

Interreg

CENTRAL EUROPE



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Impact Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme – Phase 1

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CIVITTA



ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Application Form
CA	Contracting Authority
CB	Cross-border cooperation programme
CE	Central Europe
CEA	Cost Effectiveness Analysis
CP	The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Cooperation Programme document
EU	European Union
IR	Interregional cooperation programme
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
eMS	Electronic Monitoring System
ETF	Evaluation Task Force
FG	Focus Group
MLG	Multi-level governance
NCP	National Contact Point
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PF	Performance Framework
PO	Policy Objective
SO	Specific Objective
TN	Transnational cooperation programme
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Impact Evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2014-2020 (hereinafter ‘Interreg CE’) aims at assessing the **proximal effects** of the programme implementation in the Central Europe (CE) area and beyond, across all Thematic Priorities. As such, the evaluation tackles three **main evaluation questions** (EQ) (EQ1: “What change can be observed in relation to the objectives of the programme?”, EQ2: “To what extent can the observed changes be attributed to the implementation of the programme?” and EQ3: “What mechanisms of programme implementation have delivered the observed impact?”) as well as a series of **additional evaluation questions** (AEQ), investigating further the nature and outreach of the programme impacts.

This Impact Evaluation Report outlines the **findings and recommendations** on all evaluation questions resulting from the analysis carried out in Phase 1 of the evaluation (2020-2021), where different tools for data collection and different qualitative and quantitative analysis methods have been used, namely: desk research on programme documentation; literature review on contextual developments; interviews with programme stakeholders, representatives of Macro-Regional Strategies and other Interreg programmes; interviews with thematic experts; survey addressing project beneficiaries; survey addressing programme-level stakeholders; survey addressing Innovation projects’ end-users; statistical analysis of project outputs and results; Cost-Effectiveness Analysis; and project-level case studies, including interviews with project beneficiaries and their target groups.

Central Europe (CE) is host to well-developed and closely connected economies, where some **strong disparities** between Western and Eastern regions, on the one hand, and between urban centres and rural peripheries, on the other hand, however persist. Convergence processes have significantly halted in the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009, **making cooperation in innovation, low-carbon, environmental, cultural and transport even more important to bridge socio-economic and competitiveness gaps between more and less developed CE regions.**

Considering the data from the first two calls only, **the Programme has already achieved or surpassed the targets established for most indicators collected at project level (output and result), and evidence suggests that all indicators’ targets will be reached by 2023** (EQ1). Taking into account the numerous partnerships established and the large number of organisations working together in the delivery of project activities (such as, in the implementation of pilot actions), **the Programme has effectively supported cooperation beyond borders in Central Europe**, as initially planned. **It has also reached the target groups** which it envisaged and succeeded in **achieving its objectives of improving the capacities of the public and private sector in the region, enhancing policy frameworks and developing managerial systems, human resources and institutional structures in all thematic areas.**

The projects funded under Interreg CE have overall been successful in contributing to strategically important issues across all thematic areas, with transnational cooperation directly supporting institutional learning and enhanced institutional capacity (expertise, technical knowledge) or the delivery of higher quality services for citizens. Bringing the EU-level priorities closer to the local communities is another significant contribution. In terms of **the value added of the Interreg CE programme**, evidence suggests four main distinctive features: (1) its unique territorial and thematic coverage, bringing forward topics not always on the agenda of local stakeholders, (2) its accessibility for smaller organisations compared to other EU-level programmes, (3) the design of its projects’ partnerships, which encourages the involvement of many different partners, with various backgrounds and specializations, (4) the design of its interventions, which encourages projects to test innovative solutions through pilot actions (EQ2).

More specifically, the qualitative and quantitative analysis carried out in this first evaluation phase has brought out the following success factors in project delivery: first, the projects’ **bottom-up approach** tailored to local and regional needs, the combination of complementary skills and experiences within project partnerships and the implementation of target group engagement activities; second, the particular role and

above-average cost-effectiveness of **pilot actions** as “living laboratories” to showcase the utility of project results (still, the vast majority of all outputs in absolute terms performed well and delivered the expected results); third, the **support provided by programme authorities**, whereas programme-specific reporting requirements as well as administrative procedures at EU, national and regional level for e.g. pilot actions were found to be quite cumbersome for the project implementation (EQ3).

Interreg CE did produce **strong synergetic and multiplication effects** in terms of leveraging follow-up funding and generating further cooperation opportunities – in particular, in the framework of subsequent Interreg CE calls as well as other Interreg transnational and cross-border programmes -, even though synergies with national strategies and other EU-funded programmes could be further promoted (AEQ1). A good number of projects did also produce **positive unintended effects**, going beyond the impact initially anticipated at project start (AEQ2). Importantly, the design of the programme provides the necessary framework for testing and implementing different governance formats such as bottom-up approaches and multilevel governance, but Interreg CE projects eventually contributed to better policy coordination much **more horizontally than vertically** (AEQ3).

The programme also contributed to the implementation of the **Europe 2020 Strategy** for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as **Macro-Regional Strategies**, even though the exact contribution can hardly be assessed by project beneficiaries (AEQ4). Interreg CE project results were averagely transferred to other territories but more moderately transferred to other sectors and other levels of governance – reflecting the observation that **integration of project results into policymaking is rather project-specific** (AEQ5). Interreg CE projects also created the necessary conditions for (e.g., through capacity-building) and thereby contributed to **change of practices at the individual and organisational level** within project partnerships and target groups, especially at individual level (AEQ6).

Moreover, the programme demonstrated a **high added value of transnational cooperation**, through the multidirectional transfer of knowledge and experiences, the reinforcement of cross-border networks and partnerships as well as the possibility to trial solutions in an international environment (AEQ7). The programme has brought about benefits to a **large and diverse sample of beneficiaries and target groups**, in particular local and regional authorities, SMEs, research institutes and the public, in line with the quadruple helix approach adopted by some projects (AEQ8). Likewise, **the programme supported a wide diversity of territories**, even though regions located in the south of the CE territory and urban areas more generally are likely to have benefitted more. The functional approach taken in the programme (in particular between urban areas and their hinterlands) is likely to have contributed to reducing urban-rural fragmentation in the places where pilot actions were implemented, pointing to need for continuing this approach (AEQ9).

In terms of **sustainability of project results**, there are examples of projects which have successfully managed to ensure the continuation of activities beyond the end of the financial support from the Programme. Available evidence suggests that sustainability mainly depends on the continued cooperation between the project partners, on their capacity to leverage public or private funds, as well as on their capacity to determine policy uptake, all of which are which are only starting to materialise (AEQ10).

Therefore, the Interreg CE programme has delivered a **strong, positive impact** on its targeted territories and for its target groups, demonstrating its added value in addressing all thematic challenges faced by the CE area. **Synergies, result capitalisation, fund leverage and especially policy uptake** contribute to exploiting projects results to their full potential and making them sustainable over the longer term - they should therefore be further encouraged by the programme.

Taking into account both the persistent disparities between the urban and rural areas in the Programme regions, and the excellent results obtained by the projects implemented at FUA level, future interventions should continue to focus on creating of functional links between the different territories and on enabling a fair distribution of benefits between them.

In order to improve the programme’s accessibility, it is recommended to increase support for beneficiaries from less active regions and/or categories. This would enable lagging territories and less experienced entities to reap the benefits of transnational cooperation.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. EVALUATION SCOPE

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Impact Evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2014-2020 (hereinafter 'Interreg CE'), this evaluation focuses on the **proximal effects** of the programme implementation in the Central Europe (CE) area - as defined by the programme document - and beyond, taking potential spillover effects into consideration.

More specifically, the evaluation addresses all **four Thematic Priorities** and **10 Specific Objectives** (SOs) of the programme, and tackles three main evaluation questions:

- **EQ1:** What change can be observed in relation to the objectives of the programme?
- **EQ2:** To what extent can the observed changes be attributed to the implementation of the programme?
- **EQ3:** What mechanisms of programme implementation have delivered the observed impact?

The evaluation also seeks to answer a series of additional evaluation questions, investigating further the nature and outreach of the programme impacts:

- **AEQ1:** Can any synergetic and multiplication effects in terms of improved coordination and funds leverage be observed? Are these effects stronger in projects funded in Call 4 that was focused on exploitation and coordination of results compared to projects funded in standard calls?
- **AEQ2:** Can any possible unintended effects be detected?
- **AEQ3:** Did the programme contribute to better governance in terms of multilevel governance cooperation and the alignment of governance processes?
- **AEQ4:** How has the programme contributed to wider strategies like Europe 2020, Territorial Agenda, MRS?
- **AEQ5:** To what extent have the outputs and solutions developed by the projects been transferred and adopted beyond the project partnership? Were the results achieved by the projects sufficiently transferred into public policies? Did the programme foster policy learning and innovation? Did the programme raise the interest of politicians to further develop and roll out the results?
- **AEQ6:** Did the programme contribute to change of practices at the organisational and individual level?
- **AEQ7:** Did the transnational cooperation among project partners bring an added value to the development of the outputs and achievement of the results?
- **AEQ8:** Did the programme bring a special benefit to specific target groups? Which target groups experienced the change most?
- **AEQ9:** Did the programme bring a special benefit to the specific types of territories (e.g. urban areas, rural areas, industrial areas, touristic areas, stable or growing areas, shrinking areas, inner peripheries)? How are the effects distributed within the territory of central Europe?
- **AEQ10:** Are the results generated by the projects sustainable and viable beyond the project end?

The Impact Evaluation Report lays out the evidence-based findings on the impact of the programme, focusing on Calls 1 and 2 (Phase 1 of the impact evaluation). As such, the analysis of the programme's inputs covers all 138 Interreg CE 2014-2020 projects, while the analysis of the outputs and results covers those 85 projects (61.5% of the total) that have been completed until 14th December 2021, and that received funding

in Calls no. 1 and 2. The second phase of the evaluation will cover projects that received funding under Calls no.3 and 4, which are still under implementation.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

The core methodological approach of this impact evaluation follows the conceptual framework of a Theory-Based Evaluation (TBE), using the **Theory of Change (ToC)**. Reconstructing the ToC behind the Interreg CE design is the starting point of the evaluation exercise. More specifically, the ToC builds on a detailed analysis of the intervention logic of the programme (as described in the programme documentation) and seeks to specify the causality assumptions on which the programme relies, i.e. how Interreg CE is expected to deliver the targeted impacts in order to respond to the identified needs. These assumptions, linking Interreg CE inputs with the expected outputs, results and outcomes, are to be routinely examined and tested through evaluative activities to determine:

- Whether – and the extent to which – the causality assumptions are verified, i.e. estimating the net effects of Interreg CE as a result of the funded projects and activities (EQ2), departing from the observed changes at programme level (EQ1).
- Whether – and the extent to which - internal or external factors have influenced the production of outputs and achievement of expected results.
- Whether – and the extent to which – unintended effects (both positive and negative) have been produced, and for whom (e.g. types of target groups/territories).

The evaluation matrix presented in Annex 1 of this report indicates the contribution of each tool to the answering of the evaluation questions, considering the maturation of the tools during the Inception Phase and Phase 1 of the evaluation. Based on the methodological approach presented above, and in line with the evaluation matrix presented in Annex 1, a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed during Phase 1, each contributing to providing a comprehensive and substantiated answer to the evaluation questions. The detailed methodology broken down by type of instrument depicted below is available in Annex 1.

The following data collection instruments were designed and implemented as part of this evaluation process:

1. **Desk research and literature review** - focused on establishing the context for the Programme actions, the main effects to be expected from the investments, as well as the factors that influence their results;
2. **Quantitative analysis** of programme's **inputs, outputs, results and outcomes**;
3. **Surveys - developed as primary data collection instruments.** The questionnaires can be found in Annex 5 and the detailed survey results are presented in Annex 8. The **three surveys** cover different target groups:
 - a. Programme beneficiaries
 - b. Programme stakeholders
 - c. End-users
4. **Interviews - developed as primary data collection instruments.** The interview guidelines can be found in Annex 6. The **interviews** cover different target groups:
 - a. Programme stakeholders
 - b. Thematic experts
 - c. Project beneficiaries
 - d. End-users

5. **Cost effectiveness analysis (CEA)** - The CEA consists of three methodological steps including a) the definition of effectiveness, b) the estimation of costs and c) the thematic clustering of projects. The detailed methodology is available in Annex 4.
6. **Case studies** - used for several purposes: a) understanding the mechanisms behind the project outcomes and results, b) identifying the most effective measures/interventions (in connection with the cost-effectiveness analysis), c) identifying good practices or lessons learned, as well as d) measuring the factors of influence related to the net effects of the programme. The case studies are part of the evaluation triangulation process and complement the interviews, surveys and desk research.
 - Five *individual cases studies*, focusing on illustrating successful projects. The individual case studies for evaluation phase 1 are: Innovation – [DigitalLife4CE](#), Low-carbon – [LOW-CARB](#), Environment – [RAINMAN](#), Culture – [INDUCULT2.0](#), Transport - [RUMOBIL](#)
 - Three *comparative case studies*, each looking at two projects sharing similar topics. The comparative case studies for evaluation phase 1 are: Innovation – [KETGATE](#) & [SYNERGY](#), Low-carbon – [ENERGY@SCHOOL](#) & [eCentral](#), Environment – [GreenerSites](#) & [LUMAT](#)

Both individual and comparative case studies are available in full in Annex 3.

7. **Focus groups** - were set up as a tool to complement other methodological approaches, taking place after the finalisation of the field research with the specific aim of enabling triangulation and validity-checking of working hypotheses and resulting conclusions/recommendations. In total, 6 focus groups were conducted: one dedicated to the general findings at the Programme level and five thematic FGs (one for each theme). In terms of audience, all FGs encompassed participants from the ETF, NCPs, MC, thematic experts, observers, as well as the MA/JS and the Evaluation team.

The findings of the FGs are presented in Annex 7.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1. MAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PROGRAMME AREA DURING THE INTERREG CE IMPLEMENTATION

The following section examines **the context in which the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2014-2020 has been implemented**. This is the first building block of the evaluation, exploring the main developments that have occurred in the Programme area and how initial conditions have evolved in terms of socio-economic context, priorities at EU level and other factors, such as wider trends that might have made a mark on the delivery of the actions and on achieving the intended results. Overall, the context analysis provides a better understanding of the complexity of the causal chain the actions to the observed effects.

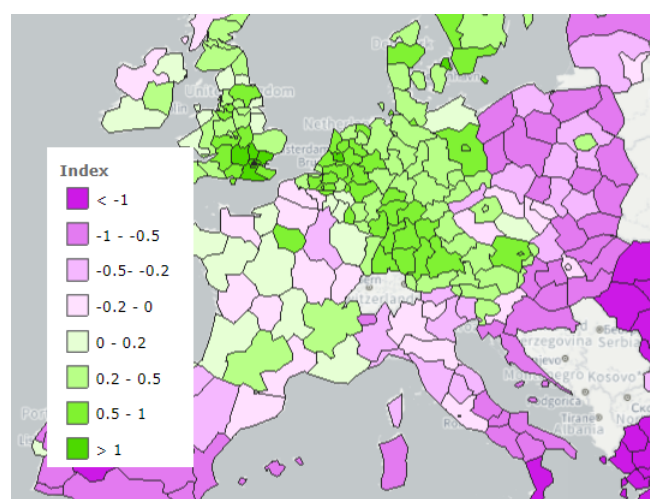
Socio-economic development

The territory covered by the Programme is a functional economic area, boasting of a generally high level of socio-economic development. Central European economies are well developed and closely connected, favoured by a variety of factors, from strong industrial value chains to shared cultural values, geography and historical travel routes. Most regions that score high in terms of regional competitiveness are those that perform best in terms of the quality of governance, infrastructure, human capital and innovation¹.

From the on-set, the Programme has identified several challenges and risks affecting the territory, which remained valid throughout the implementation. These included the increased exposure to globalisation structural changes after the global economic crisis (2007-2009), the growing interdependences of EU regions and growing difficulties in achieving EU integration.

Evidence² suggests that **convergence trends between the more and less developed regions have stopped** in the aftermath of the economic crisis and intra-national disparities have increased, particularly in less developed countries of the area. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to deepen the existing disparities and reverse some of the positive convergence outcome, despite a positive economic outlook³. In the future, the health crisis is also expected to have significant, long-lasting effects on societies and people's lives, transforming business models, consumer habits, public services etc⁴.

FIGURE 1 REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS INDEX 2019



Source: EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2019

¹ [European Regional Competitiveness Index - Regional Policy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu-regional-competitiveness-index-2019)

According to the metodological paper, "RCI 2019 tracks the performance of 268 regions at NUTS-2 level across 28 EU Member States. It measures 11 dimensions of competitiveness capturing concepts that are relevant to productivity and long-term development. The RCI is computed as a weighted arithmetic mean of pillar (dimension) scores, therefore allowing for compensation across its components. RCI scores are z-scores which means the EU-28 average is always set at 0. Thus, negative values are below the EU-28 average and positive values are above."

² [Convergence of EU regions REDUX: recent trends in regional disparities](#), 2020

³ [Jobs and economy during the coronavirus pandemic | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [The long-term effects of the pandemic: insights from a survey of leading companies \(europa.eu\)](#)

The Programme strategy also considered the diverse manifestations of the demographic and social challenges present across the different types of territories, including migration, aging, brain drain and skill availability. Evidence points out to the fact that intra-area disparities and challenges persist, especially between capital city regions and regions towards the periphery of the CE area, **and between the urban, industrialised areas and rural peripheries**. Structural development gaps between the western and eastern part of the region are still present, as confirmed by the Regional Competitiveness Index and observed in Map 1 above. Industrial “powerhouses” in northern Italy, southern Germany and central Poland produce significant economic value and show considerable linkages with the surrounding regions. Urban growth poles including capital city agglomerations (Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest, Prague), attract investments, talent and innovation, benefiting from “city magnetism”⁵, while also suffering from the negative externalities such environmental degradation and increasing social inequalities. On the other hand, rural and peripheral areas usually have lower economic performance and quality of services, making them particularly vulnerable to global shocks⁶ (such as economic crises) and to negative trends such as brain-drain and population ageing⁷.

As initially acknowledged, climate change and environmental risks have affected the regions in different manners and to different degrees. However, **the urgency of climate change** and environmental risks has intensified **and commitment for tackling environmental challenges** has increased during the implementation of the Programme. Compared to the start of the Programme, The [European Green Deal](#) has set ambitious targets for delivering on climate objectives, bringing new momentum to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), and the [Paris Agreement](#), adopted in 2015. Public pressure and general awareness towards climate change have also increased significantly. This was an opportunity for the implementation of actions under the Low-Carbon, Environment and Transport SOs but it is likely that it has influenced the design of activities in other SOs, as well.

Digital transformation has produced major disruptions to businesses and across society, impacting all sectors and influencing the way value is created, services are delivered and products reach their customers. Social media and digital technologies have enabled projects to reach and communicate with their target groups faster and easier, to develop better tools and create more knowledge in all thematic areas. They also allowed projects to mitigate the negative effects of the physical distancing imposed by the containment measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted** the investment and financing capacity of both the public and the private sector, and, on short-term, brought about a re-prioritisation of actions towards fighting the medical crisis.

Further details on developments at thematic level are presented below. These refer to innovation, low-carbon transition, natural resources and environment protection, culture and heritage, transport and accessibility, as well as governance structures.

Innovation

Just before the pandemic started, an **East-West innovation divide** was still very visible in Central Europe, both at the national and regional level: only one NUTS 2 region from the six newest CE Member States (the Czech capital region) is categorized as a ‘strong innovator’⁸, and all CE ‘innovation leaders’ regions are located in Germany, Austria and Italy. More importantly, many CE regions saw a decrease in their innovation performance between 2011 and 2019, especially those located in Eastern Germany, Czech Republic and Slovenia. In recent years, linkages between actors of the innovation systems have been developing in Central Europe. The performance of clusters and innovation networks is improving slowly, as is the implementation

⁵ [Global Power City Index \(GPCI\) - Institute for Urban Strategies \(mori-m-foundation.or.jp\)](#), [magnet-cities.pdf \(assets.kpmg\)](#)

⁶ [Home | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

⁷ [CE FLOWS – Spatial dynamics and integrated territorial development scenarios for the functional area of Central Europe | ESPON](#)

⁸ [European Regional Competitiveness Index - Regional Policy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

of Smart Specialisation Strategies in key sectors of the CE regional economies. More substantial progress was achieved with regard to increasing the availability of public services for innovation support to businesses, in particular for the financing of entrepreneurship, as well as entrepreneurial competences and mindsets. On the other hand, further actions are needed in respect to promoting social innovation and addressing demographic challenges such as migration and brain drain.

In the CE countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2013 (except Slovenia), **business enterprise R&D** accounts for a significantly lower percentage of gross domestic expenditure on R&D than the EU average⁹. In these countries, between a quarter and half of the businesses operating in the industry sector are innovative enterprises, while this share lies around two thirds for businesses in Germany, Austria and Italy¹⁰. The main barriers against innovation activities reported by non-innovative enterprises in the industry sector were lack of internal finance, high costs and low market demand¹¹. Importantly, between 24% and 33% of the CE-based innovative enterprises from the industry sector were **cooperating on R&D and other innovation activities** – a percentage that did not exceed 2% for non-innovative enterprises¹² -, thereby highlighting the strong relationship between innovation and cooperation.

Deficient coordination of innovation policies and programmes is to be observed both across territories and across governance levels in Central Europe, and this often translates into a barrier to transnational cooperation. Likewise, the lack of harmonisation with respect to regulations, incentives, tax mechanisms and administrative procedures are further obstacles to the sustainable development of innovation across borders.

Projects funded under the Innovation Thematic Priority of the Interreg CE programme were implemented in the wider context of Industry 4.0, Digital Innovation Hubs and the Internet of Things as major innovation trends.

Low carbon

Central Europe is host to a number of so-called ‘carbon-intensive regions’ in Europe, mainly driven by coal mining activities (in particular in Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia as well as numerous regions and cities in Eastern Germany and Poland). Moreover, the capacity of CE regions to adapt to a greener and low-carbon Europe - also called ‘green economic performance’ - differs widely across the area, from high-performing Alpine regions to low-performing regions in the former Eastern Bloc¹³.

When looking at recent developments, **energy efficiency** in primary energy consumption has been improving in all CE countries but Poland between 2005 and 2019. Over that same period, the share of energy from **renewable sources** has been growing in all CE countries, with particularly strong increases (i.e. around 10 percentage points more) in Italy, Slovakia, Germany, Austria and Czech Republic. In 2019, 33% of Austrian energy and 28% of Croatian energy stemmed from renewable sources, well above the EU average of 20%. On the other end, only 12% and 13% of Polish and Hungarian energy, respectively, was produced through renewable sources. **Energy productivity**, as measured in Euro per kilogram of oil equivalent, has also sharply increased in all CE countries over the last 15 years, from a 20-percent-increase to a 77-percent-increase in

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Source: Eurostat, enterprises with innovation activities, industry except construction, all size classes, 2018 (inn_cis11_inact indicator)

¹¹ Source: Eurostat, non-innovative enterprises by barrier against innovation activities, high level of importance of the barrier, industry except construction, all size classes, 2016 (inn_cis10_noin indicator)

¹² Source: Eurostat, enterprises that co-operated on R&D and other innovation activities with other enterprises or organisations, industry except construction, all size classes, all types of cooperation, 2018 (inn_cis11_coop indicator)

¹³ European Commission, *Orientation Paper Transnational Cooperation Programme Central Europe 2021-2027*, Final Version of 20 February 2020

Italy and Slovakia, respectively. Nevertheless, all six newest CE Member States still had, in 2019, an energy productivity level well below the EU average¹⁴.

The transition to a low-carbon economy has significant implications for economic development and labour markets, not least through its high potential for job creation from clean energy technologies and energy efficiency¹⁵. The development of renewable energy sources and energy-saving investments can help reduce carbon emissions while improving the resilience to conventional energy shocks and producing additional income and jobs¹⁶. However, not all regions in Central Europe have the same capacity to exploit this potential. For instance, **different paces in decarbonisation-enabled employment dynamics** have been observed in CE coal mining regions: coal mining regions in Hungary and Czech Republic are considered to have a Slow or even Restricted Decarbonizing Employment Potential, while coal mining regions in Slovenia and Slovakia show a High Decarbonizing Employment Potential¹⁷.

At a time when decentralised energy systems are emerging across Europe, cities and their hinterlands, and local and regional communities are called to play an increasingly prominent role¹⁸. In particular, **local authorities and related institutions** “can encourage, enable, measure and regulate the local economy and inform debate on suitable energy options to help cities adapt to new technologies and changing energy requirements”¹⁹. Importantly, the level of decision-making power of local governments has been found to be positively correlated with progress in the low-carbon transition²⁰, hinting towards the importance of bottom-up approaches and local policy uptake for successful decarbonisation pathways.

The **Green Deal**, announced at the end of 2019, provided a strong impetus for later projects funded under the Low-Carbon Thematic Priority of the Interreg CE programme.

Environment

The territory of the EC area is heterogeneous in geographical terms, including coastal areas, mountain ranges, rural areas, large urban agglomerations. The landscape is shaped both by natural and cultural elements which combined give the cultural identity of the area.

