Some information on the upcoming calls and events of other programmes collected to implement one's own call or event.
- Applicants required to elaborate in the application on synergies with projects funded by another programme or initiative, and if they draw on experiences from previously-funded projects. This ensures a high level of information and awareness within the JS and the MC concerning potential synergies between own projects and projects funded by other Interreg programmes.
- Applicants need to declare in the application form that no public funds have been received in the previous five years before the submission deadline for the same project in terms of objectives, activities and results.
- Applicant to submit declaration on possible overlaps.
- Both in the application and in the pre-contracting phase, the applicants have to declare that they have not benefited from financial support from public funds in the past five years before the deadline for submission of applications for an

operation implemented or under implementation with the same objectives, activities and results (declaration regarding double financing).
- Applicants need to declare any other past or current project with which there are complementarities or synergies.
- The application form includes information on the past, current and envisaged EU assistance, on the project's complementarity with national and regional programmes and/or strategies.
- Applicants are requested to describe the local/regional/national strategic context for the project, its contribution to the respective MRS and its links to other projects selected for financing already implemented under other programmes. It helps the beneficiary to acknowledge the importance of capitalising on results, for a greater impact of its interventions.
- Applicants need to describe in the application form the project's contribution to and compliance with relevant strategies for the area.
- Project applicant needs to describe in the application the project's contribution to the respective MRS.
- Applicants proposing projects focusing on the preparation of investment-related studies must explain in the application form how the effective implementation of the investment will be done in a reasonable period of time after the end of the project (exit strategy/sustainability of results after project completion).
- Clearly describing (guidance) and asking the applicant to explain in the application why the planned activities need support from this very programme (e.g., why transnational cooperation is needed).
- As far as possible, guiding applicants who do not fit into the own programme to look for other funding sources.
- NCPs tasked to be well aware of other funding instruments (national/EU) and to help direct applicants to other programmes, if needed.
- Specific thematic exchange on projects with other programmes by exchanging approved concept notes and applications.
- JS employing thematic experts for each priority. These thematic experts have knowledge about funding instruments within their field and could direct project developers to other programmes/funding sources, if relevant.
- A system of thematic experts or thematic resource persons set up in the JS with two persons per thematic priority. These people contribute to specific (thematic) terms of reference for each call and make sure that the terms of reference already take into account the complementarity and orient the project proposals accordingly.
- Giving the task to follow up other funding instruments to specific people.

5.1.2. Project selection (from assessment to funding decision)

- Duly assessing information provided by applicants on any other past or current project with which complementarities or synergies exist.
- Introducing a specific selection criterion on the project's contribution to a wider strategy and if building on existing knowledge, results and practices.
- Specific selection criteria to assess synergies and possible overlaps with other projects and programmes.

- Specific checklists for assessing information provided in application form on links with other community, national, regional programmes and policies, coherence with MRSs, with relevant policies and plans, as well as synergies with past or current EU- and other projects and initiatives – with particular attention dedicated to the contribution to the MRS.
- Contribution of the project to the respective MRS (as indicated by the applicant) is assessed during the project selection process.
- Coherence and synergies between programme priorities and the respective MRS are monitored during the application assessment by the JS.
- Avoiding double financing part of the strategic assessment. If suspicion of double financing, other programmes will be contacted and application investigated or compared with application under the other programme.
- As part of the assessment check selection criteria focusing on contribution of expected results to EU/national/regional strategies and on coherence and synergy with regional/national programmes and other relevant regional/local financial instruments.
- A system of "thematic resource" persons set up in the JS with two persons per thematic priority. This concentration of knowledge is important, in order to coordinate project assessment as much as possible.
- Consulting during the assessment other Interreg programmes (or any other EU and national/regional funding instruments) in order to avoid potential duplication and to ensure coherence (and if relevant, bring it up in the SC meeting).
- Exchanging information with other programmes during open calls on ideas which were discussed for funding (sending shortlists to each other before decision-making).
- After the closure of the call, contacting other programmes to check if there are applicants/beneficiaries in common and to check potential synergies, double funding, etc.
- NCPs are the most suitable to check if project contributes to national/regional policies (as part of the overall application assessment).
- Check for double-financing if several Interreg programmes belong to the same ministry and through the hosting body of the JSs.
- Regional advisory groups play an important role during project selection in avoiding duplication, because of their knowledge of projects funded by other programmes.
- Working contacts between JSs enabling information exchange by mail/phone on projects.
- Sending an overview of approved concept notes and applications, including a list of partners, to other Interreg programmes (or programmes which thematically overlap) to check for overlaps. The information received was used in consultations and assessment, and recommendations for cooperation were given to applicants.
- Prior to selection decision, MC members receive a list of projects proposed to be selected and are asked to analyse and identify potential overlaps and double funding – and to present these during the decision-making process in the MC meeting.