Climate change adaption and mitigation and biodiversity loss are important challenges and evidence suggests that extreme weather phenomena have increased since the Programme begun implementation, while biodiversity dropped strongly from 2008 to 2018 in all CE countries, except Hungary²¹. Environmental performance still differs²² significantly, with Austria and Germany at the top of the rankings, having also

¹⁴ Source: Eurostat, nrg_ind_eff indicator (energy efficiency), nrg_ind_ren indicator (share of renewable energy) and nrg_ind_ep indicator (energy productivity)

¹⁵ Kapetaki, Z., Ruiz, P. et al., Clean energy technologies in coal regions: Opportunities for jobs and growth: Deployment potential and impacts, Kapetaki, Z. (editor), EUR 29895 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-12330-9, doi:10.2760/063496, JRC117938

¹⁶ Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Socio-economic challenges, potentials and impacts of transnational cooperation in central Europe, Final Report, October 2018

¹⁷ Kapetaki, Z., Ruiz, P. et al., Clean energy technologies in coal regions: Opportunities for jobs and growth: Deployment potential and impacts, Kapetaki, Z. (editor), EUR 29895 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-12330-9, doi:10.2760/063496, JRC117938

¹⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Final Report of the High-Level Panel of the European Decarbonisation Pathways Initiative, 2018

¹⁹ OECD, Monitoring the transition to a low-carbon economy - a strategic approach to local development, 2015

²⁰ Schremmer, C., Derszniak-Noirjean, M., Keringer, F., Koscher, R., Leiner, M., Mollay, U., Stifter, E., Tordy, J., Kranzl, L., Fallahnejad, M., Liebmann, L., Müller, A., Resch, G., Steinbach, J., Elsland, r., Kühn, A., Mayer, F., Pudlik, M., Schubert, G., Davoudi, S., Cowie, P., Gazzola, P., Territories and low-carbon economy, ESPON Locate project, Final Report, 14 March 2018

²¹ WIIW, 2020 Territorial Analysis, Annex 1: Analytical report [Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-27 - Interreg \(interreg-central.eu\)](https://www.interreg-central.eu)

²² [Environmental Performance Index | Environmental Performance Index \(yale.edu\)](https://www.environmentalperformanceindex.com/)

suffered great economic losses caused by weather and other climate-related extremes²³. Evidence²⁴ shows that countries which score better in circular economy (Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, or Poland) have also invested more in innovation and/or in the circular economy sectors.

Compared to the start of the Programme, the political commitment in respect to tackling environmental challenges has increased. The [European Green Deal](#) has set ambitious targets for delivering on climate objectives, bringing new momentum to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), and the [Paris Agreement](#), adopted in 2015.

Overall, government expenditure²⁵ on environmental protection has not increased significantly in the CE area, but consumption of environmental protection services has grown steadily²⁶. The environmental performance in the Programme area still differs²⁷ considerably. Due to more comprehensive actions in respect to environmental policies, Austria and Germany are at the top of the rankings, despite higher values of garbage production or food waste. Evidence²⁸ shows that countries which score better in circular economy (Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, or Poland) have also invested more in innovation and/or in the circular economy sectors.

Public pressure and general awareness in relation to environmental actions have increased. Awareness in respect to biodiversity has increased significantly²⁹ and importance, threats, and protection measures are also higher in the public interest and on the public agenda. This was an opportunity for the implementation of actions under the Environment SOs.

Culture

Central Europe is characterised by a high diversity of cultures and population (ethnic diversity, linguistic minorities). The area also has a great diversity of cultural heritage and resources in terms of historical sites, documentary heritage (e.g. archives and library collections), artefacts, traditions, cultural landscapes as well as traditional skills and knowledge. This heritage and its related resources represent important location factors, strongly contributing to the attractiveness of Central Europe's territory. Some places have a transboundary character, including five UNESCO heritage sites.

As initially identified, the cultural richness is often not well valorised or even threatened. Related potentials are not sufficiently used, for numerous reasons, ranging from insufficient management and preservation skills, lack of coordination, unsustainable approaches (e.g. mass tourism). Climate change endangers the existence and limits future usage potentials of cultural assets, leading to adverse effects on the competitiveness of regions (cf. Territorial Agenda 2020). The cultural richness and vibrancy are not transmitted to the people³⁰.

Wider trends like digitalisation have produced major changes in the way culture is created and consumed, making cultural products, including heritage, available and accessible for the public and experts alike. For example, debates related to [redefining the role of museums](#) are challenging the way culture is managed.

Transport

Situated at the core of the EU, the CE territory is crossed by eight out of the nine [TEN-T](#) corridors. Three of the most important trans-European road and railway axes (Baltic-Adriatic, Rhine-Danube and Orient/East-Med) cross through at least five countries in the Programme area. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that cross-

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0738&from=EN>

²⁴ [Ranking how EU countries do with the circular economy – POLITICO](#)

²⁵ Eurostat online data code: ENV_AC_EPNEIS

²⁶ Eurostat online data code: ENV_AC_CEPSGH

²⁷ [Environmental Performance Index | Environmental Performance Index \(yale.edu\)](#)

²⁸ [Ranking how EU countries do with the circular economy – POLITICO](#)

²⁹ Special EB 436 (2015) and Special EB 481 (2018)

³⁰ Eurostat, online data code: URB_PERCEP\$DV_170

border accessibility is still considered a barrier, particularly in case of rail³¹, as most investments in infrastructure are focused on improving connectivity at national level. Multimodal passenger transport is also confined to local, regional, or national levels and services are highly fragmented. Their integration faces numerous challenges, including legal and commercial barriers, taxes and charges, proprietary software³².

Across the Programme area, outside the TEN-T network, access to quality transport services is low, leaving many communities, particularly in rural, coastal or remote areas, sometimes disconnected from the rest of the territory. The so-called ‘first and last miles’ is often a problem for those who live far from city centres, emphasizing the social role of the public transport services, besides contributing to effective mobility³³. In recent years, digitalization has supported connectivity in rural areas located in proximity of cities and town, but barriers remain, including the attitudes and user habits, particularly in the case of older users, with less digitally skilled.

Freight transport has continued to grow and is expected to do so by as much as 80% until 2050³⁴, much of it by road, hindering EU-level efforts to gradually shift to rail transport, which would help to combat climate change and would cause fewer negative externalities (accidents, pollution, congestions etc.). Multimodal transport has however increased during 2014-2020,³⁵ but important challenges remain in terms multimodal accessibility, with Western countries being better endowed.

Cooperation and coordination among the stakeholders in the transport sector have remained challenging, due to the large number of operators and service providers, lack of trust and high competition, lack of experience or expertise, different legal framework.³⁶ Different legal or governance obstacles, technical (such as power systems, signalling etc. further prevent the effective cooperation in the field of transport.

The transport sector remains one of the main contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Compared to the start of the Programme, the [political commitment](#) in respect to tackling environmental challenges has increased at EU level, with profound implications for the transport sectors. For the future, the [European Green Deal](#) has set ambitious targets for delivering on climate objectives, adding to the pressure for shifting to sustainable transportation. However, the adaptation of infrastructure to new mobility patterns and the deployment of infrastructure for clean, alternative fuels, poses additional challenges that require new investments and a different approach to the design of networks and business models.³⁷

Awareness in respect to road transport negative externalities, particularly in urban areas, has increased, prioritizing investments for sustainable services and alternatives.

Governance structures and administrative capacity

Cities and their hinterlands, and local and regional communities have an increasingly prominent role in delivering public policies. **Bottom-up approaches** have proven instrumental in designing and producing effective, attractive and sustainable results across the EU, and place-based interventions are receiving increasing attention as a way of improving people’s lives and reducing inequalities. This has been an opportunity for the delivering the Programme’s interventions targeting Functional Urban Areas (FUAs), but also in implementing most pilot actions, which had a pronounced community-oriented approach.

Contextual developments regarding the investment capacity of the public sector and socio-economic conditions for the private sector over the period 2014-2020 are likely to be country-specific, based inter alia on how Member States and regions were affected by the economic recession from 2009 and which

³¹ [201704_rail_passenger_accessibility.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

³² [Remaining challenges for EU-wide integrated ticketing and payment systems - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

³³ [EUMobilityatlas2021_FINAL_WEB.pdf \(boell.org\)](#)

³⁴ [Multimodal and combined transport | Mobility and Transport \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁵ Eurostat, online data code RAIL_GO_CONTWGT

³⁶ [Remaining challenges for EU-wide integrated ticketing and payment systems - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#), [Internalisation of transport external costs | Mobility and Transport \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁷ [2019-transport-in-the-eu-current-trends-and-issues.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

policies were then put in place. Shifting political contexts and priorities - especially at local and regional levels - has ambivalent effects on projects, depending on the interest and commitment of political leaders to thematic priorities.

3.2. Q1. IDENTIFICATION OF GROSS EFFECT

The following section provides an answer to the first evaluation question, examining the gross effects produced by the Interreg CE Programme for 2014-2020. Based on the reconstruction of the Theory of Change (ToC), the evaluation looked at the Interreg CE Programme's achievements, reviewing the outputs and results and exploring the progress towards the established objectives. A quantitative and qualitative approach was used, to gain an in-depth understanding on how the Programme contributed to improving the situation of the target groups and what were the effects it produced in the territories it covered.

The ToC Reconstruction started from revisiting the main needs and challenges of the CE territory, based on the Programme documents and taking into account the main developments observed during the period of implementation, as presented in Section 3.1.

The needs manifest in terms of uneven distribution of economic strength across the territory, sectoral and spatial inequalities between the East and the West but also between its rural and urban areas. Increasing environmental pressure, demographic challenges like aging, migration and, in some areas, brain drain, unbalanced accessibility and connectivity and deteriorating natural and cultural heritage are common issues affecting the CE territory. At the same time, the lack of a cross sectorial (integrated) approaches, the dispersion of power and lack of coordination between different policy actors, as well as the limited capacity of the various actors to adapt fast enough to the new trends are further obstacles for the CE area to achieve its full development potential, affecting both its resilience in the future and the present quality of life of its citizens. The evaluation confirmed that, while progress has been made, the initial challenges are still present in the Programme area.

The CP was developed in line with the EU 2020 Strategy objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and in response to the identified needs. The overall objective of the Interreg CE was *"to cooperate beyond borders in central Europe to make our cities and regions better places to live and work"*. Given the nature of territorial cooperation interventions, the Interreg CE Programme clarifies its role as *"the catalyst for implementing smart solutions that answer to regional challenges in the fields of innovation, low-carbon economy, environment, culture and transport"* and acknowledges that achieving the desired impact can only be done by coordinating efforts with *"other national and regional programmes supported by structural and investment funds, macro-regional strategies, the Horizon 2020 programme or the European Investment Bank"*.

An **integrated territorial and thematic approach** was envisaged³⁸, considering the needs of the territory, while also taking into account its assets and potentials. As such, interventions grouped under four thematic priorities and ten specific objectives, address key socio-economic challenges and needs within central Europe, which are particularly linked to supporting innovation, increasing the use of renewable energies and improving energy efficiency, protecting and sustainably using natural and cultural heritage and resources, and reducing the gap between peripheral and less accessible regions and the area's well-connected centres.

Types of actions were similar for all thematic areas and specific objectives and included the development and implementation of strategies and action plans, the development, testing and implementation of tools, the preparation of larger investments, the implementation of pilot actions – including pilot investments – as well as capacity building measures including training. **The focus of the interventions**, as stated in the CP, was **on policy-learning and implementation-oriented approaches at the transnational level**.

³⁸ Also confirmed by the ex-ante evaluation, Annex A of the Interreg CE Cooperation Programme Version 3.0

The Intervention Logic of the Programme³⁹ implies that, through the implemented actions and their outputs, the capacities of the public and private sectors in the region will be improved, policy frameworks will be enhanced, managerial systems, human resources and institutional structures will be developed. To measure the progress, result indicators were established for each programme specific objective.

However, in order for these to be achieved, **a series of preconditions** were necessary to enable projects to deliver their results as planned. Based on the documents included in the Application Packages for Calls 1 and 2⁴⁰, the evaluation identified a number of elements which were expected and requested from each project, and, which, in a sense, can be categorized as „inputs“ at Programme level, alongside the EU-funding. These refer to having strong partnerships and ensuring a diversity of experience of the project partners, as well as adopting and implementing state-of-the-art solutions in each project, to address the identified needs.

Achieving the results would enable a more coordinated and integrated approach among the regions in the Programme area, by means of transnational strategies and policies being developed and implemented. In turn, this would lead to the longer-term impact of triggering **economic opportunities and employment**. If this is then achieved, **the cities and regions in the Programme area would become better places to live and work**.

The ToC reconstruction was completed by a number of **external factors** which were identified as likely to have affected the implementation and achievement of results. The evaluation found that the **external factors established initially⁴¹ are still valid**, with some becoming more prominent, such as digitalization, emergence of new technologies or increased awareness towards climate change. The COVID crisis and its consequences is probably the most important new factor which might negatively affect the achievement of longer-term objectives.

Based on the Programme logic of intervention (activities – outputs – results), **the evaluation team recreated the main assumptions** underlying the implementation. These refer to the following:

- Innovation is one of the most important driving forces for regional development and economic wealth. Therefore, an innovative approach is expected in the financed interventions.
- Transnational cooperation can add value by building new knowledge and by fostering the exchange of knowledge and experience among regions, in particular addressing stakeholders dealing with the protection of natural and cultural heritage and resources as well as their management and valorisation.
- Transnational coordination can be essential for ensuring coherent and effective solutions and policies.
- Transnational cooperation is a catalyst for implementing smart solutions answering to regional challenges.
- Transfer of knowledge, outputs and results should allow for efficiently addressing existing disparities between regions. The knowledge created in the projects should be easily applicable, transferable, and possible to use in other organisations/ regions /countries outside of the defined partnership.
- Interventions will build regional capacities following an integrated bottom-up approach involving and coordinating relevant actors from all governance levels.
- The application of an integrated approach is a key factor to ensure sustainable development and to avoid usage conflicts.
- Sustainability of project outputs and results is crucial for ensuring territorial impact and long-term benefits which continue after the project end in order to reach the project's overall objectives.
- Multi-level governance (i.e. involvement of institutions representing various levels of administration like national, regional and local levels) is expected to help reaching the intended structural change as well as policy improvement and implementation.

³⁹ Annex 7 of Interreg CE Cooperation Programme Version 3.0

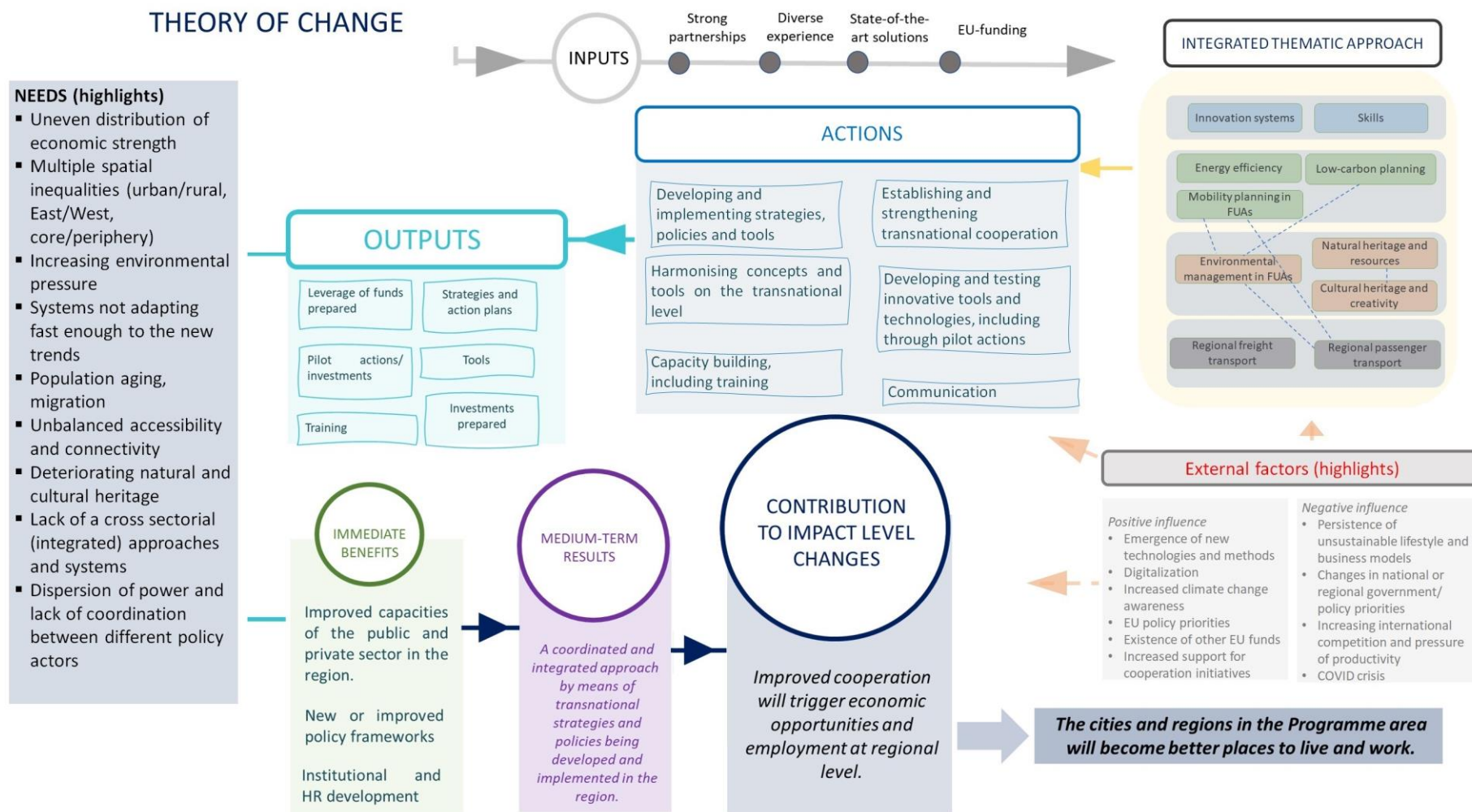
⁴⁰ [Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE - Application documents - Interreg \(interreg-central.eu\)](https://interreg-central.eu)

⁴¹ As per SWOT analysis, Annex 5 Annex 7 of Interreg CE Cooperation Programme Version 3.0

- Multi-level governance (connecting top-down and bottom-up initiatives with also cross-sectoral approaches) is needed to increase participation of local communities while fostering the efficiency of administrations and the consistency of policy-making.
- Communication plays a strategic role in successful projects. Communication helps projects to achieve the change they aim for with their thematic activities.

The Theory of Change as applied to the Interreg CE Programme's objectives is summarized in the following diagram (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). More details are presented in Annex 2, including for each SO.

FIGURE 2 THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM



Source: Developed by the experts

Based on the reconstructed ToC, a set of assumptions were developed and tested, the reasoning being that, if these assumptions are validated (found to be true), then the Programme achieved the intended results. These evaluation assumptions are presented in **Table 1** below.

TABLE 1 EVALUATION ASSUMPTIONS

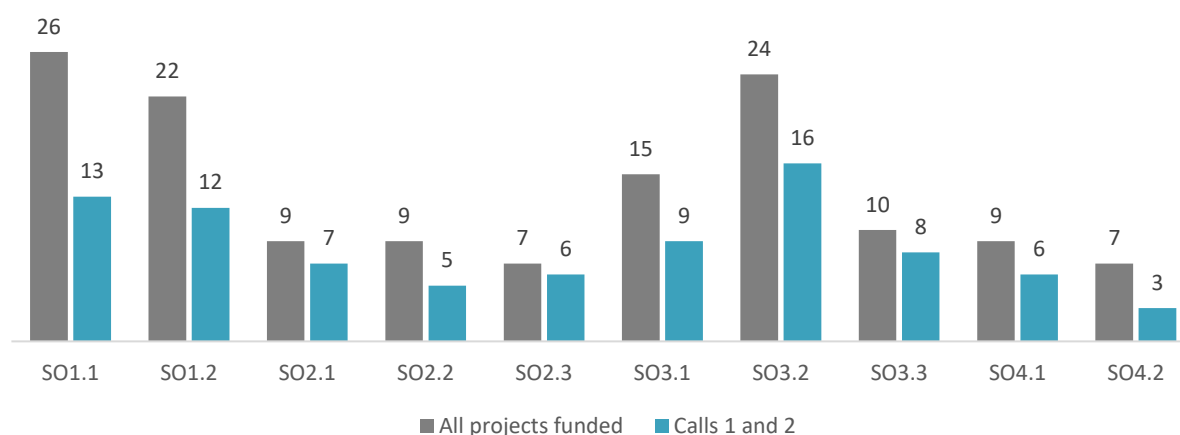
PROGRAMME DESIGN	PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION
(1) Transnational cooperation enabled regions and cities to jointly tackle challenges that go beyond borders	(6) Implementation mechanisms were able to determine the adoption of innovative approaches in the financed interventions.
(2) Projects supported are indeed “living laboratories creating opportunities for developing and testing new ways of addressing major challenges”	(7) Implementation mechanisms were able to ensure the transnational character of the financed interventions.
(3) The knowledge created in the projects is applicable, transferable, and possible to use in other organisations/ regions /countries outside of the defined partnership.	(8) Implementation mechanisms were able to trigger multiplication and synergetic effects / spillovers / capitalization/ leverage effects.
(4) Interventions followed an integrated bottom-up approach involving and coordinating relevant actors from all governance levels.	(9) Implementation mechanisms were able to ensure the sustainability of project outputs and results.
(5) Interventions were able to reach the types of territories initially envisaged	(10) Implementation mechanisms were able to capitalize on the strategic role of communication in achieving the results.
	(11) Implementation mechanisms allowed the specific territorial characteristics of the respective targeted areas to be taken into consideration.

The evaluation findings are presented in a programme-level perspective. Considerations in respect to each specific objective are included, wherever possible.

3.2.1. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

The 2014-2020 Interreg CE programme has supported in total 138 projects with around 293 EUR million (total eligible expenditure), thereof almost 242 EUR million of ERDF support⁴². Across the 10 SOs, the 138 projects were of approximately equal size and volume, with the average number of partners by project varying between 9.7 in natural heritage projects (SO3.1) and 11.2 partners in energy efficiency projects (SO2.1).

FIGURE 3 NUMBER OF INTERREG CE PROJECTS – ALL PROJECTS



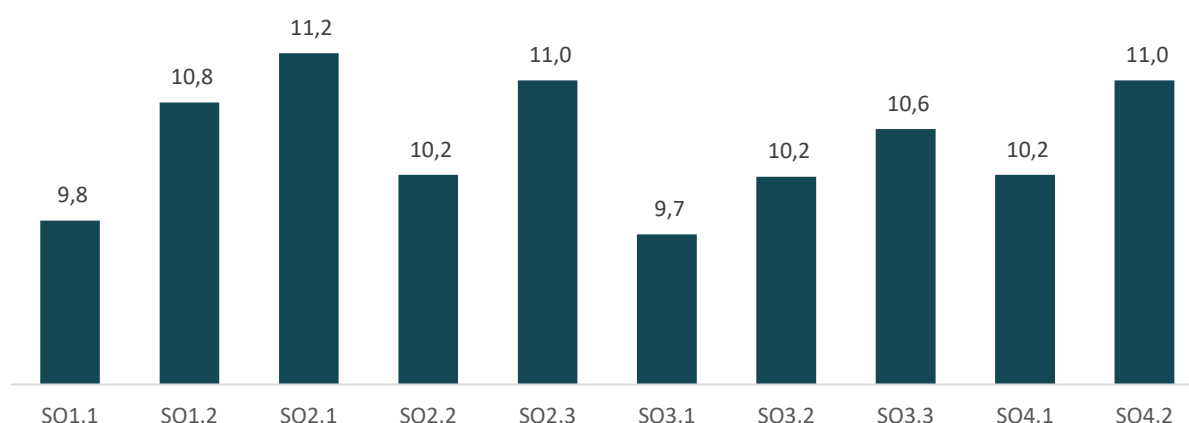
Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS

⁴² In order to increase the programme capacity to absorb the available funds, an overbooking was decided by the Monitoring Committee. Overbooked funds will be compensated by savings from closed projects.

The Interreg CE programme included in total 1430 project partners, with 1408 coming directly from the Interreg CE area and 22 from outside of it. The largest number of project partners (253 partners) came from Italian Interreg CE regions, followed by German and Polish regions. Notably, the number of partners from the smaller Interreg CE countries were not much lower, e.g. Slovenia participated with 174 project partners, Hungary with 151, and Austria and Croatia with around 140. The only country with a markedly lower number of partners (i.e. 66 partners) is Slovakia.

Overall, projects had an average of about 10 partners, lower for SO 1.1 and SO 3.1 and higher for SO 2.1, SO 2.3 and SO 4.2. (Figure 4). However, the data does not account for the associate partners⁴³ involved in some projects, which occasionally double the number of participating entities in a project.

FIGURE 4 AVERAGE NUMBER OF PROJECT PARTNERS – ALL PROJECTS

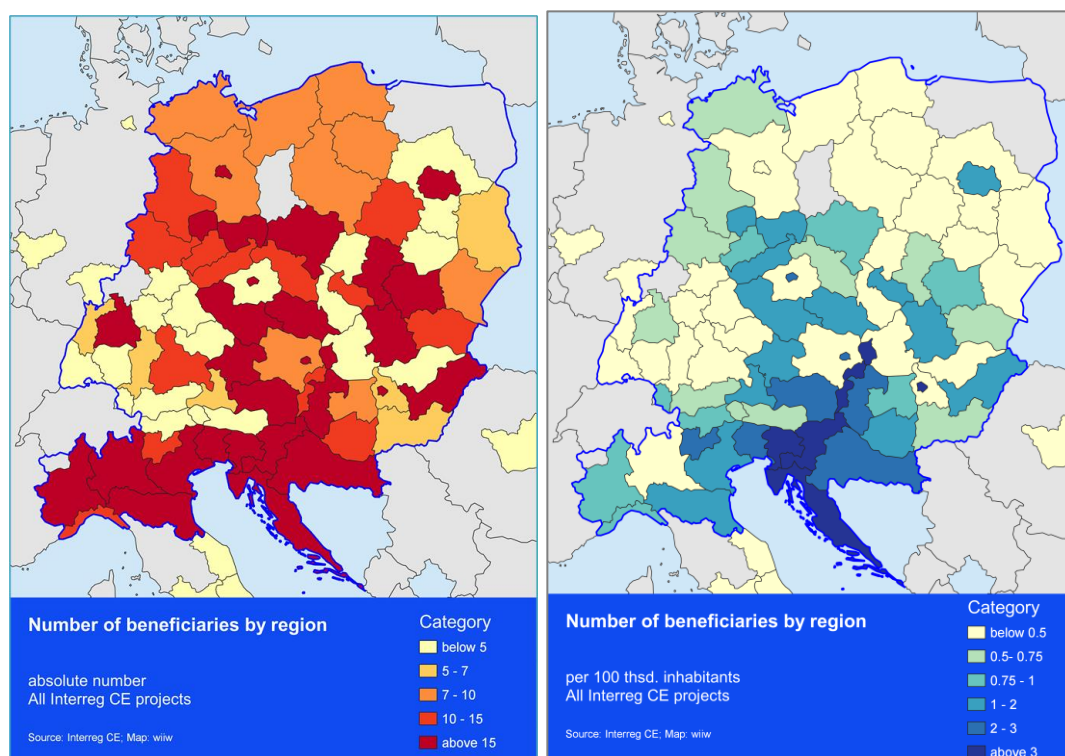


Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS

The regional distribution of project partners is illustrated in Figure 5, with the left graph showing the absolute number of partners per region and the right graph the number of partners by 100 thousand inhabitants. The maps indicate that all but three Interreg CE NUTS-2 regions had at least one project partner. The absolute numbers suggest that **capital city regions or other regions with larger cities had more project beneficiaries than other regions**. However, putting these numbers in relation to the regions' population reduces the differences between more urban and rural regions and shows a more even distribution of partners across the Interreg CE regions.

⁴³ Associate partners have limited roles and have no budget allocation in the projects. Their importance resides with the contribution they bring to increasing projects' outreach and in terms of expanding collaboration networks.

FIGURE 5 NUMBER OF PROJECT PARTNERS BY INTERREG CE NUTS-2 REGIONS: ABSOLUTE NUMBER & PER 100 THSD INHABITANTS (ALL PROJECTS)



Note: NUTS 2021 classification

Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS

By and large, the distribution of partners by countries is indicative of the distribution of funding. Italy accounted for the largest ERDF contributions (around 48 EUR million), followed by Germany and Poland, with Austria, Slovenia and Hungary in close contention. At country level, Germany and Poland stand out as having a population share which is significantly larger than their participation in the Programme (share in total project partnership and expenditure) (**Table 2**). This might be an indication that there is still untapped potential for entities from these countries to participate in the Programme.

TABLE 2 NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES AND ERDF CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE INTERREG CE AREA

	Project partners	Total eligible expenditure	ERDF contribution	Population	Project partners	Total eligible expenditure	ERDF contribution	Population
	<i>Absolute values</i>				<i>in % of total</i>			
AT	140	32,074,413	25,659,530	8,822,267	9.9	11.0	10.7	6.0
CZ	115	20,289,942	17,246,451	10,610,055	8.2	7.0	7.2	7.2
DE	190	50,061,592	40,049,274	40,204,877	13.5	17.2	16.7	27.4
HR	137	21,976,170	18,679,744	4,105,493	9.7	7.6	7.8	2.8
HU	151	28,534,897	24,254,663	9,778,371	10.7	9.8	10.1	6.7
IT	253	60,683,897	48,547,118	27,736,158	18.0	20.9	20.2	18.9
PL	182	33,620,663	28,577,563	37,976,687	12.9	11.6	11.9	25.9
SI	174	31,733,766	26,973,701	2,066,880	12.4	10.9	11.2	1.4
SK	66	11,623,762	9,880,198	5,443,120	4.7	4.0	4.1	3.7
Total	1408	290,599,102	239,868,242	146,743,908	100.0	100	100.0	100.0

Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS; data on population: 1st January 2018

Overall, Interreg CE has supported roughly 30% of the total number of projects implemented by transnational cooperation programmes⁴⁴ during 2014-2020, which (1) cover regions from the CE area and (2) cover similar Investment Priorities⁴⁵. With 138 funded projects, Interreg CE is the third largest in the area, after Interreg Europe (234 projects) and Interreg V-A Czech Republic – Poland (148 projects), the latter being a cross-border programme with an ERDF budget of € 226,2 mn., while the former has a wider territorial scope. Compared to other transnational programmes, Interreg CE ranks third in the EU in terms of budget, after North-West Europe, and Baltic Sea programmes. However, compared to other similar programmes partly overlapping its territory, Interreg CE is the largest cooperation programme in the area.

3.2.2. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME – CALLS 1 AND 2

PROGRAMME SPECIFIC OUTPUT INDICATORS

Building on the experience with the 2007-2013 Interreg CE Programme, four types of project outputs have been developed in order to measure the extent to which funded projects are linked to policy learning and implementation-oriented approaches of the Interreg CE 2014-2020 Programme. These typologies of outputs are: strategies and action plan, transnational tools, pilot actions and trainings. These outputs are measured at the project level and aggregated at SO and IP level.

In order to measure progress towards targets, two approaches have been used:

- (1) progress towards targets, as set in the Programme Performance Framework (PF)⁴⁶;
- (2) progress towards targets as set by Beneficiaries in their Application Forms (AF);

In total, the 85 finalized projects produced 2,457 different outputs, that is, on average, almost 28 outputs per project. By output types, trainings were the most frequent outputs (717), followed by pilot actions (incl. pilot investments) (640), strategies and action plans (616), as well as 459 tools. Additionally, the projects also generated 25 innovation networks⁴⁷, under SO 1.1.

Considering the targets defined in the Performance Framework (PF), **the Programme is on track to meet or has already exceed the targets set for 2023**. Projects from Calls 3 and 4 will add up to the values achieved in calls 1 and 2.

- **Innovation** – both SO1.1. and SO1.2. have outperformed in delivering strategies and action plans, compared to Programme targets. Despite having the lowest progress to PF target (i.e. 69% for SO1.1. and 76% for SO1.2.), the 85 tools and services have been delivered by 52% of projects funded under these SOs, indicating good progress towards meeting the targets by 2023.
- **Low carbon** – SO2.1. and SO2.2. show significant achievements towards targets in all types of outputs and more prominently in the delivery of tools and services (5-6 times the target values), while SO2.3. produced a more balanced of outputs compared to targets (around 2 times the target value).
- **Environment** – strategies and action plans as well as tools and services have been successfully delivered by both SO3.1. and SO3.3. projects, while for pilot actions, only SO3.3. has exceeded the target, by 70%, and SO3.1. is 30% below the target. However, this progress has been achieved by only 9 projects out of 15 funded under this SO (60%), indicating that the progress to target is still considerable.

⁴⁴ Share out of total number of projects in the following TN programmes: 2014 - 2020 INTERREG VB Adriatic – Ionian, Alpine Space, Central Europe, Danube, Mediterranean, North West Europe

⁴⁵ Only projects within the same IP as Interreg CE 2014-2020 were counted

⁴⁶ Annex 8 of Interreg CE Cooperation Programme Version 3.0

⁴⁷ Innovation networks outputs are only applicable to SO1.1.

- **Culture** – projects funded so far in SO3.2. have already contributed to exceeding the Programme targets in all output indicators, most prominently in the delivery of pilot actions (463% of target value).
- **Transport** – overall, both SO4.1. and SO4.2. have been successful in achieving the targets for all outputs, with SO4.1. exceeding them to a larger extent (1.7 to 2.5 times) and SO4.2. exactly meeting the target in the delivery of tools and services.

Targets for **trainings**, which are not included in the PF, have been largely exceeded in all SOs, to a larger extent (3-4 times) compared to other types of outputs, especially in Priority 3. Trainings delivered under SO4.2. represent the only case where achievement was low compared to targets (i.e. 14%).

Achieved values are in line with what beneficiaries have committed in the AFs, confirming the good progress of the implementation. Generally, projects go beyond expectations and produce a higher number of outputs than expected, for most SOs. Most prominently, in SO2.2, 12.4% more outputs were produced by the projects, than initially planned. Most other SOs show an overachievement of around 2-3%, while the SO2.1. and SO4.1 met exactly their expected outputs. The lowest progress to AF forecasts was observed for SO4.2. - No. of tools and services developed and/or implemented for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport, which delivered around 90% of the target. It can be assumed however, that the slight variation can be associated with normal evolutions during the implementation and cannot be considered a failure of the projects, as other indicators were overachieved.

Comparing the AF commitments of beneficiaries with the targets in the PF (**Table 3**), significant differences can be observed for most indicators under all SOs, as values assumed by beneficiaries are well beyond those established in the PF. This could indicate a conservative approach to target setting, in the Programme design phase.

TABLE 3 OVERVIEW OF OUTPUT INDICATORS BY SO AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	SO	Delivered outputs	Progress to target - PF	Progress to forecast -AF
1b.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for strengthening linkages within the innovation systems	SO1.1	65	130%	101.6%
1b.3	No. of tools and services developed and/or implemented for strengthening linkages within the innovation systems	SO1.1	47	76%	102.2%
1b.5	No. of innovation networks established	SO1.1	25	109%	100.0%
1b.6	No. of pilot actions implemented for strengthening linkages within the innovation systems	SO1.1	71	82%	107.6%
1b.2	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for improving skills and competences of employees and entrepreneurs	SO1.2	76	230%	101.3%
1b.4	No. of tools developed and/or implemented for improving skills and competences of employees and entrepreneurs	SO1.2	38	69%	100.0%
1b.7	No. of pilot actions implemented for improving skills and competences of employees and entrepreneurs	SO1.2	66	86%	104.8%
1b.8	No. of trainings implemented for improving innovation capacity and mindsets	SO1.1& SO1.2	108	120%	112.5%
4c.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for improved energy efficiency and renewable energy use in public infrastructures	SO2.1	55	306%	105.8%

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	SO	Delivered outputs	Progress to target - PF	Progress to forecast -AF
4c.2	No. of tools and/or services developed and/or implemented for improved energy efficiency and renewable energy use in public infrastructures	SO2.1	85	654%	97.7%
4c.3	No. of pilot actions implemented for improved energy efficiency and renewable energy use in public infrastructures	SO2.1	65	181%	98.5%
4e.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for improving local/regional energy performance	SO2.2	47	174%	123.7%
4e.3	No. of tools developed and/or implemented for improving local/regional energy performance	SO2.2	52	520%	105.0%
4e.5	No. of pilot actions implemented for improving local/regional energy performance	SO2.2	41	152%	117.1%
4e.2	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for low-carbon mobility in functional urban areas	SO2.3	48	282%	100.0%
4e.4	No. of tools and/or services developed and/or implemented for low-carbon mobility in functional urban areas	SO2.3	21	210%	105.0%
4e.6	No. of pilot actions implemented for low carbon mobility in functional urban areas	SO2.3	56	267%	100.0%
4e.7	No. of trainings implemented on low-carbon solutions	SO2.2& SO2.3	106	379%	103.9%
6c.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources	SO3.1	64	142%	101.6%
6c.3	No. of tools developed and/or implemented for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources	SO3.1	50	135%	100.0%
6c.5	No. of pilot actions implemented for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources	SO3.1	56	70%	101.8%
6c.7	No. of trainings implemented on the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources	SO3.1	99	330%	107.6%
6c.2	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources	SO3.2	123	178%	106.0%
6c.4	No. of tools developed and/or implemented for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources	SO3.2	81	142%	106.6%
6c.6	No. of pilot actions implemented for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources	SO3.2	139	463%	99.3%
6c.8	No. of trainings implemented on the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources	SO3.2	190	413%	99.5%
6e.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for the improvement of environmental quality in FUAs	SO3.3	63	252%	98.4%
6e.2	No. of tools developed and/or implemented for the improvement of environmental quality in FUAs	SO3.3	57	228%	105.6%
6e.3	No. of pilot actions implemented for the improvement of environmental quality in FUAs	SO3.3	68	170%	97.1%
6e.4	No. of trainings implemented on the improvement of the environmental quality in FUAs	SO3.3	81	405%	114.1%

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	SO	Delivered outputs	Progress to target - PF	Progress to forecast -AF
7b.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for the improvement of regional passenger transport	SO4.1	51	232%	96.2%
7b.2	No. of tools and/or services developed and/or implemented for the improvement of regional passenger transport	SO4.1	18	129%	120.0%
7b.3	No. of pilot actions implemented for the improvement of regional passenger transport	SO4.1	57	259%	93.4%
7b.4	No. of trainings implemented on the improvement of regional passenger transport	SO4.1	38	238%	126.7%
7c.1	No. of strategies and action plans developed and/or implemented for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport	SO4.2	24	171%	100.0%
7c.2	No. of tools and services developed and/or implemented for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport	SO4.2	10	100%	90.9%
7c.3	No. of pilot actions implemented for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport	SO4.2	21	124%	105.0%
7c.4	No. of trainings implemented on multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport	SO4.2	2	14%	100.0%

Note: Column Progress to target (%) – PF: refers to outputs delivered compared to targets in the PF methodology and CP (for trainings and innovation networks); Column Progress to forecast (%) – AF: refers to outputs delivered compared to forecasted values in the Application Forms; Source: Own calculations based on JS data

The Interreg CE Performance Framework summarized in **Table 4** includes those programme-specific output indicators, in an aggregated form, that cover the key features and main types of outputs expected in the frame of operations supported by the Programme, thus capturing the essential progress and achievements by priority axis.

Most SOs have already exceeded their targets, despite covering half (Priority 1 and Priority 4) or two thirds (Priority 2 and Priority 3) of funds and approved operations. Most prominent achievements have been recorded for Priority 2 projects, with SO2.1. (306% of target) as a notable overachiever. Priorities 3 and 4 have also exceeded the Programme targets, with minor differences across SOs, with SO3.3. and SO4.1. leading under their corresponding priority. Despite being 8% below the target, SO1.1. is already in an excellent position to meet (and exceed) the set target, given that half of the projects are still under implementation (in Calls 3 and 4).

TABLE 4 PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK SUMMARY TABLE (CALLS 1 AND 2)

PA	Indicator or key implementation step	SO	Outputs delivered	Final target (2023)	Progress to target (%)
1	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for strengthening linkages within the innovation systems	SO1.1	183	199	92.0%
1	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for improving skills and competences of employees and entrepreneurs	SO1.2	180	165	109.1%
1	Total amount of eligible expenditure certified to EC for PA 1	PA1	44,754,322	91,497,242	48.9%
1	Key implementation step: No. of approved operations PA 1	PA1	25	47	53.2%
2	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented in the field of improved energy efficiency and renewable energy use of public infrastructures	SO2.1	205	67	306.0%
2	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for improving local/regional energy performance	SO2.2	140	64	218.8%
2	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for low-carbon mobility in functional urban areas	SO2.3	125	48	260.4%
2	Total amount of eligible expenditure certified to EC for PA 2	PA2	33,486,365	51,427,229	65.1%
2	Key implementation step: No. of approved operations in PA 2	PA2	18	25	72.0%
3	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources	SO3.1	170	134	126.9%
3	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources	SO3.2	343	206	166.5%
3	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for the improvement of environmental quality in functional urban areas	SO3.3	188	90	208.9%
3	Total amount of eligible expenditure certified to EC for PA 3	PA3	62,353,546	102,974,940	60.6%
3	Key implementation step: No. of approved operations in PA 3	PA3	33	48	68.8%
4	No. of strategies, action plans, tools developed and/or implemented and pilot actions for the improvement of regional passenger transport	SO4.1	126	58	217.2%
4	No. of strategies, action plans, tools and pilot actions developed and/or implemented for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport	SO4.2	55	41	134.1%
4	Total amount of eligible expenditure certified to EC for PA 4	PA4	16,347,668	33,361,124	49.0%
4	Key implementation step: No. of approved operations in PA 4	PA4	9	16	56.3%

Source: Own calculations based on JS data (CP Annex 8, Final Progress Reports for 85 projects completed in Calls 1 and 2, cut-off date 14th of December 2021)

COMMON OUTPUT INDICATORS

Common output indicators⁴⁸ for Interreg CE have been selected in order to reflect the characteristics of operations and actions supported by the Programme, and building on the experience of the previous CP. As such, four common output indicators have been defined⁴⁹:

- CO1 - Number of enterprises receiving support
- CO41 - Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects
- CO42 - Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects
- CO26 - Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions (only for priority 1)

Values reported for the common indicators include both project partners and target groups. As enterprises were among the largest target groups engaged in the projects (see **Table 5**), they also contributed to impressive achievements in respect to the indicators. (**Table 8**).

TABLE 5 COMMON OUTPUT INDICATORS (CALLS 1 AND 2)

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Target (2023)	Achieved	o/w: project partners	Progress to target
Priority Axis 1 (SO1.1. and SO1.2)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	2400	9825	19	409%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	2400	9825	19	409%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	300	1767	57	589%
CO26	No. of enterprises cooperating with research institutions ⁵⁰	2200	3738	8	170%
Priority Axis 2 – IP 4c (SO2.1.)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	40	189	6	473%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	40	189	6	473%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	50	118	13	236%
Priority Axis 2 – IP 4e (SO2.2. and SO2.3)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	250	4154	6	1662%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	250	4154	6	1662%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	90	202	19	224%
Priority Axis 3 – IP 6c (SO3.1. and SO3.2.)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	700	2828	10	404%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	700	2828	10	404%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	170	629	48	370%

⁴⁸ Defined based on Annex to regulation (EU) No 1299/2013

⁴⁹ Full definition of indicators and selection criteria can be found in Annex 8 of the CP

⁵⁰ According to AIR 2020, only 16 projects in total qualified for this indicator. In Calls 1&2 only 10 projects were considered: 3DCentral, AmiCE, BIOCOMPACT-CE, digitalLIFE4CE, FabLabNet, KETGATE, NUCLEi, SMART_watch, SYNERGY, TRANS3net

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Target (2023)	Achieved	o/w: project partners	Progress to target
Priority Axis 3 – IP 6e (SO3.3.)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	140	637	4	455%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	140	637	4	455%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	70	292	20	417%
Priority Axis 4 – IP 7b (SO4.1.)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	30	211	5	703%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	30	211	5	703%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	20	43	10	215%
Priority Axis 4 – IP 7c (SO4.2.)					
CO1	No. of enterprises receiving support	300	317	1	106%
CO41	No. of enterprises participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	300	317	1	106%
CO42	No. of research institutions participating in CB, TN or IR research projects	30	50	8	167%

Source: Own calculations based on JS data (CP Annex 8, Final Progress Reports for 85 projects completed in Calls 1 and 2, cut-off date 14th of December 2021)

PROGRAMME RESULT INDICATORS AND ADDITIONAL RESULT INDICATORS

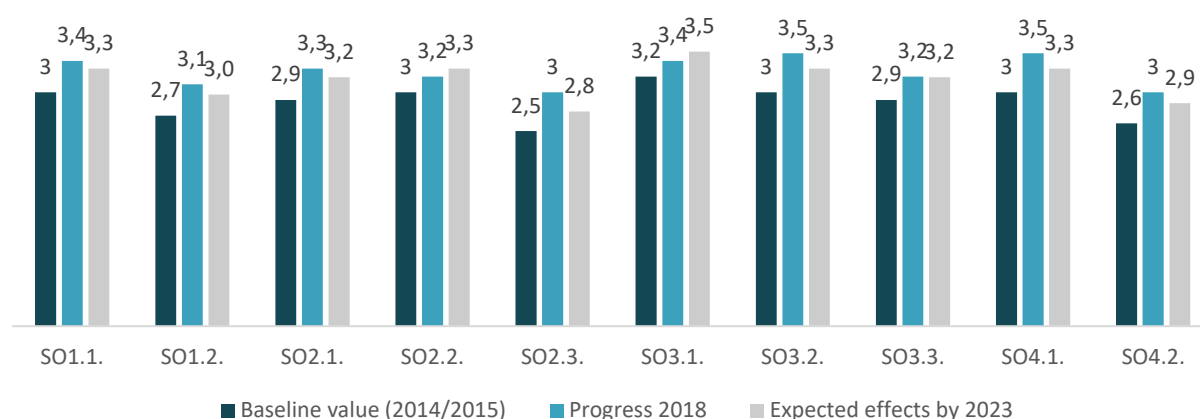
Programme specific result indicators have been defined in order to capture the desired changes in the Programme area for each SO, reflecting the Programme's ability to enable the development and improvement of know-how and capacity of territory-wide organisations through transnational cooperation. However, these changes would be only partially observed (or remain unobserved) due to the limited availability of data, thus the situation can only be described in qualitative terms combined with a quantitative measurement scale (in this case, a Likert scale for each result indicator).⁵¹

Evidence⁵² shows that the **Programme had achieved its targets as early as 2018 in almost all SOs**, except from SO2.2. and SO3.1. In some cases, achievements exceeded the target by almost double, as it is the case for SO2.3. Given that similar performance is expected from the rest of the projects, it is almost certain that targets SO2.2. and SO3.1. will also be exceeded (**Figure 6**).

⁵¹ Annex 8 of the Programme Strategy, pg. 24: "Each result indicator is composed of a set of four specific components which define the focus and scope of the indicator. The first three components are meant to describe the overall situation of the programme area with regard to the main aspects tackled by the respective result indicator, whereas the fourth one is directly related to the achievement and transfer ("roll-out") of results of Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE transnational cooperation projects. This allows identifying the changes which are attributable to the programme, considering thereby also potential external effects."

⁵² "The baseline value for each result indicator has been established on the basis of the outcomes of the on-line survey (end of 2014/beginning of 2015) and focus group discussions involving 45 national thematic experts carried out between January and March 2015" (Annex 8 of the CP, page 32). Progress to targets is measured in 2018 and 2020, while the verification of targets set will be conducted in 2023.

FIGURE 6 PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC RESULT INDICATORS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGETS, BY SO



Source: JS data, Monitoring of Programme Result Indicators Report, 2019 (based on progress to target as of 2018, the most recent data available)

In terms of **thematic results**, progress towards planned achievements⁵³ is largely good, with almost all thematic results exceeding or meeting the forecasted values, except for jobs created. More than 1,700 institutions adopted new or improved strategies and over 3,300 institutions applied new/improved tools and services as a result of the projects' activities, while 62,452 persons were trained. By SOs, the situation varies by type of thematic result, despite the overall good performance. For example, SO2.3. reached only 51% of its planned results in terms of *Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans*, while SOs 3.1. and 3.2. are almost 60% above their target values.

Additionally, the projects either directly or indirectly created 1,276 new (full-time) jobs. New jobs were mostly created in the SO1.2 and SO2.2. projects. It must be acknowledged, however, that some of the amounts declared as leveraged at the end of the projects were only commitments, many to be accessed through the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy Programmes. As such, it is too early to see if all of these investments materialize. At the same time, the CP Implementation Manual⁵⁴ states that jobs created (and reported) should be new and durable, pointing towards the need that they are sustainable. However, there is no evidence on their quality and sustainability on the long run, as no detailed evidence is collected (such as work contracts).

The closed Interreg CE projects leveraged more than 2.4 EUR billion of funds, which is around 10 times higher than the ERDF for all Interreg CE projects in the period 2014-2020. Even when removing outliers (see Note below [Table 6](#)), the leverage of funds is more than double the target, as outlined in [Table 6](#). Highest values were recorded for SOs under the Low carbon theme – 176 mil. EUR, while projects under SO2.2. leveraged most funds compared to target (411% progress to target).

⁵³ For thematic results, only forecasted values set in the Application Forms are available, therefore all reference to progress to forecasts refers to AF planned results.

⁵⁴ Interreg CE Implementation Manual, version 4, page 44

TABLE 6 THEMATIC RESULTS BY SO, TOTAL VALUES

	Achieved (no.)	Target (no.)	% of forecast (AF)		Achieved (no.)	Target (no.)	% of forecast (AF)
Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements (mil EUR)				No. of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans			
Total	760.5	359.6	211%	Total	1,761	1,770	99.5%
SO1.1	66.4	36.3	183%	SO1.1	505	494	102.2%
SO1.2	43.2	46.3	93%	SO1.2	213	201	106.0%
SO2.1	112.1	38.5	291%	SO2.1	143	110	130.0%
SO2.2	125.3	28.6	439%	SO2.2	94	83	113.3%
SO2.3	176.0	78.7	224%	SO2.3	204	399	51.1%
SO3.1	19.8	5.8	341%	SO3.1	133	81	164.2%
SO3.2	74.5	34.7	215%	SO3.2	220	139	158.3%
SO3.3	38.8	29.0	134%	SO3.3	152	154	98.7%
SO4.1	72.2	30.8	235%	SO4.1	66	86	76.7%
SO4.2	32.2	31.0	104%	SO4.2	31	23	134.8%
No. of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services				No. of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements			
Total	3,369	2,549	132.2%	Total	1,276	1806	70.6%
SO1.1	977	986	99.1%	SO1.1	141	281	50.2%
SO1.2	579	461	125.6%	SO1.2	736	926	79.5%
SO2.1	198	205	96.6%	SO2.1	55	210	26.2%
SO2.2	183	105	174.3%	SO2.2	146	62	235.5%
SO2.3	722	198	364.6%	SO2.3	111	223	49.6%
SO3.1	216	160	135.0%	SO3.1	9	24	35.4%
SO3.2	230	196	117.3%	SO3.2	40	38	105.8%
SO3.3	131	132	99.2%	SO3.3	35	34	101.5%
SO4.1	54	60	90.0%	SO4.1	3	4	67.5%
SO4.2	79	46	171.7%	SO4.2	1	4	25.0%
No. of trained persons							
Total	62,452	21,197	294.6%				
SO1.1	3,816	2,119	180.1%				
SO1.2	42,620	10,128	420.8%				
SO2.1	2,175	1,168	186.2%				
SO2.2	1,331	607	219.3%				
SO2.3	2,690	1,510	178.1%				
SO3.1	3,025	1,920	157.6%				
SO3.2	4,308	1,990	216.5%				
SO3.3	2,096	1,530	137.0%				
SO4.1	360	185	194.6%				
SO4.2	31	40	77.5%				

Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS; Data for 85 projects under Calls 1 and 2.