- Coherence and synergies between programme priorities and the respective MRS are monitored during the project selection by the MC.
- SC members who are also committee members in another programme compare project ideas to ensure that there is no overlap.
- Complementarity with regional programmes ensured by national delegation encompassing also representatives of regions who are MAs of regional programmes.
- Synergies between programme priorities and MRS ensured by involvement of NA, regions and socio-economic partners in the project selection.
- Setting up an advisory committee for ETC in order to coordinate actions funded by ETC programmes and those financed by ESI funds (esp. national/regional programmes), consisting of representatives from ministries and social and economic partners, providing opinion during project selection.
- In the funding decision, formulate conditions for approval in order to ensure that projects make use of synergies identified through an informal exchange.
- Including requirements and recommendations (on coordination and cooperation) included in the funding decision (letter) sent to the applicants.

5.1.3. Project implementation (incl. monitoring)

- Beneficiary to submit declaration on possible overlaps.
- Monitoring by MA and JS of exit strategy/sustainability of project results in cases where projects are focusing on the preparation of investment-related studies (where applicants must explain in the application form how the effective implementation of the investment will be done in a reasonable period of time after the end of the project).
- Risk of double-financing eliminated by the MA verifying each project progress report through cross-checks, based on the data in the electronic monitoring system.
- During implementation of approved projects, information exchange between the monitoring team in the MA and the monitoring team in the JS (the latter being the interface to the beneficiaries).
- Applying the 20% geographical flexibility rule and involving partners (though a rather limited number) outside the programme area allowed creating links and opportunities across areas with common challenges and features.

5.2. What did not work so well and could be improved

5.2.1. Project generation (until submission of application)

- Coordinated calls among different programmes have been discussed several times, but were so far not feasible due to the fact that all programmes were already at different speeds. Coordinated calls can only be achieved if the intention for this is built into the programme from the start. In addition, the objectives for organising such coordinated calls should be made very clear to potential applicants. For example, if the aim is to fund back-to-back projects to cover a wider geographical area.

- Joint definition of upcoming calls and organisation of common/coordinated events have to be planned in one single common agenda from the beginning, otherwise it is impossible to harmonise afterwards.
- If calendars of the calls are not the same for programmes, it is practically impossible to coordinate.
- Overview missing on all calls going on in parallel for European programmes other than ESI.
- If calls (schedules) are not coordinated between programmes, the later one has to adapt in order to reach synergies.
- Conditioning the terms of reference of a call for proposals to the Horizon 2020 work programmes. It is much more relevant that national information platforms ensure a link between Interreg programmes and, for example, Horizon 2020, instead of the programmes doing it for themselves.
- An initial attempt to coordinate with the EIB (follow-up of outputs and results of Interreg cooperation into large-scale investments) was dismissed because the understanding of investment projects in the EIB is very different from the needs of Interreg stakeholders.
- Applicants are requested to demonstrate in the application that there is no double-financing, that synergies with centrally-managed programmes have been investigated, etc., and they do so to the best of their abilities. However, taking into account the number of centrally-managed projects and their complexity, this task is not always realistic.
- Only sporadic exchange on a thematic level (at least) during selection phase. This can be due to a competition between programmes and/or, more practically, because calls (schedule) are not coordinated and applications not shared between programmes before approval.
- A systematic and structured coordination in the selection phase is not possible as long as programmes do not publish/share information among each other before approval.
- The MA/JS staff does not have the capacity to stay well informed about the different funding instruments in order to really advise applicants.
- It is hard to keep track of other funding instruments (to be able to redirect applicants, if necessary) as programme staff are busy enough with implementing their own programme.
- Programme territorial facilitation network service may vary a lot from country to country and from facilitator to facilitator, esp. as facilitators are not necessarily sufficiently informed about regional ERDF programmes/other programmes.
- System of conditional commitment of funding in case it is planned to combine ESIF and Horizon 2020 grants in the same project (incl. standard letters to prove the financial viability of a project as regards the ESIF co-funded expenditures).