Note: Outliers were removed (i.e. TRANSTRITIA project, that reported 1.7 bn EUR funds leveraged, moving the average up)

Together, the 85 completed projects also resulted in more than 1,850 joint communication activities (2.1% above the target), more than 150 thousand participants at project events (more than double the planned number) and more than 100 thousand visits to the projects' websites (1.5 times the planned number) (Table 7).

TABLE 7 AGGREGATE COMMUNICATION RESULTS, PROJECTS UNTIL CUT-OFF DATA

	Achieved (no.)	Target (no.)	% of forecast (AF)
Joint communication activities implemented with external stakeholders (external cooperation)	1,887	1,848	102.1%
SO1.1	672	921	73.0%
SO1.2	182	157	115.9%
SO2.1	114	68	167.6%
SO2.2	114	83	137.3%
SO2.3	108	97	111.3%
SO3.1	209	145	144.1%
SO3.2	189	157	120.4%
SO3.3	258	163	158.3%
SO4.1	32	27	118.5%
SO4.2	9	30	30.0%
Participants at project events in WP C (physical reach)	155,811	76,814	202.8%
SO1.1	13,334	5,905	225.8%
SO1.2	39,165	12,295	318.5%
SO2.1	10,317	12,210	84.5%
SO2.2	9,402	5,630	167.0%
SO2.3	23,148	13,295	174.1%
SO3.1	8,212	7,180	114.4%
SO3.2	16,432	10,220	160.8%
SO3.3	31,088	7,494	414.8%
SO4.1	3,532	1,485	237.8%
SO4.2	1,181	1,100	107.4%
Unique visits to the project website (digital reach; monthly average in the reporting period)	106,459	68,820	154.7%
SO1.1	17,302	13,460	128.5%
SO1.2	11,571	4,350	266.0%
SO2.1	9,639	20,900	46.1%
SO2.2	6,946	2,200	315.7%
SO2.3	6,054	3,700	163.6%
SO3.1	8,925	3,250	274.6%
SO3.2	16,302	13,480	120.9%
SO3.3	17,482	3,330	525.0%
SO4.1	10,442	2,700	386.7%
SO4.2	1,796	1,450	123.9%

Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS

The Interreg CE projects reached a variety of target groups across the entire programme area. The actual numbers reached exceeds by far the initially expected numbers, e.g. more than twice as many SMEs, business support organisation, national public authorities, higher education institutions and NGOs were reached than initially planned. This is proof that a high amount of interest was generated, on aggregate, by Interreg CE projects. The only exception to this is the outreach to the general public that stayed well behind expectations⁵⁵.

In more detail, the 85 projects reached more than 8000 public authorities. National public authorities were particularly addressed by the projects in the innovation related SOs, while local authorities were most frequently targeted by the projects related to natural and cultural heritage and low-carbon. Also, the

⁵⁵ According to the JS, one reason for this is that, by definition, target group involvement needs documented active involvement (e.g. in workshops, etc.). Thus, neighborhood activities, open door or outside events etc. that attracted a lot of the general public are not counted here.

projects reached out to more than 21,000 business related stakeholders. Here, the projects dealing with economic and social innovation and innovation capacity, as well as with low carbon mobility in FUAs had a high outreach towards SMEs, while the innovation related projects more than others addressed business support organisations. In turn, the multimodal transport projects had a large outreach towards large enterprises. Finally, these projects also reached more than 4.5 thousand educational institutions, over 3,600 interest groups and almost 2 million individuals. (Table 8).

TABLE 8 NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS REACHED, BY TYPE OF STAKEHOLDERS

Business support organisation				Sectoral agency			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1	930	442	210.4%	SO1.1	106	108	98.1%
SO1.2	905	350	258.6%	SO1.2	263	265	99.2%
SO2.1	86	40	215.0%	SO2.1	271	123	220.3%
SO2.2	66	40	165.0%	SO2.2	161	62	259.7%
SO2.3	105	79	132.9%	SO2.3	112	70	160.0%
SO3.1	65	87	74.7%	SO3.1	76	87	87.4%
SO3.2	318	193	164.8%	SO3.2	215	198	108.6%
SO3.3	64	58	110.3%	SO3.3	166	104	159.6%
SO4.1				SO4.1	34	35	97.1%
SO4.2	30	28	107.1%	SO4.2	10	32	31.3%
Total	2,569	1,317	195.1%	Total	1,414	1,084	130.4%
SME				Large enterprises			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1	3,628	2,584	140.4%	SO1.1	467	171	273.1%
SO1.2	5,209	4,091	127.3%	SO1.2	502	542	92.6%
SO2.1	171	100	171.0%	SO2.1	12	10	120.0%
SO2.2	442	146	302.7%	SO2.2	48	37	129.7%
SO2.3	3,458	370	934.6%	SO2.3	200	232	86.2%
SO3.1	1,263	1,131	111.7%	SO3.1	84	62	135.5%
SO3.2	1,414	888	159.2%	SO3.2	57	18	316.7%
SO3.3	560	388	144.3%	SO3.3	73	43	169.8%
SO4.1	200	70	285.7%	SO4.1	6	10	60.0%
SO4.2	120	700	17.1%	SO4.2	189	184	102.7%
Total	16,465	10,468	157.3%	Total	1,638	1,309	125.1%
National public authority				Regional public authority			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1	231	75	308.0%	SO1.1	375	222	168.9%
SO1.2	263	105	250.5%	SO1.2	317	178	178.1%
SO2.1	22	22	100.0%	SO2.1	113	138	81.9%
SO2.2	29	9	322.2%	SO2.2	164	66	248.5%
SO2.3	17	20	85.0%	SO2.3	182	85	214.1%
SO3.1	153	103	148.5%	SO3.1	242	113	214.2%
SO3.2	136	110	123.6%	SO3.2	291	197	147.7%
SO3.3	66	47	140.4%	SO3.3	203	169	120.1%
SO4.1	40	40	100.0%	SO4.1	114	89	128.1%
SO4.2	37	18	205.6%	SO4.2	16	22	72.7%
Total	994	549	181.1%	Total	2,017	1,279	157.7%
Local public authority				Infrastructure and (public) service provider			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1	459	278	165.1%	SO1.1	121	98	123.5%
SO1.2	426	512	83.2%	SO1.2	836	86	72.1%
SO2.1	710	650	109.2%	SO2.1	211	219	96.3%

SO2.2	298	203	146.8%	SO2.2	76	44	172.7%
SO2.3	835	516	161.8%	SO2.3	277	686	40.4%
SO3.1	620	489	126.8%	SO3.1	120	53	226.4%
SO3.2	932	640	145.6%	SO3.2	90	66	136.4%
SO3.3	502	398	126.1%	SO3.3	137	77	177.9%
SO4.1	240	195	123.1%	SO4.1	239	109	219.3%
SO4.2	30	110	27.3%	SO4.2	147	45	326.7%
Total	5,052	3,991	126.6%	Total	2,254	1,483	152.0%
International org., EEIG under national law				Other types of stakeholders			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1				SO1.1	23	4	575.0%
SO1.2	33	9	366.7%	SO1.2	232	57	407.0%
SO2.1	7	5	140.0%	SO2.1	1,055	1,115	94.6%
SO2.2	7	3	233.3%	SO2.2	138	35	394.3%
SO2.3	21	15	140.0%	SO2.3			
SO3.1	38	29	131.0%	SO3.1	80	39	205.1%
SO3.2	18	14	128.6%	SO3.2	2,395	91	2631.9%
SO3.3	21	24	87.5%	SO3.3	7	8	87.5%
SO4.1	10	6	166.7%	SO4.1			
SO4.2	2	2	100.0%	SO4.2			
Total	157	107	146.7%	Total	3,930	1,349	291.3%
Education/training centre and school				Higher education and research			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1	178	97	183.5%	SO1.1	953	459	207.6%
SO1.2	507	451	112.4%	SO1.2	757	272	278.3%
SO2.1	263	213	123.5%	SO2.1	105	106	99.1%
SO2.2	46	9	511.1%	SO2.2	69	101	68.3%
SO2.3	31	26	119.2%	SO2.3	114	70	162.9%
SO3.1	170	110	154.5%	SO3.1	175	104	168.3%
SO3.2	321	227	141.4%	SO3.2	406	166	244.6%
SO3.3	76	27	281.5%	SO3.3	272	116	234.5%
SO4.1	3	20	15.0%	SO4.1	33	35	94.3%
SO4.2	4	5	80.0%	SO4.2	42	22	190.9%
Total	1,599	1,185	134.9%	Total	2,926	1,451	201.7%
Interest groups including NGOs				General public			
	Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF		Reached	Target	% of forecast -AF
SO1.1	280	182	153.8%	SO1.1	16,643	4,420	376.5%
SO1.2	1,229	565	217.5%	SO1.2	45,499	35,340	128.7%
SO2.1	80	29	275.9%	SO2.1	75,752	1,008,800	7.5%
SO2.2	38	8	475.0%	SO2.2	7,058	2,420	291.7%
SO2.3	153	84	182.1%	SO2.3	144,462	2,836,100	5.1%
SO3.1	280	191	146.6%	SO3.1	19,457	13,800	141.0%
SO3.2	1,131	461	245.3%	SO3.2	401,605	217,370	184.8%
SO3.3	392	214	183.2%	SO3.3	132,170	179,021	73.8%
SO4.1	75	42	178.6%	SO4.1	1,150,109	155,120	741.4%
SO4.2	26	20	130.0%	SO4.2	100	100	100.0%
Total	3,684	1,796	205.1%	Total	1,992,855	4,452,491	44.8%

Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS

Taking into account the numerous project partners directly cooperating during the implementation of projects, the large number of organizations working together in pilot actions, as well as the vast array of stakeholders directly involved in the projects' activities, it can be concluded that **the Programme has effectively supported cooperation beyond borders in Central Europe**, as initially planned. It has also

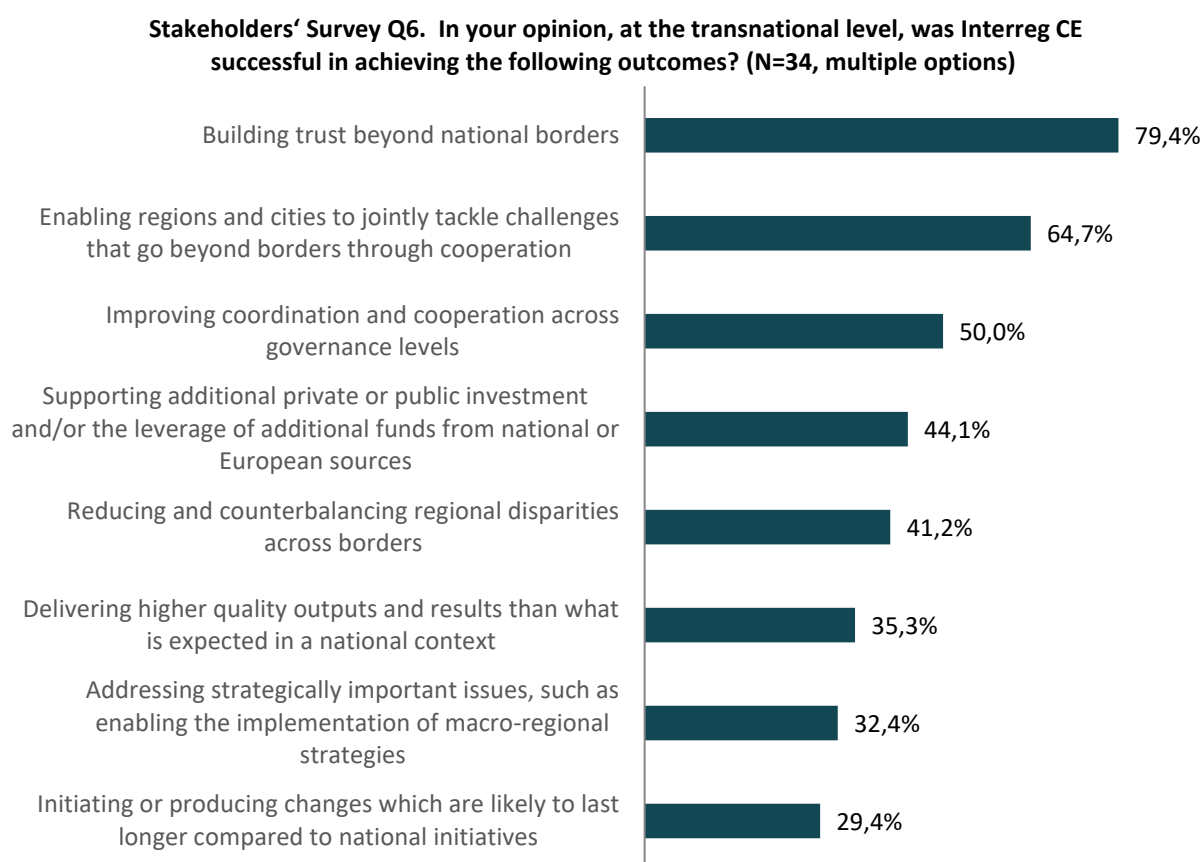
reached the target group categories which it envisaged and succeeded in **achieving its objectives of improving the capacities of the public and private sector in the region, enhancing policy frameworks and developing managerial systems, human resources and institutional structures in all thematic areas.**

3.2.3. STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

In order to gain a better understanding about the effects produced by the Programme, qualitative evidence was gathered during the evaluation through surveys (with beneficiaries and stakeholders), interviews (with beneficiaries, stakeholders and thematic experts) and focus groups (with NCPs, MA/JS, ETF members, thematic experts).

Overall, beneficiaries consider that better knowledge, capacity and competences, as well as improved policy learning are the areas where their projects were very successful. Fostering cooperation and enhancing the quality of governance and delivering higher quality results than what is expected in a national project was largely appreciated as a successful result for beneficiaries in **Innovation**. The same is true for **Low carbon** beneficiaries, to which other responses can be added: supporting public authorities to offer new or better services for citizens and companies, enabling regions to make better use of limited resources or building trust across national borders. For **Environment**, improved policy making or building trust beyond borders is seen as a major achievement by SO3.1. and SO3.3. beneficiaries. The same is valid for SO3.2. in **Culture**. Finally, in **Transport**, fostering cooperation and supporting public authorities in the delivery of better services is regarded as a significantly successful result by most respondents in SO4.1. and SO4.2. (See Annex 9 for more details).

FIGURE 7 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE MAIN OUTCOMES OF INTERREG CE



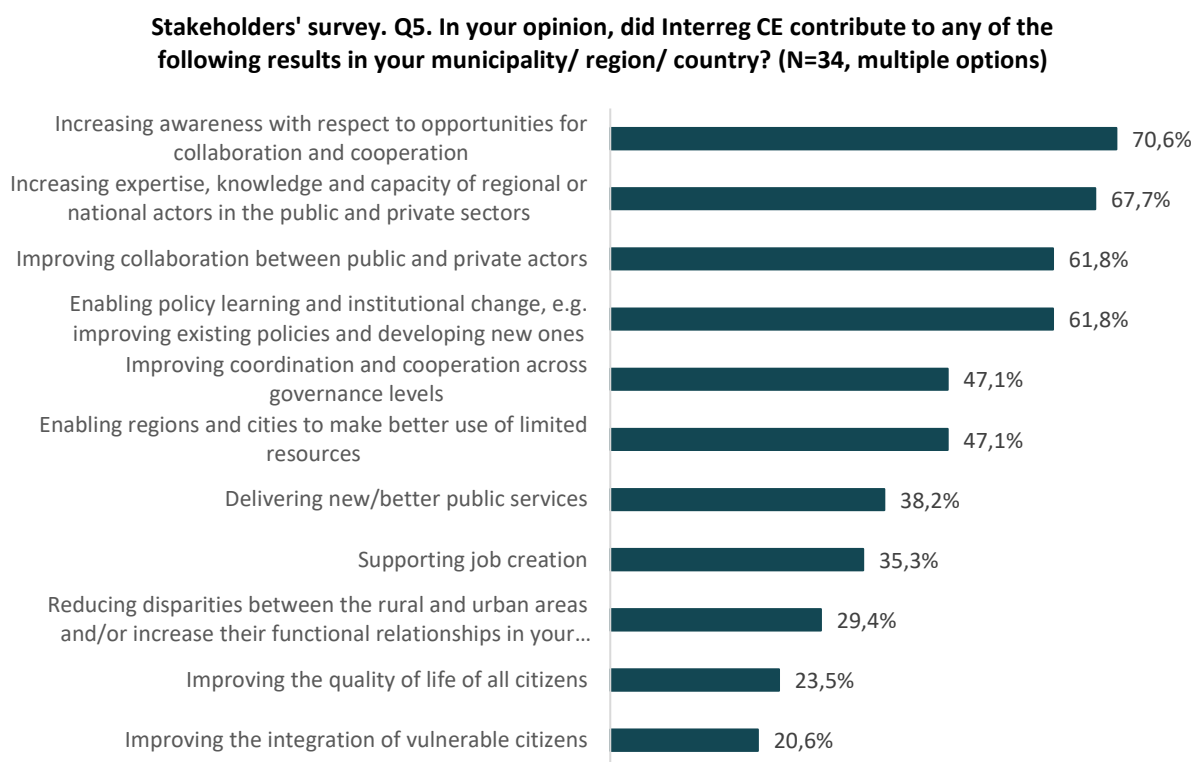
Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Stakeholders highlighted the Programme's contribution to **building trust beyond national borders (79.4%)**, to enabling regions and cities to jointly tackle challenges that go beyond borders through cooperation

(64.7%) and to improving coordination and cooperation across governance levels (50.0%) among the main outcomes (**Figure 7**). These achievements were confirmed by the interviews with beneficiaries.

The stakeholders survey also highlighted various benefits deriving from the Programme implementation at local level, including: Increasing awareness in respect to opportunities for collaboration and cooperation (70.6%), Increasing expertise, knowledge and capacity of regional or national actors in the public and private sectors (67.7%), Improving collaboration between public and private actors and Enabling policy learning and institutional change, e.g. by improving existing policies and developing new ones (61.8% each) (**Figure 8**). Structural changes such as: Improving the integration of vulnerable citizens or the quality of life, reducing disparities between the rural and urban areas or supporting job creation were less associated with the Interreg CE Programme.

FIGURE 8 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTION AT LOCAL LEVEL



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Most projects focused on small and medium size entities (SMEs, municipalities etc.). For these, a direct link may be observed between the programme intervention and the improvement in their situation (capacity). Even more, for the sites where pilot investments were implemented, tangible results were produced. This is the case, for example, of the [YouInHerit](#) pilot action which developed the innovative installation in the salt warehouse Monfort (Portoroz, Slovenia). The investment effectively contributed to mobilized young people in the community and in consolidating the local identity related to the salt, salt-pans and salt warehouses, reviving the traditional craft of the region.

For the entities and persons involved in the Interreg CE projects, especially trainings and pilot actions, transnational cooperation has provided the framework for gaining access to first-hand knowledge and experience, to a vast range of contexts, practices and solutions, which would have otherwise been difficult to access. Interviews with stakeholders and the case studies confirmed that for the people directly involved in the pilot actions and the training activities, participating in the projects has resulted in an evident improvement of their skills and competences. Arguably, this will lead to improved outcomes in respect to how they perform their jobs or pursue their careers and potentially, others will benefit. Such an example is that of the museum operators in the [COME-IN!](#) project, who, after having received training on improving

accessibility for visitors, are more aware of the challenges faced by disabled people and will be able to change the way exhibitions are displayed, making them more accessible for all. Nonetheless, as the project has proven, trainings alone are not sufficient to produce benefits for the target groups and further actions, such as introducing innovative equipment greatly improve the outcomes.

It can be thus concluded that the Programme has effectively contributed to providing **new opportunities for collaboration**. While their impact cannot be directly quantified, the projects supported through Interreg CE can be **directly associated with benefits gained by the various target groups**, mainly in terms of improving **knowledge and capacity and policy learning**. Not least, **the Programme has created opportunities for bringing EU-level themes closer to the local agenda**.

The Programme has contributed to achieving better coordination, by means of transnational strategies and policies being developed and implemented in the region. Through its pilot actions, it can be assumed that the Programme has effectively contributed – or at least demonstrated how - to making the cities and regions of Interreg CE better places to live and work. However, coordination of policies/governance, especially vertically, should be further addressed and improved. Potentially, this should lead to additional benefits being generated for end-users, such as better, more efficient, innovative services for citizens and companies, leading to the longer-term impact of triggering economic opportunities and employment at regional level.

The evaluation validated the following assumptions, confirming that:

1. Transnational cooperation enabled regions and cities to jointly tackle challenges that go beyond borders. All funded projects have effectively and successfully delivered outputs and results which produced improvements in respect to the needs in the Programme area.
2. Projects supported are indeed “living laboratories creating opportunities for developing and testing new ways of addressing major challenges”. This was achieved mainly by the pilot actions.
3. Implementation mechanisms were able to ensure the transnational character of the financed interventions. Projects had a variety of partners from all the regions of the Programme area; actions were developed and implemented with a transnational character.

3.3. Q2. IDENTIFICATION OF NET EFFECT

The following section provides an answer to the second evaluation question, examining the net effects produced by the Interreg CE Programme for 2014-2020. Based on the reconstruction of the theory of change and the gross effects identified, the evaluation explored to what extent the achieved results can be attributed solely to the Programme and what other factors might have also contributed to the observed effects.

Net effects of the programme were assessed qualitatively, trying to reasonably distinguish the Programme contribution from the effects which would have happened anyway, which happened due to other initiatives, including, for example, policy measures or programmes). The evaluation considers that it is unlikely that “replacement” effects have occurred, i.e. that the Programme has led to replacing already existing results. The assessment was based on the assumption that linkages and collaboration networks are kept in existence and consolidated only through repeated collaborations; as such, new projects do not replace existing linkages, but rather reinforce them and bring value to all entities in the collaboration network, including through new opportunities. Also, given the specificity of the Programme and its distinctive value proposition, the evaluation considers that its implementation did not divert similar initiatives (actions, partnerships) from being carried out and thus “displacement” effects are unlikely.

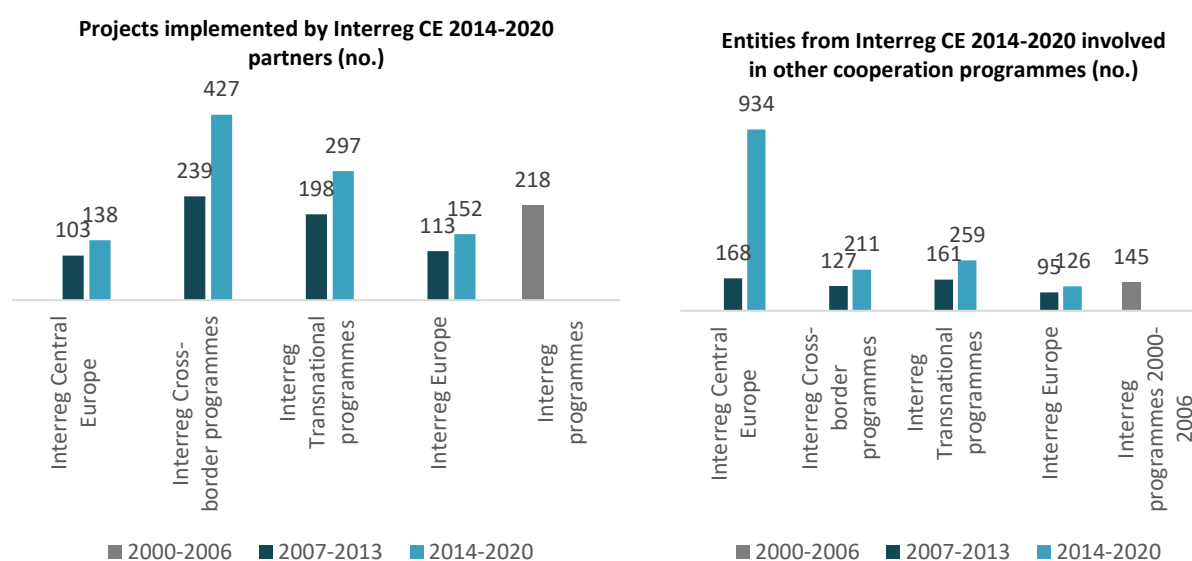
The assessment focused on observing the effects of the Programme, in terms of linkages and cooperation, to reflect the main objective of *“supporting cooperation beyond borders in central Europe”*. It also investigated the effects produced in relation to the objectives established for each SO, which are have a more pronounced thematic impact on the territory mainly through the pilot actions, and thus contribute to

the final aim of the programme, that of making the cities and regions in the CE area better places to live and work.

3.3.1. LINKAGES AND COOPERATION

In total, the 934 unique organisations taking part in Interreg CE 2014-2020 implemented nearly 2,000 projects in the past 20 years⁵⁶. Most projects were implemented under cross-border (666 projects since 2007) and transnational cooperation programmes (495 projects since 2007). The figure includes 251 projects under Urbact, Interact or ESPON implemented entities which also participated in Interreg CE. The number of projects has increased significantly from 2013-2017 to 2014-2020 in all types of cooperation programmes (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9 PARTICIPATION IN PREVIOUS PROJECTS BY ENTITIES INVOLVED IN INTERREG CE 2014-2020



Source: Own calculations based on data available on Keep.eu database

For 2000-2006, all cross-border, interregional and transnational programmes were considered under the Interreg programmes category

It can be thus assumed that, for many of the entities directly involved in the implementation, participating in the programme has provided not only the opportunity of accessing a network of relevant stakeholders, but also of continuing the collaboration, after the project end. This was also confirmed by the interviews with beneficiaries, who acknowledged that gaining experience and exposure in the programme has led and will most likely lead to other opportunities for collaboration, thus creating or reinforcing linkages with other organizations and expanding the transnational networks.

While some stakeholders have mentioned that *“less and less new players are accessing the Programme and that the programme is being increasingly exclusive to those with enough experience”*, the analysis of the projects’ partnerships showed that **766 (84%) of the partners implementing Interreg CE projects during 2014-2020 are newcomers**, meaning that it was the first time they participated in the Interreg CE programme.

⁵⁶ Keep.eu data – programme level. The number of unique partners was obtained based on the manual inspection of data available, taking into account the frequent spelling differences for the same institution. Also, separating or aggregating institutions, e.g. the University of Ljubljana and the University of Ljubljana – Faculty of Architecture was not straightforward and based on expert’s opinion. The data refers to all 138 projects funded by Interreg CE 2014-2020.

BOX 1 PROFILE OF ENTITIES PARTICIPATING IN INTERREG CE

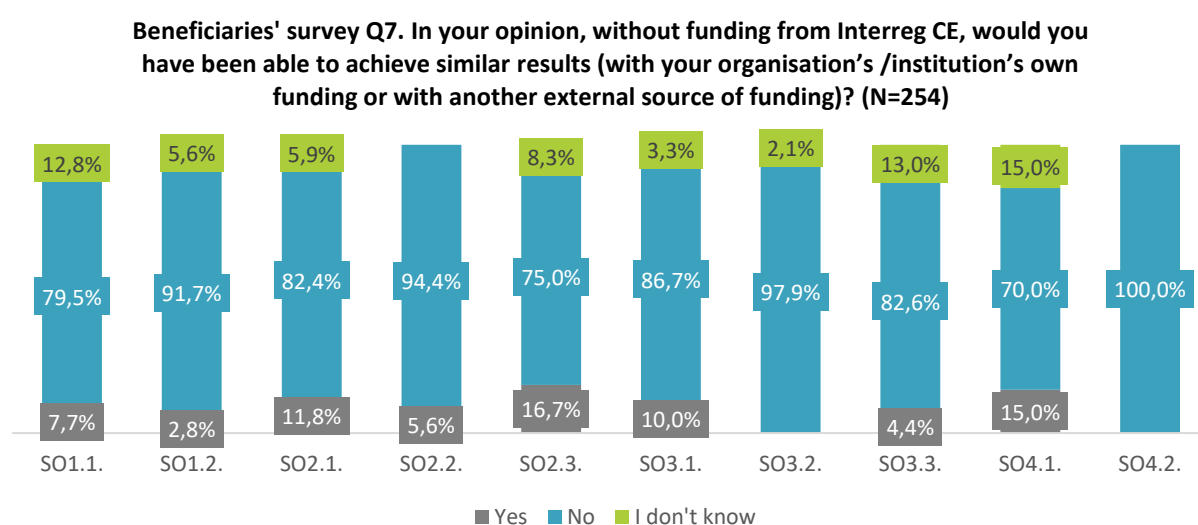
Compared to the 2007-2013 Interreg CE programme, only 146 public organisations and 22 private entities participated in both programmes (i.e. 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 Interreg CE). As such, most newcomers are public institutions (513), compared to 253 private entities. This reflects the distribution by legal status of Interreg CE 2014-2020 partners: public institutions – 659, compared to 275 private ones. While public entities display a rather homogenous involvement in other programmes, Interreg CE seems to be the most attractive cooperation programme for private entities, proof being the 116 projects in which the 275 private entities were involved as partners, followed by other TN programmes (76 projects in total) and cross-border (43 projects).

Interviews with various stakeholders (beneficiaries, thematic experts and Programme authorities), as well as discussions in the focus groups acknowledge, however, that the transnational nature of the programme calls for strong and stable institutions, with good financial and technical capacity and, generally, with enough experience in previous EU-funded projects, though not necessarily at international level. Smaller NGOs or small-scale beneficiaries experience difficulty in accessing the Programme as first-time participants and potential applicants are usually first advised to start as associates or to take on fewer responsibilities as partners

As acknowledged by the stakeholders and agreed by the evaluation team based on documentary review, the value added of the Programme, which differentiates it from others is manifold: (1) it has a unique territorial and thematic coverage, making it more relevant for the entities in the area, compared to other programmes; (2) it is more accessible to smaller organizations compared to other EU-level programmes; (3) by design it requires a significant number of partners, of different types/ backgrounds/ specializations; (4) also by design, it encourages projects to test innovative solutions in pilot actions. **As such, it can be concluded that the Interreg CE Programme has contributed to building and consolidating collaboration in a distinctive manner from other programmes.**

Testimonials gathered through interviews indicate that the Programme was “quite visionary”, “forward thinking” and brought forward topics that were not always on the agenda of local stakeholders. Others talked about Interreg CE being “a playground for testing innovative ideas which would otherwise be impossible to implement in a transnational context in the CE area”⁵⁷. Interviews with beneficiaries confirmed that many of the actions and especially pilot actions are unlikely to have been implemented through other funding sources.

FIGURE 10 BENEFICIARIES’ FEEDBACK ON WHETHER SIMILAR RESULTS COULD HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED WITHOUT INTERREG CE FUNDING



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

⁵⁷ Stakeholder interviews and focus-group

Even more, thematic experts confirmed that *“Transnational programs help to link a No. of stakeholders, they give the opportunity to look at international level for the topics that would usually not be addressed on a national level.”* This is the case with transport, environmental issues, digitalisation and the circular economy, as well as social innovation and entrepreneurship. A concrete example in this respect is the [INDUCULT2.0](#) project, which introduced the concept of industrial heritage and initiated local actions towards its valorisation in its pilot locations.

The unique contribution of Interreg CE Programme is particularly acknowledged for the smaller organizations acting as project partners and for all the entities involved in the projects’ activities at local level, who not have otherwise been exposed to the knowledge, experience and networks of stakeholders from several countries. Interviews with various stakeholders also confirmed the high value added that the Programme delivered for these organizations.

For the small and medium size entities (SMEs, municipalities etc.), a direct link may be observed between the programme intervention and the improvement in their situation (capacity). Even more, for the sites where investments were implemented, tangible results were produced (see the example of the [YouInHerit](#) pilot action, presented previously). As far as the structure of the programme is concerned, bigger investments are not covered so that’s why it’s not always attractive to larger entities (such as cities), which are generally more interested in accessing funds for more “tangible” investments.

The qualitative evidence conveyed a convergent message with respect to the fact that the projects supported through Interreg CE have demonstrated that **the solutions developed are highly transferable and can be adapted to a variety of local contexts**. Interreg CE projects provide successful examples of interventions, in all thematic areas, in terms of improving management and planning capacities of the public sector and private sector, consolidating the linkages of actors in the region, developing the skills and competences of employees and entrepreneurs.

The evaluation validated the following assumptions:

- (1) Projects supported are indeed *“living laboratories creating opportunities for developing and testing new ways of addressing major challenges”*
- (2) The knowledge created in the projects is applicable, transferable, and possible to use in other organisations/ regions /countries outside of the defined partnership.
- (3) Interventions followed an integrated bottom-up approach involving and coordinating relevant actors from all governance levels.
- (4) Interventions were able to reach the types of territories initially envisaged
- (5) Implementation mechanisms were able to determine the adoption of innovative approaches in the financed interventions.

3.3.2. PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC RESULTS PER SO

Further details on the direct contribution of the Programme from a thematic perspective are presented as follows.

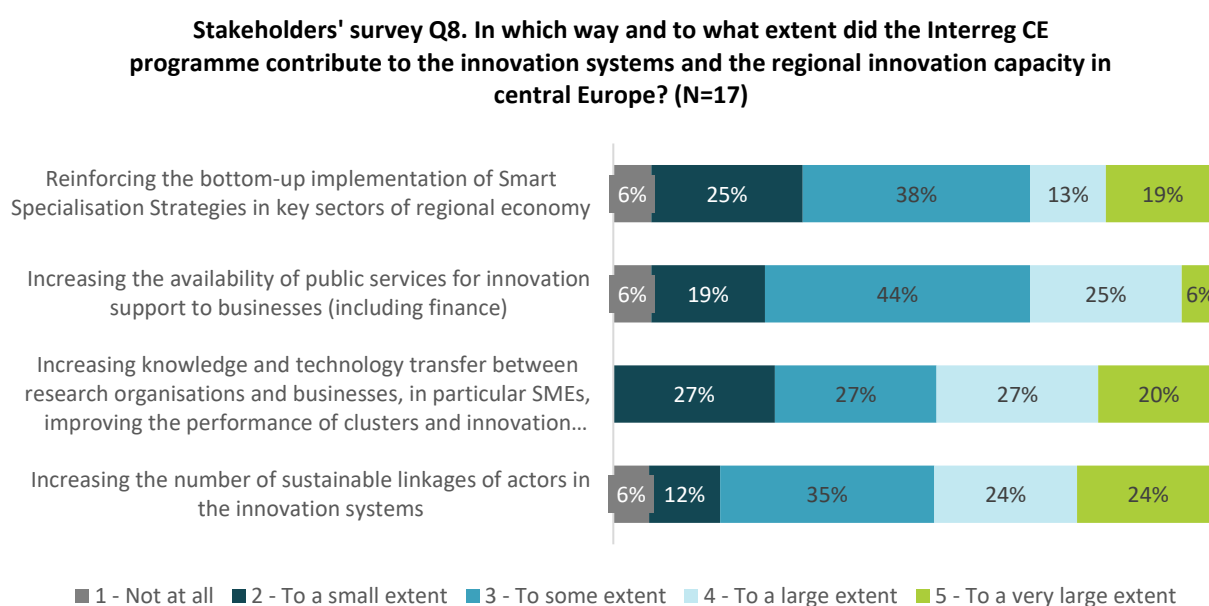
Innovation

The Interreg CE programme has positively contributed to the progress outlined in [Section 3.2.2](#) above thanks to its focus on the **full innovation cycle**, i.e. from research to product and from product to users. In particular, the strong participation of **SMEs** in the programme has helped improve the quality of the projects overall and bring project outputs closer to the market. The programme has also contributed to improving the knowledge of the public sector in relation to new innovation concepts.

With regard to the Innovation Specific Objectives more specifically and as reported in the beneficiary and stakeholders survey, the programme was particularly successful in:

- increasing the number of **sustainable linkages** between actors of the innovation systems, as confirmed in the stakeholders' survey (58% of respondents consider that the programme contributed to a large and very large extent to increasing the number of sustainable linkages in the innovation system). For instance, the [digitalLIFE4CE](#) project has created 7 CE Digital Excellence Health Spots with the specific aim to develop stakeholder cooperation. One stakeholder briefly mentions that *"nevertheless, the Interreg CE Programme adds something which could never be achieved with just national funds, namely: connecting relevant actors in the field throughout Central Europe - broadening their network, bringing in new skills and knowledge, new partners, etc."*.
- increasing **knowledge and technology transfer** between research organisations and businesses. This finding was also reported by the stakeholders' survey, in 57% of responses. For instance, the [KETGATE](#) project enabled 12 innovative SMEs to set up a project with a research organisation from another country than where they are based.
- improving capacities of the public and private sector for **skills development** of employees and **entrepreneurial competences**, as reported by 40% of respondents in the stakeholders' survey. For instance, the [SYNERGY](#) project introduced 'design thinking' as a novel approach within the project partnership – an approach that is now widely used, including through mutual exchange and learning as well as technological and managerial competences development.

FIGURE 11 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO1.1.)

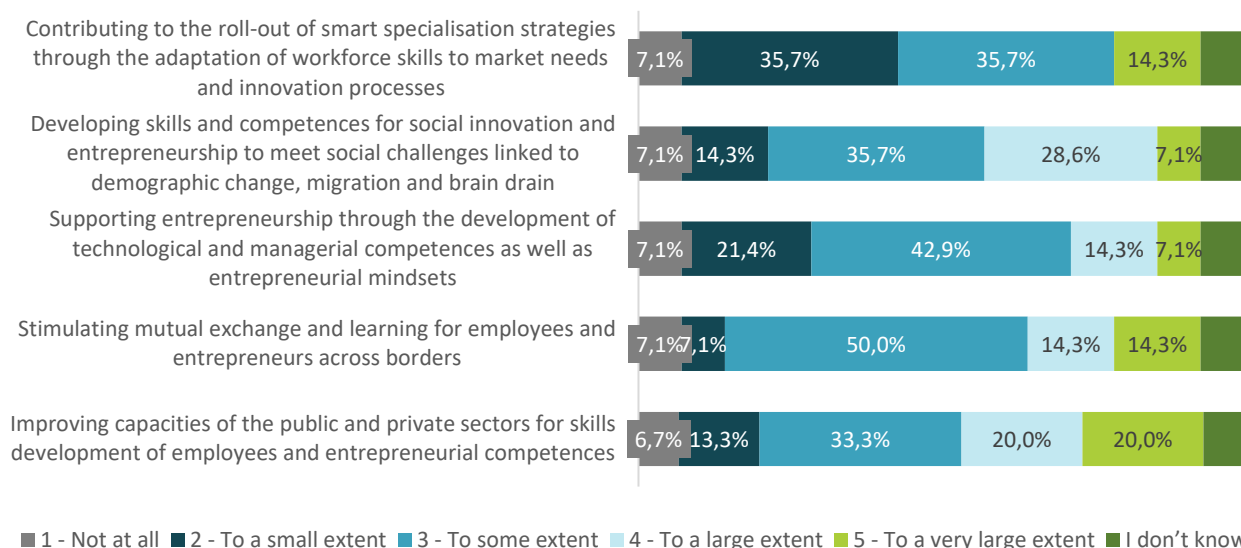


Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Other stakeholders provided additional explanations regarding their answer (NO / to a small extent), mentioning that: *"The sum of money invested through the CE-Programme is compared to national funds in this field very low. Therefore the quantitative points above are rated rather low. Nevertheless, the CE-Programme adds something which could never be achieved with just national funds, namely: connecting relevant actors in the field throughout Central Europe - broadening their network, bringing in new skills and knowledge, new partners, etc."*

FIGURE 12 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO1.2.)

Stakeholders' survey Q9. In which way and to what extent did the programme contribute to improving skills and entrepreneurial competences for advancing economic and social innovation in central European regions? (N=15)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Note: additional explanations were provided with respect to the NO/to a small extent option – please refer to quotation in *italic* above the chart

The **large number of projects** funded under the Innovation Specific Objectives 1.1 and 1.2 (13 and 12, respectively) might also be a reason why innovation-related achievements are particularly visible. This is also testimony of the importance of innovation projects for the CE area.

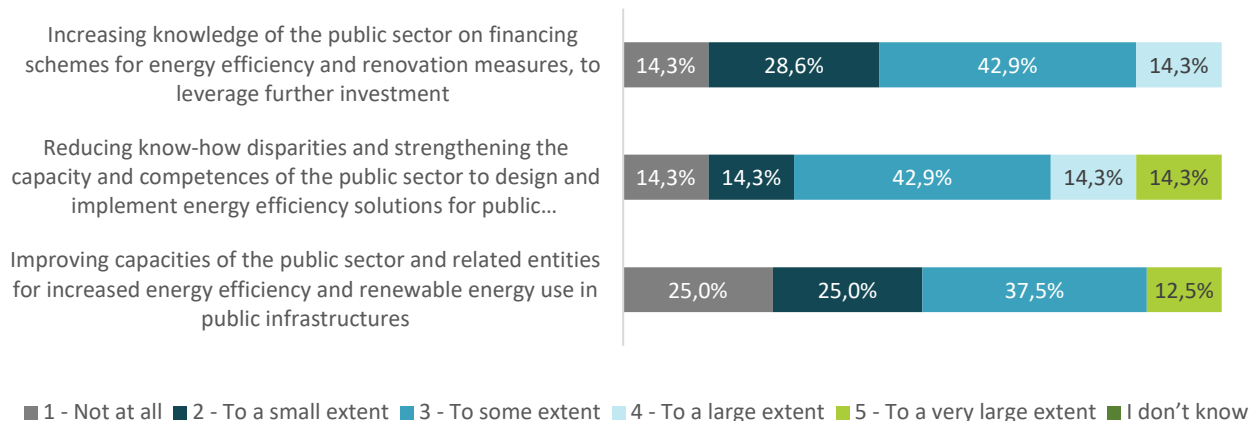
The 48 projects were implemented by roughly 360 unique entities, of which 38% are private organisations, a much higher share compared to other themes covered by the Programme. Also, the Innovation Thematic Priority displays the highest share of new-coming partners – 81%, compared to the Interreg CE 2007-2013 programme. Most new-comers are located in regions either with a history of cooperation (regardless of the theme) – e.g. Veneto, or in capital city regions (e.g. Wien, Budapest), with a more developed business and innovation environment. These regions also took more often the lead partner role in projects under this Thematic Priority. Aside from the Interreg CE 2014-2020 programme, 110 entities acted as partners in other TN programmes (2014-2020), 83 in cross-border programmes (2014-2020), and 67 in the Interreg CE 2007-2013.

Low carbon

Overall, the Interreg CE programme has significantly contributed to improving the capacity of the public sector in relation to awareness-raising and **knowledge- and competence-building** for low-carbon issues, as reported by the stakeholders' survey (**Figure 13** below); this has helped **improve policy-making** and offer **new or better services** for citizens and companies in this field, although more can be done to translate awareness and knowledge into concrete actions. Here, including government-level stakeholders in the Programme might be beneficial.

FIGURE 13 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO2.1.)

Stakeholders' survey Q10. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme support solutions for increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage in public infrastructures? (N=8)

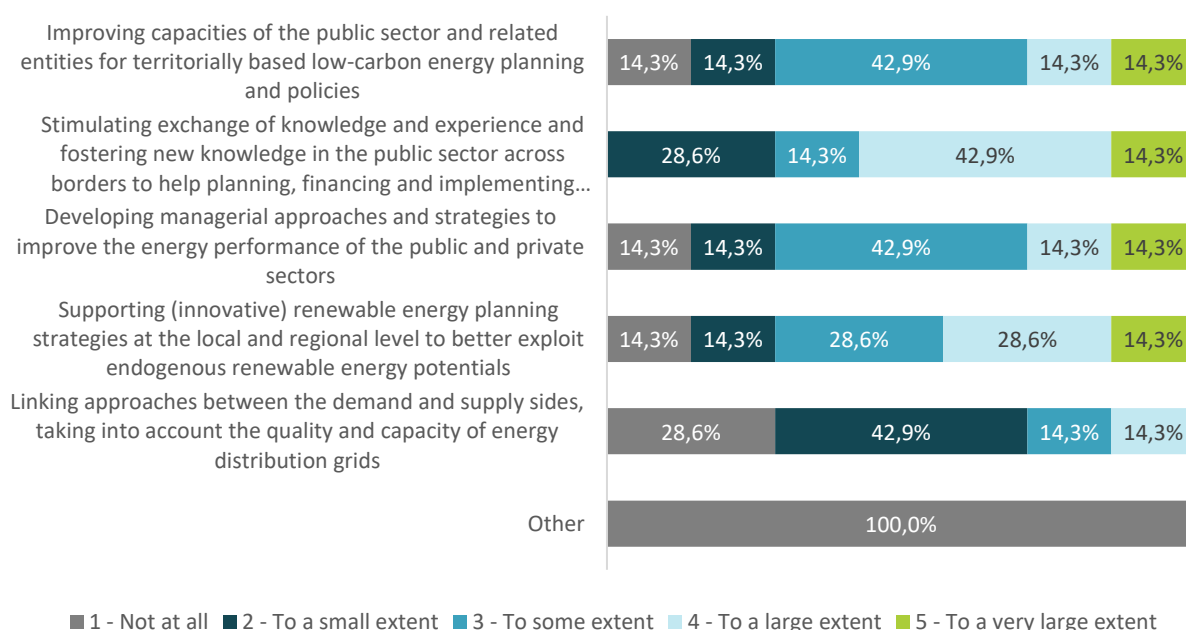


Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

The impact of the programme with regard to SO 2.1 and SO 2.2 was somewhat more limited, except for enabling regions and cities to make **better use of limited resources** and **building trust** beyond national borders, two key impacts produced under all Low-Carbon Specific Objectives. Stimulating exchange of knowledge and experience in the public sector was also acknowledged by stakeholders in SO2.2. as a major contribution, as outlined in over 57% of responses.

FIGURE 14 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO2.2.)

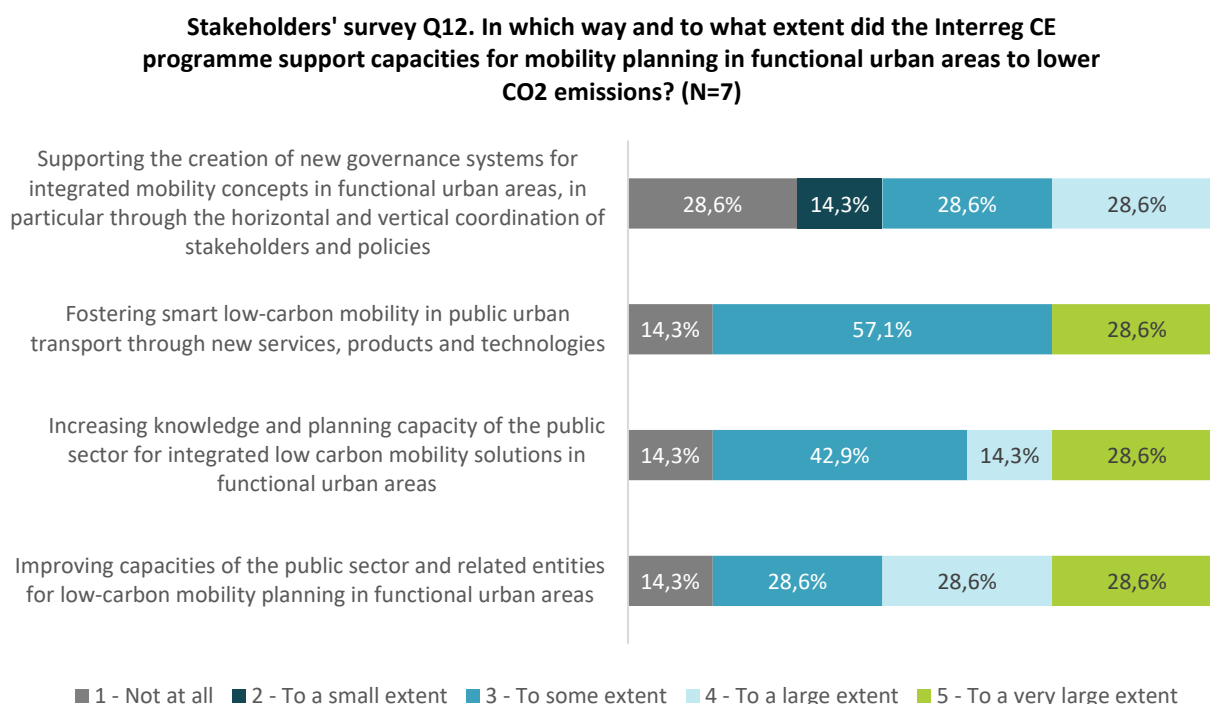
Stakeholders' survey Q11. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme contribute to improving territorially based low-carbon energy planning strategies and policies supporting climate change mitigation? (N=7)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

For the “other” response option, the respondent indicated “Increasing climate change adaptation in the field of climate-related risk prevention and disaster resilience”.

FIGURE 15 STAKEHOLDERS’ FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO2.3.)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

The impact on SO 2.3 in particular was strong, especially with regard to the capacity of the public sector for low-carbon mobility planning in functional urban areas, as seen by e.g. the contribution of SO 2.3 projects to Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, and also reported by the stakeholders’ survey.

The 25 projects were implemented by roughly 201 unique entities, of which 81.1% are public organisations, similar to the distribution in the Environment theme. Also, the Low carbon Thematic Priority displays the lowest share of new-coming partners – 73%, compared to the Interreg CE 2007-2013 programme, similar to what was found for Transport. Most entities that are new to the programme come from the Emilia-Romagna region (IT) – 13 new entities, followed by regions in Austria and Croatia. Most lead partners are located in Emilia-Romagna (IT) – 5. For this thematic priority, entities that implemented projects in Interreg CE 2014-2020 also saw an increase in participation in other types of programmes, especially in cross-border programmes (in 2014-2020 compared to 2007-2013).

Environment

The environment projects financed by the Interreg CE have contributed to developing solutions for the sustainable management of natural resources, for effective water management, safeguarding soil and air quality, reducing waste and pollution, managing natural and man-made risks. Measures supporting urban development, regional and territorial planning were also developed and tested, across the Programme area⁵⁸. Overall, Interreg CE has supported roughly 9% of the total number of projects implemented by transnational cooperation programmes during 2014-2020⁵⁹ in relation to environment topics, having notable contributions on the topics of climate change and biodiversity and regional planning.