5.2.2. Project selection (from assessment until funding decision)

- Applicants need to describe if and how they contribute to or complement other EU programmes. If the question in the application form is not precise enough,

the applicants sometimes just submit a list of programmes/projects which is vague and does not give the JS any insight on potential synergies.

- Although applicants need to describe in the application form past, current and future EU support, possible overlaps, possible coordination with other activities/projects, etc., this assessment has limits as 1) knowledge of the assessor is fully based on what applicants share in the application form, and 2) it is taken for granted that the applicants are informed about everything that happens or has happened around him/her on similar themes (which is unlikely and in any case not verifiable).
- The information provided by the applicant (on/to identify possible overlaps, complementarities, synergies, etc.) can show the degree of accuracy the applicant has put into the application and can show a certain estimation of the applicant's seriousness on the topic, but nothing more than that.
- Although indicated in the CP, there was no specific descriptive section in the application form on overlap with other EU assistance (due to the programme being so specific in its scope). However, a statement on not receiving double-financing is part of the LP confirmation. Where possible overlaps were identified, these were handled through the selection criterion on the quality of the partnership (minimum geographical coverage required).
- Ensuring coherence and synergies between priorities of Interreg programme and MRS part of the project assessment by the JS and the project selection by the MC.
- Going through list of applications or projects from other programmes is an additional task that takes capacities in the JSs, often in a busy application and assessment period.
- As the JS is not composed of thematic experts (considering the wide range of topics), a system similar to Horizon 2020 with a real thematic expert assessment would be needed, as the JS assessor at present is rarely in a position to contradict what is stated by the applicant.
- The MRS's policy areas relevant for the programme were modified during programming and programme implementation.
- To use the IT system for mainstream operational programmes to check double financing did not work out as the implementation of ETC programmes belongs to another ministry than the mainstream programmes, and with a different IT system background, this did not work out.
- Information on projects selected by other programmes (in view of possible double funding) more relevant for programmes timewise taking funding decisions later than others (for comparison with projects during the same call).
- Very little coordination at thematic level during selection phase due to calendars of calls not being coordinated and application forms not shared between programmes before approval/during assessment.
- Improving assessment of overlap with other funding programmes/projects and coherence with local/regional strategies by identifying some specific tools to assess these aspects and their implementation during the project life cycle.
- No involvement of independent experts with knowledge of national legislation and social-economic situation of the programme area in the project assessment process (performed by the JS).

- Advisory committee not provided with the quality assessment of project applications. This limits the committee's opinion and support during the selection process to being based on the project idea and partnership, but not on the quality of the application (therefore in most cases supported by the committee).
- Relying on MC members being informed on what is happening on the national level and in assessing the complementarity of applications in relation to interventions funded on the national level varies depending on the commitment of single MC members and on how the discussion process is organised in the countries.
- Direct contacts with IPA and ENI MAs in order to activate synergies between complementary operations being implemented at EU external borders (esp. exchange of information on applications and approved operations) could not be implemented due to the lack of internal resources and the concentration of efforts in performing coordination measures with other EC-managed and Interreg programmes.

5.2.3. Project implementation (incl. monitoring)

- Improving assessment of overlap with other funding programmes/projects and coherence with local/regional strategies by identifying some specific tools to assess these aspects and their implementation during the project life cycle.
- The option to involve partners outside the programme (creating links and opportunities across areas with common challenges and features) using the 20% geographical flexibility rule was used only in a limited way – with the administrative burden linked to the management, control and audit requirements for implementing the rule as a major cause of this limited use.