For the Environment theme, evidence on partner participation shows that there 190 entities involved in SO3.1. and SO3.3. in the current Programme, out of which 156 are public entities. Additionally, these entities

⁵⁸ These represent themes, as captured by the keep.eu database

⁵⁹ Keep.eu data, completed projects on selected themes, relevant for the environment SOs.

have also been involved in other TN programmes in 2014-2020 (65 entities), while 41 of them have a history of participation in territorial cooperation programmes since 2000-2006. Only 22.6% are entities that also participated in the 2007-2013 Interreg CE.

The supported projects have demonstrated that highly transferable solutions can be developed and adapted to a variety of local contexts. Interreg CE projects provide successful examples of place-based interventions, for example in relation to environmental challenges affecting Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) or in other unclearly delineated territories such as river basins or touristic areas.

Considering the achievements obtained in the projects, it can be concluded that the Programme has effectively contributed to increasing the environmental management capacities of the public sector and related entities in respect to the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources.

Taking into account the numerous project partners directly cooperating during the implementation, the large number of municipalities, agencies and authorities working together in pilot actions, as well as the vast array of stakeholders directly participating in the projects' activities, it can be concluded the Programme has effectively supported cooperation beyond borders in Central Europe, as initially planned.

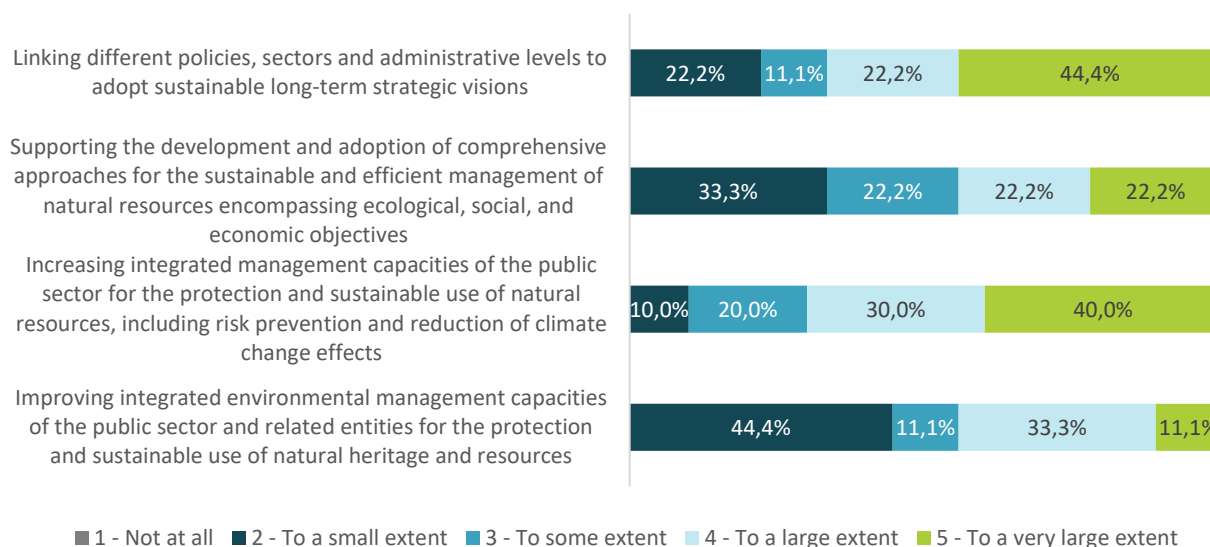
Through its pilot actions, it can be assumed that the Programme has effectively contributed to making the cities and regions of Interreg CE better places to live and work, by improving their resilience to climate change and reducing pollution effects. Such examples are the [AMIIGA](#) project, which proposed solutions to addressing groundwater contamination and [RAINMAN](#), which addressed the risks posed by heavy rain.

For the entities and persons involved in the trainings and pilot actions, transnational cooperation has provided the framework for gaining access to **first-hand knowledge and experience**, to a vast range of contexts, practices and solutions, which would have otherwise been difficult to access. The case study ([RAINMAN](#) project) has confirmed that for the stakeholders directly involved in the pilot actions (municipalities, water management agencies and rapid intervention services), participating in the project has resulted in an evident increase in capacity. Arguably, this will lead to wider benefits for their communities.

The general opinion of the stakeholders (interviews and surveys) was that the projects financed through Interreg CE were successful and very successful in **linking different policies, sectors and administrative levels** to adopt sustainable long-term visions (opinion expressed by over 60% of the respondents to the survey) and in **improving the knowledge and management capacities of the public sector** and related entities (over 70% of the respondents to the survey). In many cases, projects targeted particularly smaller municipalities, which could not have developed the environmental management plans and strategies by themselves. For these projects, there is a direct link between the programme intervention and the improvement in the situation of the respective target groups, with tangible results for the communities.

FIGURE 16 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO3.1.)

Stakeholders' survey Q13. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme contribute to improving integrated environmental management capacities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources? (N=10)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

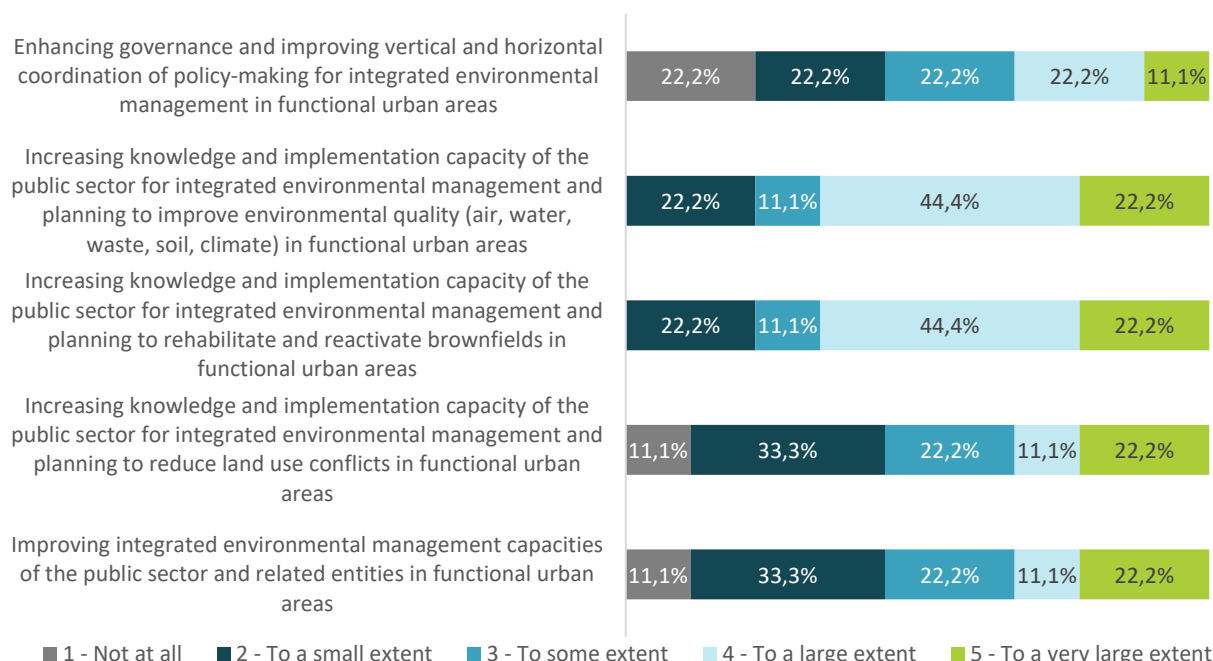
More specifically, stakeholders detailed the specific contributions of the Interreg CE programme to improving integrated environmental management capacities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources, highlighting mainly the following:

- Linking different policies, sectors and administrative levels to adopt sustainable long-term strategic visions (44.4% of survey respondents) and increasing integrated management capacities of the public sector for the protection and sustainable use of natural resources, including risk prevention and reduction of climate change effects (40%).
- Lesser contributions were mentioned in respect to Improving integrated environmental management capacities of the public sector and related entities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources (11.1%).

Improving coordination of policymaking for **integrated environmental management in FUAs**, under SO 3.3, is regarded as a major achievement by the beneficiaries (87%). Various examples were provided, from planning to rehabilitate and reactivate brownfields, to environmental management and planning to improve environmental quality (air, water, waste, soil, climate) and reducing land use conflicts. Improving the quality of the urban environment will potentially increase attractiveness and quality of life. In combination with the rich cultural diversity, the valorisation of natural heritage could activate other development opportunities, for example in the creative and cultural sector or tourism.

FIGURE 17 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO3.3.)

Stakeholders' survey Q14. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme contribute to improving environmental management of functional urban areas to make them more liveable places? (N=9)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

The stakeholders survey (Figure 17) provides more details in respect to the way the Interreg CE programme contributed to improving environmental management of functional urban areas, highlighting: Increasing knowledge and implementation capacity of the public sector for integrated environmental management and planning to reduce land use conflicts in functional urban areas and Increasing knowledge and implementation capacity of the public sector for integrated environmental management and planning to rehabilitate and reactivate brownfields in functional urban areas (44.4% each).

Culture

The projects financed by the Interreg CE have contributed to developing solutions for supporting cultural heritage and arts⁶⁰. Overall, Interreg CE has supported roughly 20% of the total number of projects implemented by transnational cooperation programmes during 2014-2020 in relation to culture and cultural heritage, having notable contributions on the topic of tourism.

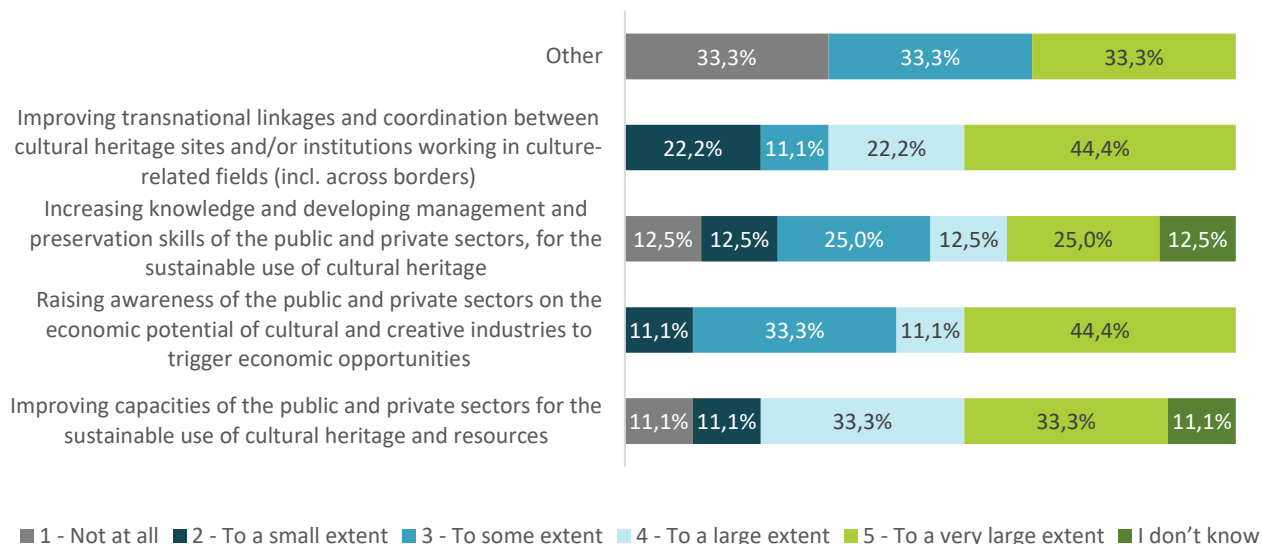
The projects financed through calls 1 and 2 under SO3.2 were implemented by more than 170 project partners, mostly public entities (80%). The majority of the partners are from Italy (20%), Slovenia (16%) and Croatia (13%). More than half of the lead partners come from Italy and Germany.

Throughout the evaluation exercise, the general opinion of the stakeholders (interviews and surveys) was that the projects financed through Interreg CE were successful and very successful in **raising awareness of the public and private sectors** on the economic potential of cultural and creative industries, **improving capacities of the public and private sector** for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources, **improving transnational linkages and coordination** between cultural heritage sites.

⁶⁰ As recorded thematically in keep.eu database

FIGURE 18 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO3.2.)

Stakeholders' survey Q15. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme support improving capacities for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources? (N=9)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

For the “other” response option, the respondent indicated: *“Improving of visibility and availability of cultural and touristic sites”*.

Overall, beneficiaries consider that **better knowledge, capacity and competences**, as well as improved policy learning are the areas where their projects were very successful. Improved policy-making and building trust beyond borders are seen as major achievements for SO 3.2. beneficiaries.

A remarkable finding in respect to this specific objective relates to the sense of pride which was repeatedly mentioned by the partners in relation to participating in the projects. This was also stated in respect to the various target groups participating in the pilot actions.

Transport

The projects financed by the Interreg CE aimed at supporting sustainable transport and mobility and developing multimodal transport solutions. They also supported urban and regional planning, rural and peripheral development through improved transport connections⁶¹. The Interreg CE accounts for roughly 20% of all projects implemented by transnational cooperation programmes in the 2014-2020 period, in the Transport Thematic Area⁶². Overall, 118 entities participated in this theme in Interreg CE 2014-2020, out of which 74% are public institutions. 75% of partners are new-comers to the Programme (only 29 entities participated in the 2007-2013 Programme). Most partners come from Budapest (8), Veneto (7), Lombardy (5) and Dresden (5), while most of the 43 regions where partners are located have between 1-4 entities involved in the Transport theme.

The supported projects have provided successful examples of place-based interventions, and have also provided tools which are not only highly transferable but could also provide essential inputs for developing the regulatory framework and guidance at EU level.

Considering the projects' achievements, it can be concluded that the Programme has effectively contributed to increasing the coordinated planning capacities of the public sector and related entities for regional

⁶¹ These represent themes, as captured by the keep.eu database

⁶² Keep.eu data, projects on selected themes, relevant for the Transport SOs, including ongoing projects

passenger transport systems and the coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally friendly freight solutions.

Taking into account the numerous project partners directly cooperating during the implementation, the large number of transport operators and municipalities together in pilot actions, as well as the vast array of stakeholders directly participating in the projects' activities, it can be concluded the Programme has effectively supported cooperation beyond borders in Central Europe, as initially planned.

For many of the entities directly involved in the implementation of the projects, participating in the programme has provided not only the opportunity of accessing a network of relevant stakeholders, but also of continuing the collaboration, after the project end. Interreg CE projects also provided the framework for gaining access to first-hand knowledge and experience, to a vast range of contexts, practices and solutions, which would have otherwise been difficult to access.

The transnational strategies and tools developed through the projects supported by Interreg CE provide the **framework for increasing coordination** among stakeholders across borders, for aligning practices and achieving positive outcomes (lower costs, lower emissions), through cooperation.

For the services operators and companies participating in the pilot actions, there is a direct link between the programme intervention and the improvement in the situation of the respective target groups and resulted in wider, yet very tangible benefits. For example, in the case of [CHEMMULTIMODAL](#), after 40 transport routes were discussed with companies shipping/receiving chemical goods, 8 routes were reorganized to multimodal transportation. Thus, CO₂ emissions could be reduced by 10.5% compared to the initial measurements.

The case study ([RUMOBIL](#) project) has confirmed that, for the communities directly benefiting from the pilot actions, participating in the project has resulted in an evident improvement of the quality and availability of transport services (such as better connections, safer and more attractive bus stops, improved timetables, easier and faster ticketing, easy identification of routes etc.). It has also helped local and regional authorities improve their capabilities for planning and implementing efficient and attractive public transport services.

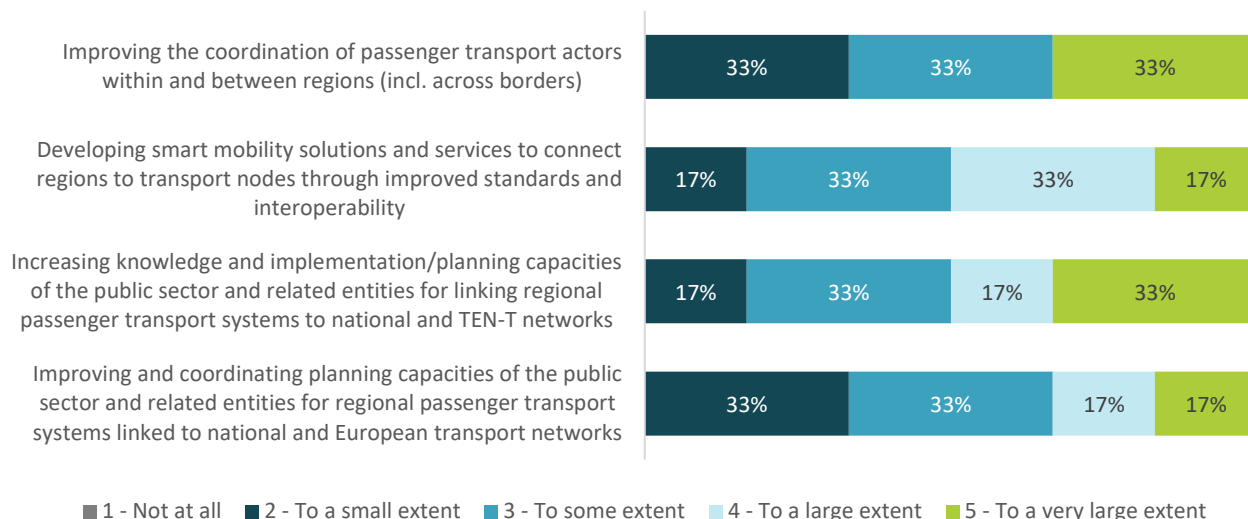
Throughout the evaluation exercise, the general opinion of the beneficiaries (observed through interviews and via the survey) was that the projects financed through Interreg CE were generally successful in:

- developing smart mobility solutions and services to connect regions to transport nodes through improved standards and interoperability (85.7% of survey respondents)
- increasing knowledge and implementation/ planning capacities of the public sector and related entities for linking regional passenger transport systems to national and TEN-T networks (78.6%)
- improving coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally friendly freight (100%)
- increasing knowledge and implementation capacities of freight transport stakeholders for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport systems and logistics (100%).

In the survey, stakeholders provided more details in respect to the way in which the Programme supported the planning and coordination of regional passenger transport systems (SO 4.1), highlighting its contribution to: *Improving and coordinating planning capacities of the public sector and related entities for regional passenger transport systems linked to national and European transport networks* and to *Increasing knowledge and implementation/planning capacities of the public sector and related entities for linking regional passenger transport systems to national and TEN-T networks*. Other examples include *Developing links to peripheral areas and improving better public transport in peripheral areas*.

FIGURE 19 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO4.1.)

Stakeholders' survey Q17. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme support the planning and coordination of regional passenger transport systems for better connections to national and European transport networks? (N=6)



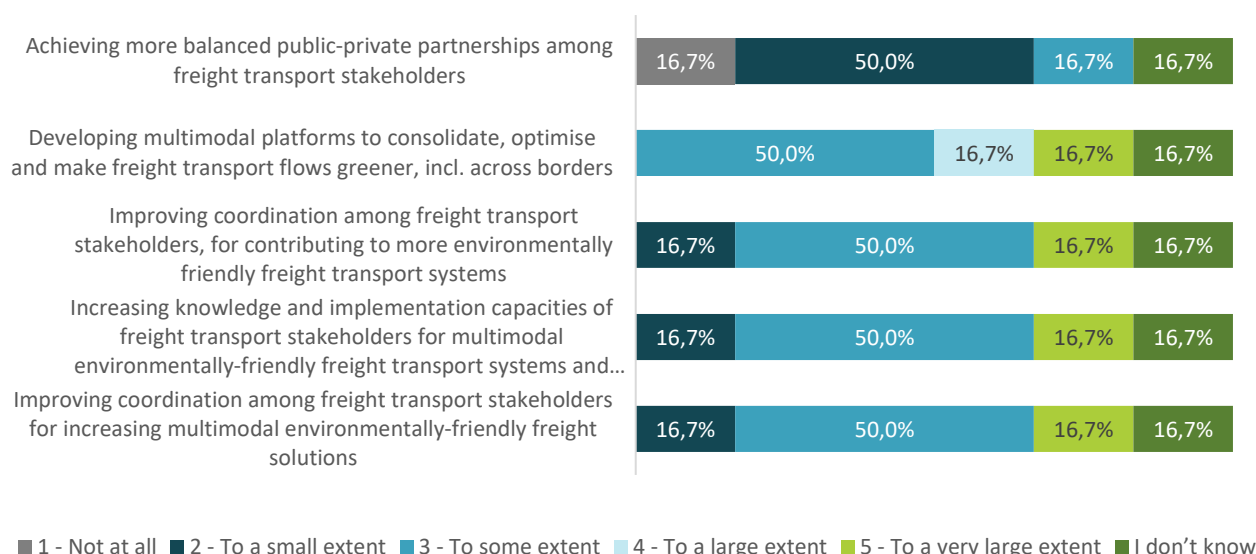
Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Other comments provided by respondents include “Developing links to peripheral areas and improving better public transport in peripheral areas; not assessed”.

With respect to the Programme contribution to improving coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally friendly freight solutions (SO 4.2), stakeholders feedback shows more modest achievements. Interviews indicated that this is due to a variety of reasons, among which competition, costs, regulatory frameworks are the most important.

FIGURE 20 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERREG CE PROGRAMME (SO4.2.)

Stakeholders' survey Q18. In which way and to what extent did the Interreg CE programme contribute to improving coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally-friendly freight solutions? (N=6)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

It can be thus concluded that the Programme's interventions can be directly linked to improvements observed at local, regional and transnational level, with respect to the specific topics of the projects implemented. This is also confirmed by the specific assessments carried out at project level (for example, [PERIPHERAL ACCESS Evaluation Report](#)).

3.4. Q3. UNDERSTANDING OF IMPACTS AND SHOWING WHAT WORKS BEST

The analysis of why the Interreg CE programme produced the observed impacts and what worked best to produce them was split into a qualitative and a quantitative part. The qualitative analysis deals with the information gathered through the interviews, surveys and case studies conducted; the quantitative analysis consists in a cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) of the outputs produced by the Interreg CE projects. For this, the CEA focused⁶³ on the Interreg CE projects from Calls 1 and 2 (85 projects), as projects of Calls 3 and 4 projects are not completed yet.

The results of both analyses can be grouped in three categories. First, there are results that address the strategic level of the programme itself. Second, the analyses provided results on what worked best that apply to all projects independent of their thematic focus. Finally, there are also results that are more closely connected to the projects' thematic areas.

3.4.1. PROGRAMME LEVEL RESULTS

After evaluating the 85 projects of the first and second calls of the Interreg CE programme 2014-2020, we consider it a particular strength of the programme that it allows for a **bottom-up development of projects**. Its bottom-up approach of project design directly addresses the needs of local and regional actors and stakeholders, thus contributing to regional as well as territorial development in a direct way. Additionally, the programme provides finance for locally important issues that otherwise would face severe difficulties in getting funded. This includes projects that are of more experimental nature, which apply and test innovative solutions for regional and local challenges.

As a consequence, this bottom-up approach also comes with certain risks, as locally developed projects, in particular if they include experimental solutions, might not always yield the expected outcomes. They are also more difficult to evaluate throughout their lifetime from project application to their finalisation, as they may require specific (technical) knowledge to assess their success prospects. Nevertheless, given the overwhelmingly large number of well-performing projects within the programme, the evaluation so far concludes that this is a risk worth to be taken. This is also the case in the light of the alternative of a top-down approach: though this latter approach would mitigate bottom-up approach related risks, it itself bears the risk that it applies a too strict framework for project development, which may miss the actual needs of the local and regional stakeholders.

At the same time, there are also common factors adversely affecting project implementation and thereby the success of projects. These relate first and foremost to **project financing**: the absence of pre-financing was deemed a barrier for the involvement of partners with limited financing capacity; in that regard, the possibility of co-financing/pre-financing offered by national/regional governments for lead partners (e.g. in Poland) has been praised. Moreover, the lengthy process for reimbursements (due to bureaucratic procedures) was thought to compromise the financial capacity of project partners to carry on with their projects, and thereby constitutes a limitation to project activities and the resulting outputs. Likewise, the conditions and administrative requirements (declaration) related to state aid rules (de minimis aid) were often problematic for the involvement of SMEs.

⁶³ The full CEA, including the methodology is provided in Annex 5.

3.4.2. GENERAL RESULTS

Project partnership

A key aspect of project success is the composition of the **project partnership**. The case studies emphasised the importance of having a good and balanced mix of skills and expertise within the project partnership; partners' skills were often mapped, in order to have the 'right' partner for the 'right' task, also ensuring that each partner would benefit from the project activities implemented (understanding partners' needs and interests and tailoring project activities thereto). Thus, involving a variety of partner institutions, e.g. a mix of public, private, academia, increases the projects' outreach and increases the relevance of the outputs produced.

Stakeholder engagement

The analysis indicates that **stakeholder engagement**, in particular vis-à-vis target groups, is **key to ensure a wide dissemination and uptake of project results**. It is essential for the adoption and actual implementation of the strategies and plans developed by the projects by local and regional policy-makers. Through this, the stronger stakeholder engagement is in the project, the higher is the probability that project outputs and results are a) sustainable over a longer period of time and b) rolled-out and up-scaled to increase the projects' benefits beyond their initial target groups. To this end, projects have dedicated significant efforts to mobilising stakeholders, empowering local decision-makers and training end-users. For example, in the UGB project, project partners, together with nearly 300 stakeholders, studied the effectiveness of the models and designed local pilot activities. Community meetings, workshops and study visits have proved effective in this respect.

Tailored approaches

Tailoring activities and communication to territorial characteristics (e.g. using national language) and target groups' needs and interests (e.g. identifying financing opportunities for SMEs) was crucial for activities to be impactful.

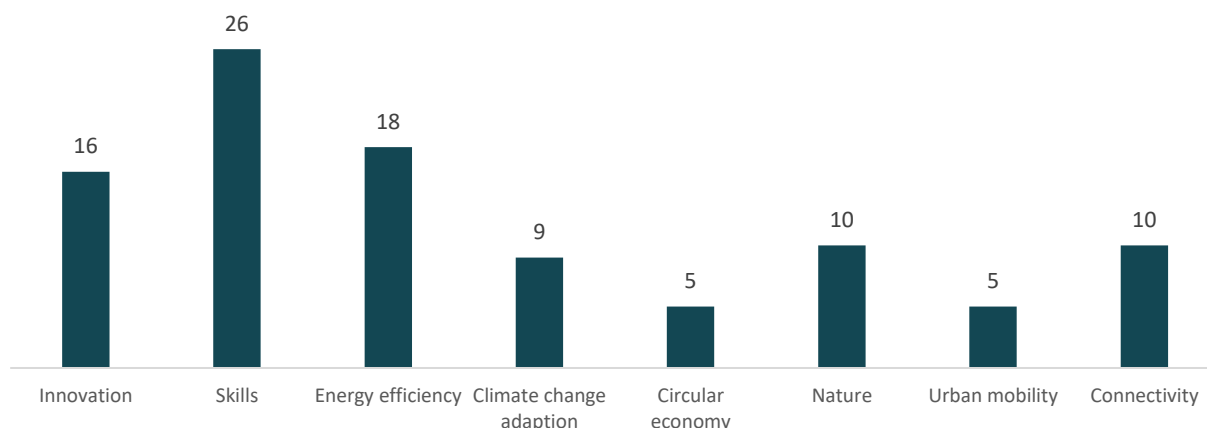
Outputs

Successful projects ensured that the outputs they developed were well-adapted to the needs of the end-users, easily applicable, transferable, and possible to use in a variety of contexts. Engaging stakeholders in their development and checking for feedback from users, enlisting the support of experts, as well as testing in a variety of contexts seem to be effective methods for ensuring quality and relevance for the outputs developed.

For a more detailed analysis of which types of outputs worked best, we performed a quantitative analysis, assessing the effectiveness and the costs of the outputs produced by the 85 projects from Calls 1 and 2⁶⁴. These projects were grouped in 8 main thematic clusters and their respective secondary clusters. Depending on their characteristics they could enter more than one cluster. The definition of clusters can be found in Annex 4.

⁶⁴ Of those, 4 projects were not included in the analysis because of missing output data. The projects are: 3Lynx, ENTeR, eCentral and VirtualArch.

FIGURE 21 NUMBER OF PROJECTS PER MAIN CLUSTER



Source: JS data, own calculations

The distribution of projects across clusters is illustrated in **Figure 21** for the main clusters and Table 3 in Annex 4 for the main and secondary clusters. The highest number of projects falls in the skills cluster (26 projects) of which 13 are also in the cultural heritage and CCI secondary cluster. Besides those 26 skills cluster projects, there are also 18 energy efficiency projects, 16 innovation projects, 10 projects in each of the nature and connectivity clusters, 9 climate change adaptation projects and, at the lower end, 5 circular economy as well as urban mobility focused projects.

The projects are fairly evenly distributed across the secondary clusters, for example in the energy efficiency main cluster, 7 projects relate directly to energy efficiency, 6 to energy-related mobility topics and 5 to greenhouse gases. Exceptions to these are social innovation projects which are under-represented, as there were overall a low number of projects focusing on this topic in the first two calls. At the same time, their social innovation focus was quite specific so that they could not be included in other main or secondary clusters.

Output effectiveness

The output effectiveness was determined by expert assessments. The JS project managers thereby rated outputs of the projects they themselves were in charge of (thematically), while Evaluation experts rated all outputs. The outputs were rated in 5 categories, each time on a scale from 1 (worst) to 5 (best) including half-steps. The overall output rating is the average rating of the 5 categories. These are in detail:

- The contribution of the output to improving the economic, social, and territorial development in CE.
- The importance of the output for reaching the respective project's goals.
- The extent to which the output contributed to generating synergies with other projects and/or EU/national/regional/local strategies, policies and programmes.
- The outputs transferability, i.e. the extent to which the output was transferred to public policies, other regions, sectors.
- The output's sustainability, i.e. to what extent is it used after the respective project's end.

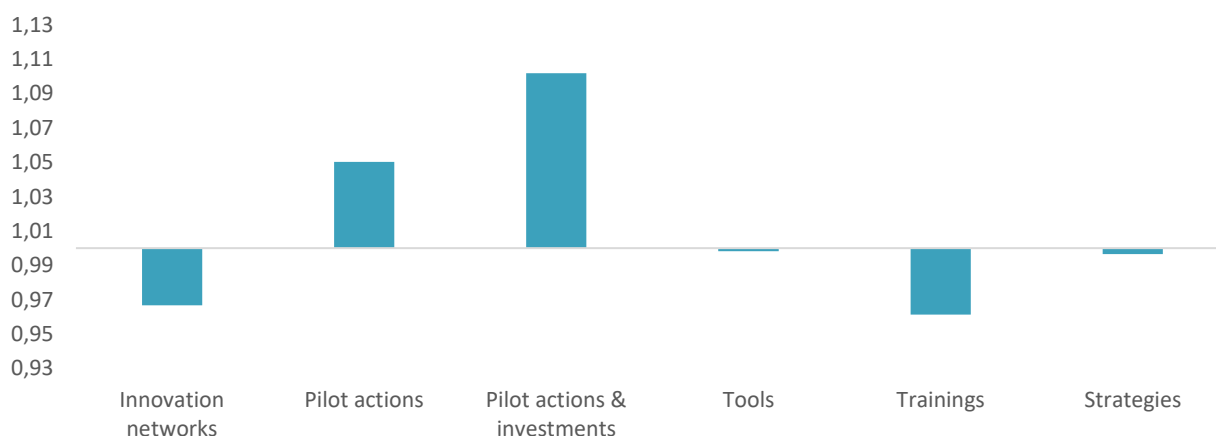
Generally, 93% percent of the outputs received a rating of three or higher, indicating that their performance was at least adequate in terms of the challenges they addressed.

Since the goal of the analysis was to determine which outputs worked best, and to reduce a potential expert bias in the ratings⁶⁵, a correction mechanism based on the main cluster average ratings was applied. It divided the output effectiveness ratings by the cluster average effectiveness (e.g. the average effectiveness of all outputs in the innovation cluster), to derive a standardised effectiveness measure. Therefore, in the following, output ratings are presented in relative rather than in absolute terms.

The standardised (relative) effectiveness measure is shown in **Figure 22** for the aggregated outputs, Figure 6 (Annex 4) for the outputs by main clusters as well as Table 9 in Annex 4 (for the outputs by secondary clusters). They provide the following insights:

- Pilot actions in combination with investments are considered to be the most effective type of output. This tends to hold almost over all main and secondary clusters, except for climate change adaption and urban mobility, where their rating is lower, but still slightly above average. In general, these pilot actions also tend to score highly – and higher than other outputs – in the individual categories of the effectiveness rating (see **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** in Annex 4).
- Pilot actions without investments are also regarded as highly effective, especially for innovation related projects in the corresponding cluster, where pilot actions with investments are rare. For the other clusters their effectiveness is rated above average (except for urban mobility).
- Tools and strategies have an average overall effectiveness of all the output types. At the main cluster level there is some differentiation, though. Tools seem to be highly effective in urban mobility related projects, while strategies are above-average effective in skills and connectivity related projects.
- Innovation networks and trainings were rated with a below-average effectiveness, both in all main and secondary clusters⁶⁶. This corresponds to the on-average low rating the outputs got for the individual components of the effectiveness rating. In particular, innovation networks scored worse regarding their synergies with policies and/or projects etc. as well as their transferability – though regarding the latter point it needs to be stressed that innovation networks are generally limited in number and only applicable to SO 1.1.

FIGURE 22 AVERAGE CLUSTER RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS RATING



Source: JS data, own calculations

⁶⁵ Here the assumption is used that experts, having to rate project outputs they were directly working with, tend to be not completely neutral in the scores they provide. Additionally, experts may have a different understanding of the 1-5 scale, with some providing, on average, higher scores than others. It is likely that outputs which received an overall lower score (such as trainings), have been particularly effective in some projects.

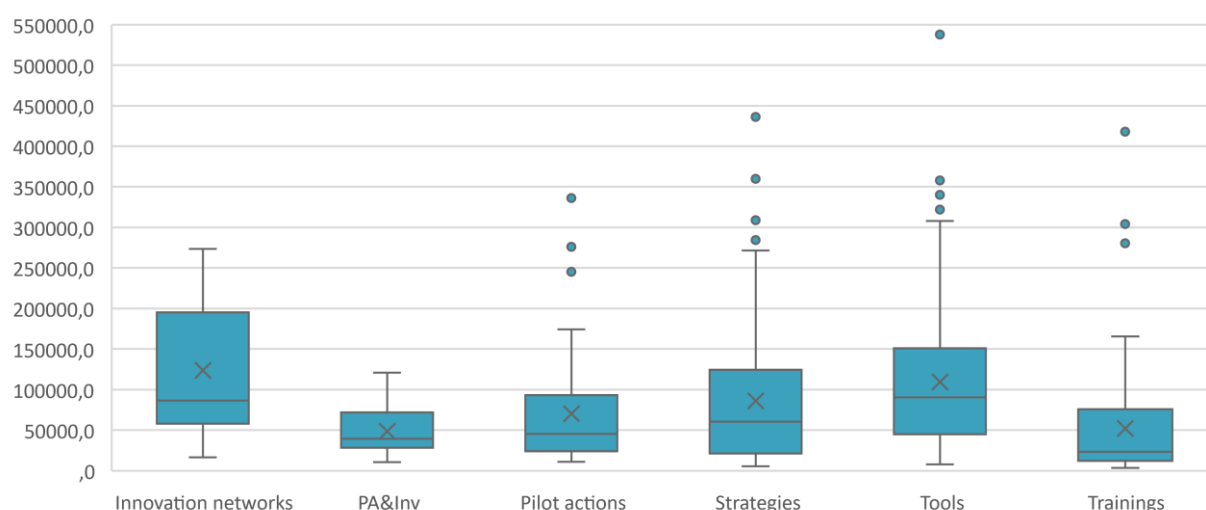
⁶⁶ To clarify, the vast majority of innovation networks and trainings received a rating of adequate or better. Yet, in comparison to other outputs, their ratings were lower on a relative basis.

Costs

The cost measure of the cost-effectiveness rating is defined as the ratio of ERDF expenditures by unit of output. The distribution of costs across outputs is illustrated in **Figure 23** and across clusters in Figure 9 in Annex 4. They show the following facts:

- Trainings have the lowest expenditures, their median expenditure is around 23 thousand EUR, hence 50% of all trainings cost less than this amount.
- Pilot actions with and without investments also tend to have low unit costs. The median expenditure for pilot actions with investments was slightly less than 40 thousand EUR, and for pilot actions without investments around 45 thousand EUR⁶⁷.
- Strategies, on average, have a middle position in terms of expenditures. The median expenditure is slightly more than 60 thousand EUR.
- Innovation networks and tools are the outputs with, on average, the highest expenditures per output unit. The median innovation network costs around 87 thousand Euro, while the median tool costs even more than 90 thousand Euro. Both show a high upward variability, i.e. more than 25% of the innovation networks cost 195 thousand Euro; for tools the respective number is 150 thousand EUR.
- From a cluster perspective, circular economy and energy efficiency projects' outputs tend to require less funds than those from other clusters, the median expenditure overall output types in both clusters being 35 thousand and 37 thousand EUR, respectively. Climate change adaption, connectivity, nature and urban mobility outputs have median values around 50 to 60 thousand EUR. On average, outputs in the skills and innovation clusters have the highest costs, i.e. 80 thousand and 86 thousand EUR median expenditures, respectively.
- All clusters have a high variability in costs per output, i.e. very low cost and very high-cost outputs are both produced in each cluster.

FIGURE 23 DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENDITURES, BY OUTPUT TYPE



Source: JS data, own calculations

⁶⁷ The fact that average costs for pilot actions with investments are lower than for pure pilot actions is due to occasional difficulties to allocate investments exactly to one pilot action. Thus, in some cases investments have been allocated to more than one pilot action, thereby reducing average costs.

Cost-effectiveness

As a final step, the Evaluation team calculated the cost-effectiveness index as the ratio of the outputs' effectiveness to their costs. For this, the Evaluation team used a relative cost measure to be consistent with the relative effectiveness measure. It was calculated according to the method used to derive the relative effectiveness measure.

It is noteworthy that there are some significant limitations with the cost-effectiveness index.

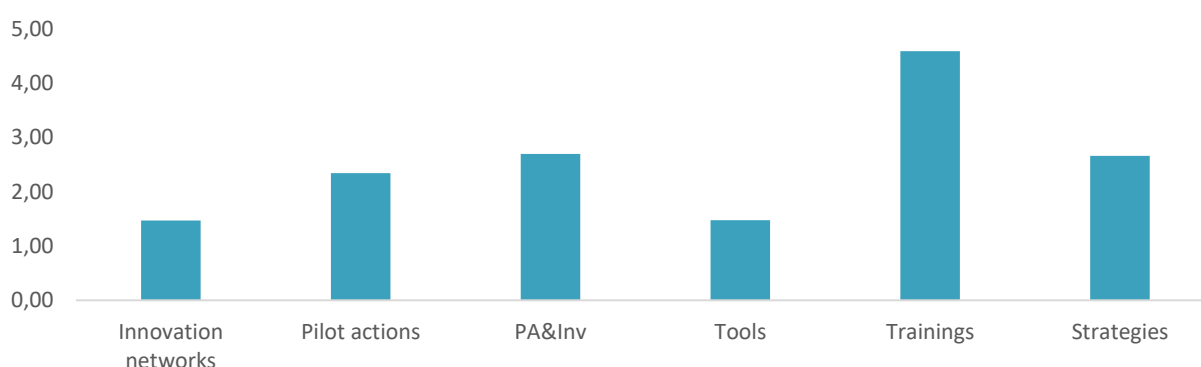
- Firstly, from the way it is constructed, the index assumes a specific cost-to-effectiveness relationship, which is hard to be backed up empirically. This relationship implicitly assumes that if the cost of an output doubles, the effectiveness of the output has to double as well for the index to stay constant. In practice this is not given, because presently, the effectiveness rating is an ordinal measure, i.e. it measures categories or a ranking, rather than quantities.
- Secondly, it is doubted whether such needed relationship can be estimated from the available project and expenditure data, particularly as there is no apparent correlation between the size of expenditures for and the effectiveness of the outputs (cf. Annex 4).

Consequently, the resulting index must be interpreted with extreme caution and conclusion should rather be drawn by combining the individual results for effectiveness and expenditures rather than on the mechanically calculated index.

Nevertheless, the index provides interesting insights, some of which are apparent from the previous section, but also others that show potential dilemmas for project or output evaluation and selection. For this, **Figure 24** and **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** as well as Table 12 (both in Annex 4) depict the index for the aggregate level, the main clusters and the secondary clusters. From the index we can derive the following points:

- **Pilot actions with and without investments seem to be cost-effective measures.** This was already demonstrated in the analysis above, as both output types have high effectiveness ratings and, at least on average, low costs.
- **Tools and innovation networks seem to have lower cost-effectiveness.** Again, this can be read from the above-outlines results as both outputs are, on average, relatively expensive outputs paired with either a below-average (innovation networks) or average effectiveness measure (tools).
- **Strategies seem to be reasonably-efficient outputs,** with average costs and effectiveness.
- **Trainings do not yield a clear-cut cost-effectiveness valuation.** They got a below-average effectiveness rating, yet they are also the least expensive tools. Hence, because of the implicit cost-effectiveness relation assumed by the index, it shows trainings as being most cost-effective. This result needs to be treated cautiously for the aforementioned reasons.

FIGURE 24 AGGREGATE AVERAGE COST-EFFECTIVENESS MEASURE



Source: JS data, own calculations

Results

Considering the analysis presented in the chapters above the main result of the comparison of the outputs' effectiveness and costs is that pilot actions with and without investments seem to be highly cost-effective measures to tackle the CE challenges.

In comparison, the other output types, i.e. trainings, strategies, tools and innovation networks, are less effective. However, given the strong limitations of the cost-effectiveness analysis as such, these results are not necessarily reliable. In fact, trainings, strategies etc. may just be as effective as pilot actions with or without investment in tackling the challenges of the Interreg CE regions and territories.

The main advantage, and hence the popularity of pilot actions (with/without investments) is *inter alia* reflected in the case study observation that they are highly important for stakeholder engagement and policy uptake. Also, they are an efficient tool to test and showcase the applicability and utility of project results 'on the ground' to local communities and policy-makers.

Thus, pilot actions were emphasised as "living laboratories", where newly designed tools, strategies, plans etc. were tested. They provided the opportunity to showcase that the proposed solutions work and produce visible benefits for their users. Evidence gathered during the evaluation shows that the selection of the pilot locations is key for the success of the projects. In this respect, early engagement with the stakeholders, careful assessment of their willingness and actual capacity to carry out the activities, empowering local stakeholders and gaining people support have proved generally effective.

3.4.3. PROJECT SPECIFIC RESULTS

The following section lists project features that were observed to be an important part for the respective project's success. Compared to the above points they are more specific in nature and were thus observed for projects in specific thematic areas. However, this does not exclude that a) in many cases these features were observed for projects of two or more thematic areas and b) these features can be applied by projects in other thematic areas as well. The features are briefly described below.

First, projects **developing skills for the market** showed to be highly successful. Thus, such projects enabled local policy-makers and stakeholders to bridge the gap between economic and social development needs and the economic viability of certain policy measures, thus making them sustainable in the long term. Examples come from the social, cultural or innovation thematic areas. As far as the social area is concerned [Social\(i\)Makers](#) contributed to building up social innovation operational skills and entrepreneurial competences for social and commercial SMEs, start-ups and companies, social investors, public authorities and NGOs. In the cultural area the [RESTAURA](#) project increased the public sector's capacity to sustainably run and use cultural heritage sites via Public-Private-Partnership schemes.

Regarding innovation, the [KETGATE](#) project supported SMEs to get access to and use Key Enabling Technologies, thereby increasing their and the respective regions' competitiveness. Other projects **linked policy-making to practice**, particularly in areas where this was not straightforward and highly complex such as innovation. A good example for this is the [SMART_watch](#) project that created links between Regional Innovation Strategies, their monitoring practices and the actual needs of smart specialisations' end-users. Related to this are projects that strengthened the cooperation of various stakeholders in order to tackle certain challenges that otherwise could not be easily dealt with. One such example is the [BIOCOMPACT-CE](#) project that involved stakeholders at all levels to promote ecologically sustainable paper-bioplastics packaging solutions.

Other successful projects provided **integrated solutions to complex challenges**. Such projects managed to integrate a multitude of factors that characterise the respective challenge into a single output framework and thus contributed significantly to address those challenges. For example, in transport related areas the [LOW-CARB](#) project supported integrated and low-carbon mobility solutions for public transport in Central Europe and thus helped to make regional transport networks in FUA's more CO₂-efficient. Similarly regarding environmental topics, the [GreenerSites](#) project managed to reconcile the need to rehabilitate brownfield sites, increase the environmental quality and strengthen economic development in CE FUA's.

In a similar manner, other projects contributed to regional/local policy-making by **emphasising cross-over relationships**, i.e. by combining and providing solutions to two or more challenges simultaneously. As an illustration, the [PROLINE-CE](#) project introduced integrated land use management approaches to improve the protection of drinking water resources, on the one hand, and simultaneously protect against floods/droughts, on the other.

Some successful projects are also characterised by their **introduction of highly innovative actions or methods** to local and regional policy-making. Thus, they provided local and regional stakeholders with solutions that usually have a high technological barrier and therefore need specialised knowledge to get access to. There are a number of examples for this, like the [FIRECE](#) project that supported low-carbon transition by introducing innovative financial instruments to help putting the Regional Energy Plans into practice. Likewise, the [GeoPLASMA-CE](#) project supported the use of shallow geothermal energy for heating and cooling, while the [AMIIGA](#) project inter alia used modelling and statistical methods to tackle the groundwater contamination challenge at FUA level in CE.

Last but not least, there are also important examples of successful projects that supported **equal opportunities** in CE. One of these projects is [COME-IN!](#) that contributed to equal opportunities by making cultural heritage sites and experiences accessible to disadvantaged groups of the society.

3.5. ADDITIONAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS

3.5.1. SYNERGETIC AND MULTIPLICATION EFFECTS

Synergetic and multiplication effects go beyond those specifically intended by the projects or interventions. They are usually expected to occur due to factors such as: positive interactions between projects themselves or projects and programmes, fruitful cooperation between project partners, efficient coordination between project partners and programme authorities or timely exploitation of project results. The analysis of synergetic and multiplication effects focused on two dimensions: (1) accelerating and supporting additional funding and (2) generating other partnerships or cooperation contexts.

The evaluation showed that projects succeeded in securing additional funding for ensuring the continuation of activities, for expanding the work done to other regions, reaching new target groups, applying the results in related topics. The funds leveraged amount to 2,46 bn EUR (684.3% of the values forecasted by projects in their application forms). However, when removing outliers, both total value (around 760 mil. EUR) and progress towards forecasted values (as set in the AF) is much smaller, yet significant (i.e. 211% - as outlined in section 3.3.2.).

TABLE 9 FUNDS LEVERAGED, PROJECTS UNTIL CUT-OFF DATE

	Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements	No. of completed projects until cut-off date	Average amount of funds leveraged per project
SO1.1	66 398 852	13	5 107 604
SO1.2	43 228 558	12	3 602 380
SO2.1	112 102 467	7	16 014 638
SO2.2	125 323 684	5	25 064 737
SO2.3	175 951 035	6	29 325 172
SO3.1	19 829 150	9	2 203 239
SO3.2	74 477 418	16	4 654 839
SO3.3	38 824 707	8	4 853 088
SO4.1	72 162 265	6	12 027 044

SO4.2	1 732 173 400 32 173 400*	3	577 391 133
TOTAL OVER ALL SOs	2 460 471 535 / 760 471 535*	85	28 946 724

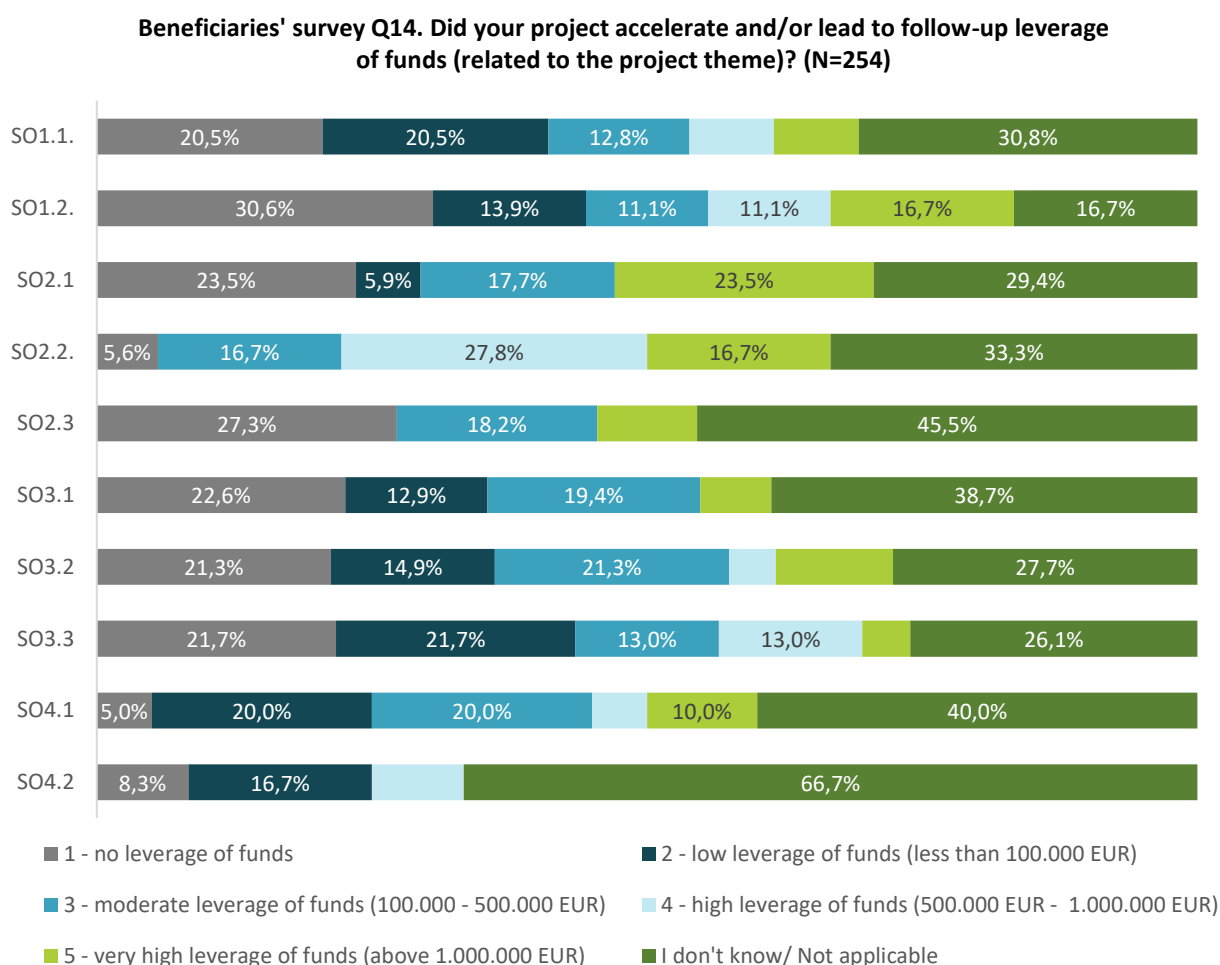
Source: Own calculations based on Interreg CE data provided by the JS on 85 projects completed until cut-off date 14th of December

There are however significant differences across Thematic Priorities, SOs and even projects within SOs in terms of funds leverage:

- Innovation (SO 1.1 and SO 1.2) projects leveraged between 3.6 and 5.1 million EUR on average,
- Environment SO 3.1 projects focusing on natural heritage leveraged 2.2 million EUR on average,
- Environment SO 3.3 and Culture (SO 3.2) projects leveraged close to 5 million EUR on average,
- Low-Carbon SO 2.1 and Transport SO 4.1 projects leveraged between 12 and 16 million EUR on average,
- Low-Carbon SO 2.2 and 2.3 projects leveraged between 25 and 30 million EUR on average, and
- Transport SO 4.2 projects leveraged 577 million EUR on average, with one project (out of three) reporting no leverage of fund and one outlying project ([TRANSTRITIA](#)) reporting a 1.7 billion EUR of funds leveraged, thereby significantly driving the SO- and programme-averages upwards.

*Without [TRANSTRITIA](#) (i.e. 1.7 bn EUR), the average fund leverage across all remaining 85 completed projects would amount to **8.9 million EUR**. In that context, low-carbon projects (SOs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) and passenger transport projects (SO 4.1) are demonstrating above-average fund leverage capacity.

FIGURE 25 BENEFICIARIES' FEEDBACK ON PROJECTS' CAPACITY TO LEVERAGE FUNDS



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

Out of the 85 projects analysed, 22 reported funds leveraged beyond the AF targets, most of them in SOs 1.1., SO2.3. and SO3.2. At the same time, 4 projects did not report any additional funds leveraged ([Focus IN CD](#), [INNO-WISEs](#), [ChemMultimodal](#) and [ENTeR](#)). Compared to [TRANSTRITIA](#), these results show great variation across projects. According to the documentary analysis, most projects rely on additional funding sources at the local or national level, as well as on other EU programmes (e.g. LIFE, other Interreg programmes).

This wide variation between SOs is also reflected in the responses to the beneficiary survey, although it is here noteworthy that a rather strong proportion (i.e. between a quarter and two thirds) of survey respondents was, in all SOs but SO 1.2, not able to assess fund leverage for their project. Surprisingly, the proportion of survey respondents indicating no or low leverage of funds (i.e. less than 100,000 EUR) was, in all SOs but SO 2.2, larger than the proportion of survey respondents indicating a high or very high leverage of funds (i.e. above half a million EUR). The discrepancy between the figures reported for the corresponding thematic result indicator, on the one hand, and the responses to the beneficiary survey, on the other, could point to an over-estimation of non-anonymously, self-reported fund leverage in the project final reports and/or to a different understanding of the survey question (e.g. when beneficiaries answer the question for their own organisation only, and not for the entire project partnership as it is the case for the projects' final reports).

Documentary analysis showed that **most projects build upon the previous experience** and knowledge acquired by the partners, in different contexts (for example [AMIIGA](#), which built on and capitalized on the results of previous projects, especially MAGIC and FOKS).

Evidence suggests that most projects are implemented in **synergy** with other Interreg and EU-level programmes, such as LIFE, Horizon or Urbact. Such an example is the case of the [SYNERGY project](#), which linked up with the Knowledge Transfer Upper Rhine (KTUR), Interreg V Upper Rhine and several Interreg CE projects. Another example is the [FORGETHERITAGE](#) project, which worked together with ARCHES, CLIC, EUCANET, I-Media-Cities, Open Heritage, REACH, ROCK, RURITAGE to provide inputs into the concept for the White paper and recommendation to the EU Urban Agenda partnership on culture and cultural heritage, drafter by ICLEI & EUROCITIES. Other projects were implemented in synergy with national funds (for example [LUMAT](#)). Finally, Interreg CE projects financed under the fourth call should enhance synergetic effects within the programme itself as this call "is devoted to the exploitation of outputs and results being delivered by projects funded by the [programme] within the first two calls"⁶⁸.

From a thematic perspective, examples of such synergetic effects are numerous, for instance:

- In **Innovation**, examples include the [SMART watch](#) project, where project results were passed on to several institutions linked to the Baltic Sea Region, the [Interreg ADRIION Programme](#) and S3 Platform. At the local level for example, [TRANS³Net](#) cooperated with [FUTURESax](#), a network of transfer supporting organisations in Saxony and some of the projects results also, became part of the regional innovation strategy, while in Czechia the project cooperated with the national RE-START programme supporting long-term development of coal regions. Many innovation projects established links to other, similar projects and initiative. Here, the [SYNERGY](#) project for example linked up with the Knowledge Transfer Upper Rhine (KTUR), Interreg V Upper Rhine and several Interreg Central Europe projects.
- In **Low-Carbon**, examples include [Dynamic Light](#), where cooperation with the Horizon2020 Project "Premium Light Pro" and with the Nature Park authority Nossentiner Schwinzer Heide in Germany were established. [TOGETHER](#) cooperated with other ETC initiatives and projects as well as Horizon projects. Similar experience is observed for other projects including [ENERGY@SCHOOL](#), [BOOSTEE-CE](#), [CE-HEAT](#) and others. Programme stakeholders highlighted the potential for synergies between Low-Carbon and other Interreg priorities (e.g. Transport), as well as other EU-funded programmes and initiatives (e.g. circular economy).

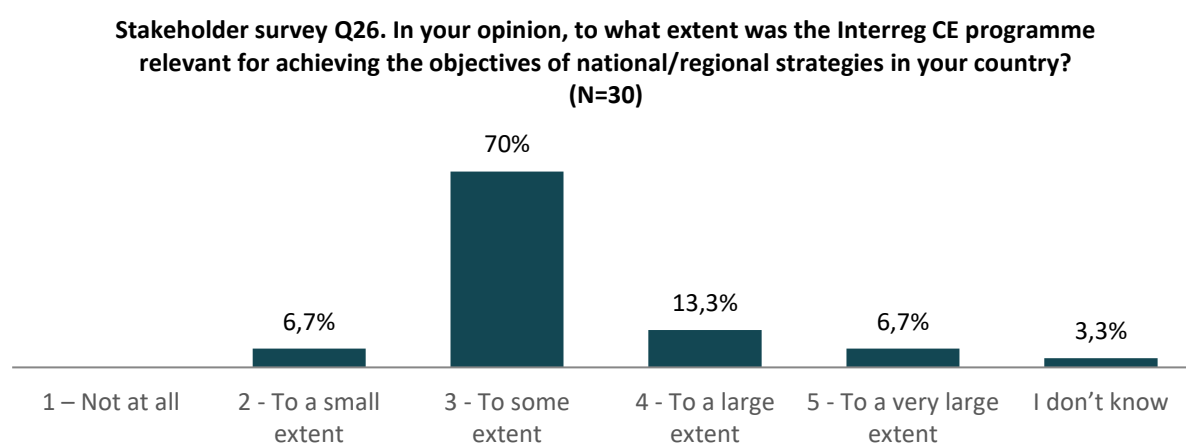
⁶⁸ Interreg CE fourth call documentation, 4 March 2019.

- In **Environment**, most examples show that partners from the current projects went on to develop new ones. This is the case of [RAINMAN](#), [FramWat](#), [PROLINE-CE](#) and [SUSTREE](#) project partners, who came together and are currently implementing the [TEACHER-CE](#) project, also financed through Interreg CE.
- In **Culture**, the Guidelines and Handbook developed in the [COME-IN!](#) project was used as a base for increasing accessibility of the UNESCO sites ([USEFALL](#) project, Italy-Croatia Cross Border Cooperation Programme). Additionally, the project results were capitalised in the Horizon project [ARCHES](#). Furthermore, the [ForgetHeritage](#) worked together with [ARCHES](#), [CLIC](#), [I-Media-Cities](#), [Open Heritage](#), [REACH](#), [ROCK](#), [RURITAGE](#) (all funded through Horizon), [EUCANET](#) (co-financed by Europe for Citizens Programme), to provide inputs into the concept for the [White paper and recommendation to the EU Urban Agenda partnership on culture and cultural heritage](#), drafted by [ICLEI](#) & [EUROCITIES](#).
- In **Transport**, examples of synergies are to be found between [CONNECT2CE](#), [TRANS-BORDERS](#) and [PERIPHERAL ACCESS](#) projects. These were mainly facilitated by the Programme authorities and encouraged exchange of experience between the partners.

Documentary analysis and interviews showed that Interreg CE projects are generally **aligned with local and regional strategies**. There were cases of projects being expanded to other areas than initially planned (e.g. policy uptake across regional borders), hinting towards **spillover effects**. For example, [TRANS³NET](#) project partners cooperated with [FUTURESax](#), a network of transfer supporting organisations in Saxony and some of the projects results also, became part of the regional innovation strategy, while in Czechia the project cooperated with the national [RE-START](#) programme supporting long-term development of coal regions. Alignment with local and regional strategies is assessed during project appraisal.

The stakeholder survey confirmed that the Programme has contributed to some extent to achieving objectives of national or regional (sub-national) strategies (**Figure 26**), for example, by using the outputs produced in projects to update regional policies and programming ([INDUCULT2.0](#), [LUMAT](#)).

FIGURE 26 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON THE PROGRAMME'S CONTRIBUTION TO ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVES OF NATIONAL/REGIONAL STRATEGIES



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Many projects are highly relevant also for regions outside the Interreg CE area. For example, the results of the [BHENEFIT](#) project were transferred to stakeholders in the Western Balkans region and used to train professionals dealing with planning and management of historical built areas, even though no project partner was located in the region. Concepts, data and models developed in the [SUSTREE](#) project were used within the [Interreg Danube](#) project [REFOCUS](#), and thus, [SUSTREE](#) results will be applied outside of the CE region.

Multiple examples also confirm that projects have been **successful in generating other partnerships or cooperation contexts**. Such is the case of the [SMART WATCH](#) project, whose results were passed on to several institutions linked to the Baltic Sea Region, the [Interreg ADRIAN Programme](#) and S3 Platform. Another example is that of the [COME-IN!](#) project, where the Guidelines and Handbook developed as part of the project was used as a base for increasing accessibility of the UNESCO sites ([USEFALL](#) project, [Italy-Croatia Cross Border Cooperation Programme](#)). The [COME-IN!](#) partnership coordinated with the [European Disability Forum](#) and developed points for common contribution in consultations for new [Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030](#). Additionally, the project results were capitalized upon in the Horizon project [ARCHES](#). Securing the continuation of activities and capitalisation of results has been strongly promoted by the CP, through the Application Manuals of Calls 1 and 2 and through Calls 3 and 4 (not covered by the current report).

Evidence gathered during the evaluation nonetheless points to the observation that **more could be done** in terms of supporting synergies and multiplication effects. Several interviewees pointed out that Interreg CE projects often deliver local (e.g. through pilot actions), though widely useful results that could be taken into consideration when national strategies and action plans are developed. That is why when the projects are over, they are “forgotten” and people do not use those results anymore, unless another similar project is implemented.

At the same time, stakeholders indicated that greater synergies could be ensured between different EU-funded programmes which have a territorial overlap, by strengthening and formalising information exchange between the programme authorities, organising joint events, facilitating knowledge sharing between projects, and capitalising on the knowledge and experience of entities which participate in more than one programme. Similar achievements could be encouraged between Interreg CE and national/mainstream programmes, particularly with the support of NCPs, but also with the support of relevant stakeholders, including, for example members of the European Parliament.

Some beneficiaries pointed out that while leveraging additional funds or achieving synergies with other initiatives is important, these objectives are secondary for their projects.

The evaluation validated the following assumptions

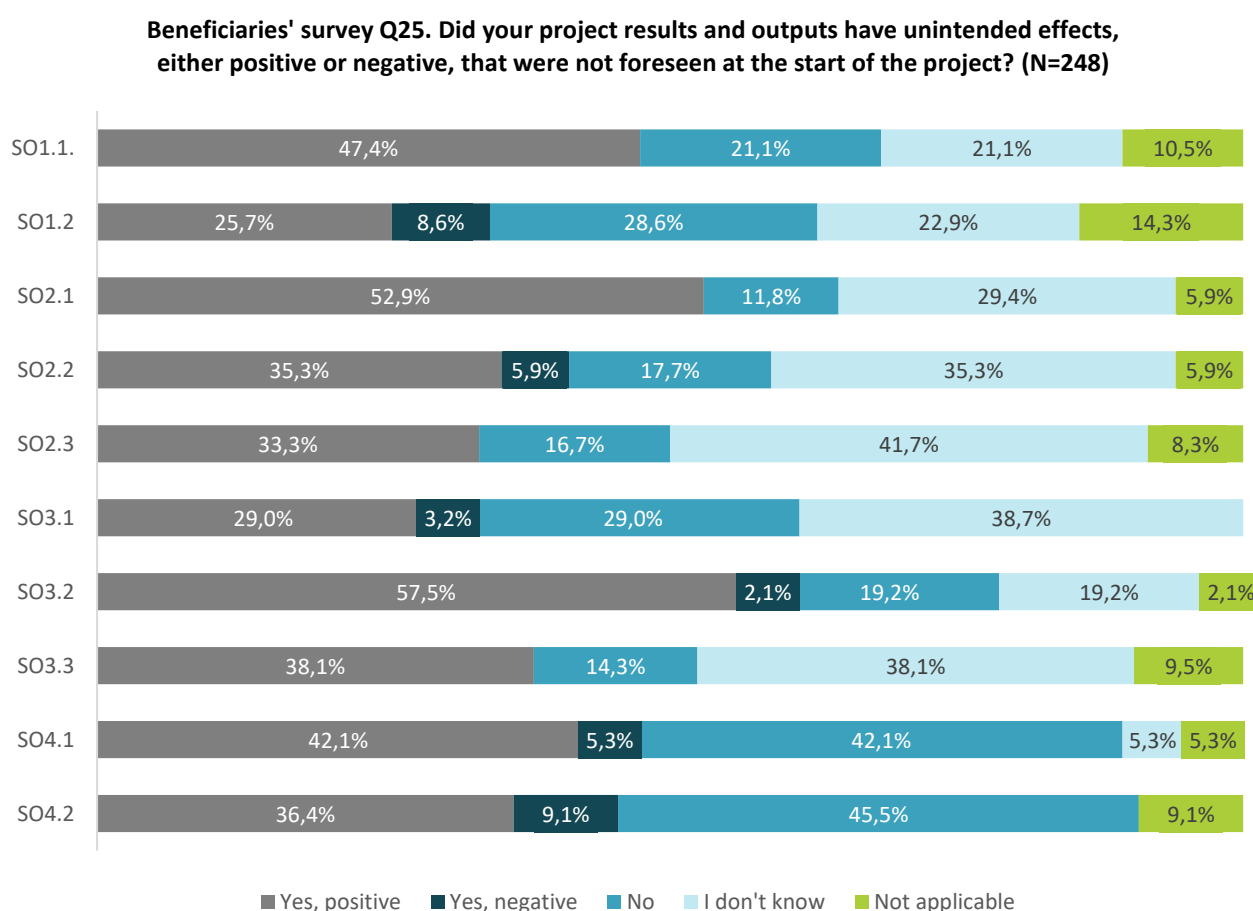
- (1) Transnational cooperation enabled regions and cities to jointly tackle challenges that go beyond borders
- (2) Implementation mechanisms were able to trigger multiplication and synergetic effects / spillovers / capitalization/ leverage effects.

3.5.2. UNINTENDED EFFECTS

Unintended effects were explored through document analysis, interviews and the surveys carried out as part of the evaluation process. Findings were then validated during the focus groups with key stakeholders.

The initial review of documents showed that no unintended effects or risks which might lead to unintended effects have been anticipated at programming stage. Also, except for SO 2.1 and SO 3.2, **more than 50% of the beneficiaries either consider that their projects had no unintended effects or are not aware of any. Most unintended effects noticed by beneficiaries are positive** and only six SOs have projects which brought about negative unintended effects. However, there are significant differences depending on the thematic focus ([Figure 27](#)).

FIGURE 27 BENEFICIARIES' FEEDBACK ON UNINTEDED EFFECTS



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

- For **Innovation**, nearly half of respondents in SO1.1. consider that there were positive unintended effects, mentioning cooperation with SMEs as example. For SO1.2., this opinion is shared by only 25.7% of respondents. Some examples provided refer to increased technological skills or obtaining specific certifications. On the other hand, approx. 51.4% of respondents are either unaware or think there were no unintended effects, while 8.6% believe the unintended effects were negative. Some reasons include the Covid-19 outbreak, or the fact that “[partners] needed too much time to understand the opportunities of the project (too [little] administrative understanding by few partners, who did not exploit full potential offered)”.
- For **Low carbon**, positive effects are indicated by 53% of respondents (SO2.1.), and one third for SO2.2. and SO2.3. No respondent indicated that there were negative unintended effects, except for SO2.2 (5.9%). This overall positive opinion is reflected in a few examples: “It was not foreseen that some project outputs will be used to launch a new innovative program”, or “Interest in waste heat utilization increased at all relevant stakeholders during project implementation - perfect timing.”

- For **Environment** SO 3.1, approx. one third (29%) consider that there were no unintended effects, or that they are not aware of them (also 38.7%). Positive unintended effects are acknowledged also in 29% of responses. The examples provided by respondents indicate the high administrative burden of project implementation or the need for better coordination at the national level regarding brownfields regeneration. Other responses simply consider that the effects “were known and predictable”. Only 3% of respondents reported negative unintended effects. For SO 3.3, there were as many respondents who reported positive unintended effects as those who were not aware of them (38% in both cases), and another 14% who believed that there were no unintended effects at all. No respondent reported negative unintended effects.
- Beneficiaries under **Culture** SO 3.2 declared that there were positive unintended effects (57.5%). Some unintended effects mentioned indicate: “we took collaboration to the next level, from regional to cross-border or transnational [level]”, or “further interest for the topic and invitations to participate in knowledge transfer”.
- For the **Transport** Thematic Priority, 42.1% of respondents in SO 4.1 and 36.4% of respondents in SO 4.2 believe that projects had positive unintended effects, outlining the potential for further cooperation and the uptake of pilot actions into more concrete projects. An almost equal share of respondents indicated, however, that there were no unintended effects.

3.5.3. CONTRIBUTION TO A BETTER GOVERNANCE

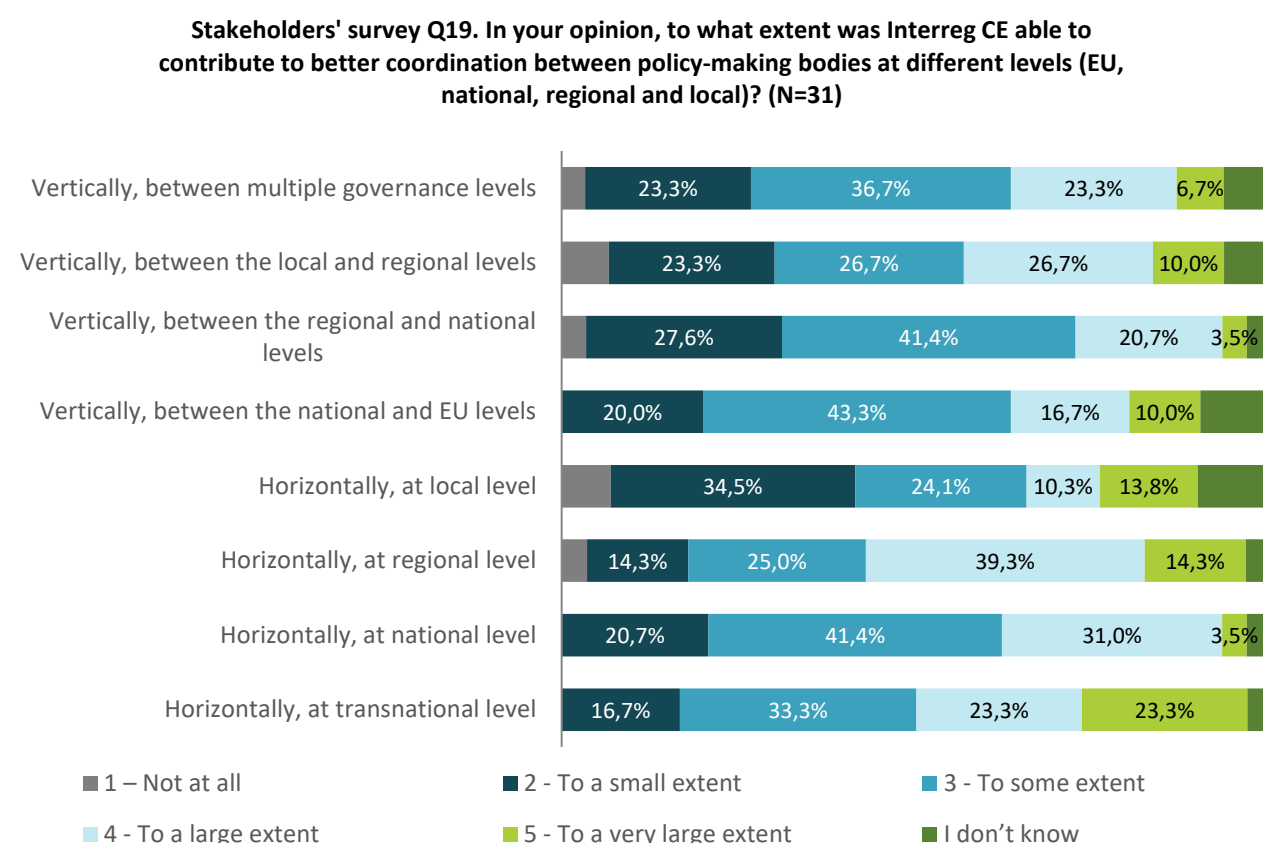
Multi-level governance (MLG) is one of the cross-cutting themes of the Cohesion Policy. According to the EU Territorial Agenda, *“MLG formats are required to manage different functional territories and to ensure balanced and coordinated contribution of local, regional, national and European actors in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity. This needs vertical and horizontal coordination between decision-making bodies at different levels and sector-related policies to secure consistency and synergy.”*

MLG is closely associated with the successful achievement of the cohesion goals, as it contributes to improve governance and build stronger institutional structures. Generally, MLG implies that different actors, at EU, national, regional and local levels are involved in the EU policy implementation cycle. MLG is especially encouraged in urban development and regeneration policies.

Documentary analysis showed that **the design of the programme and of the call documents ensured the necessary framework for implementing/ mainstreaming/ testing different governance formats**, for example in supporting place-based approaches and in encouraging collaboration and coordination between actors at different levels. Interventions targeting functional urban areas (FUAs) are particularly conducive to enabling MLG, as it was confirmed through the surveys, interviews and case-studies.

Findings from the survey (**Figure 28**) show that **most beneficiaries agree that projects contributed to better coordination to a large or even very large extent, but mostly horizontally**. Strong contribution to vertical coordination between the local and regional levels was also reported by beneficiaries, reflecting the bottom-up design of Interreg CE projects.

FIGURE 28 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK REGARDING THE PROGRAMME'S CONTRIBUTION TO BETTER COORDINATION BETWEEN POLICY-MAKING BODIES AT DIFFERENT LEVELS



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

- For the **Innovation** Thematic Priority, horizontal coordination at local, regional and national level as well as vertical coordination between the local and regional levels is positively assessed by a majority of beneficiaries in SO 1.1. One of the main reasons for this positive impact on policy coordination both horizontally and vertically is likely to stem from the specific focus and good performance of SO 1.1 projects in strengthening the linkages (leading to coordination) between all actors of the innovation systems, including policymakers. This is notably illustrated by the example of one specific project: *“increased visibility of concrete interregional collaboration and motivated decision-making bodies for using similar models and concrete personal relationships created within the project”*. For SO 1.2 projects, only horizontal coordination at the local and regional levels was positively assessed by a majority of beneficiaries. This more limited impact on policy coordination is likely to be explained by the stronger focus of SO 1.2 on the private sector (entrepreneurs, market needs, etc.) in comparison to SO 1.1 on the public sector.
- For the **Low carbon** Thematic Priority, there is general consensus among beneficiaries that projects improved coordination between decision-making bodies at the local level, at the regional level, and between both levels. Horizontal coordination at the national level and vertical coordination between the national and EU levels is regarded as less improved than other levels, in line with the bottom-up approach (starting at the local and regional level) widely taken in Interreg CE projects.

- For the **Environment** Thematic Priority, horizontal coordination at the local and regional levels as well as vertical coordination between both levels was positively assessed by a majority of beneficiaries under SO 3.1, as in other themes. Most beneficiaries under SO 3.3 considered that their projects contributed to improving horizontal coordination at the local, regional and national levels as well as across governance levels, except between the national and EU levels. This finding of a stronger impact on better governance is consistent with one of the project results indicated as mostly successful: improving coordination of policy-making for integrated environmental management in FUAs (see above).
- Likewise, a majority of respondents under SO 3.2 (**Culture**) agreed that their projects contributed to improving coordination at the local level, at the regional level and between these two levels. Coordination at and from the national level (to the EU level) was largely negatively assessed. This could be explained by the fact that cultural heritage and resources are locally anchored, while innovation and low-carbon issues (e.g. improving energy efficiency) are more widely relevant.
- For the **Transport** Thematic Priority, respondents under SO 4.1 were largely positive about improved coordination at the local level, at the regional level and between these two levels, a similar finding than in most other SOs. More interestingly, a majority of beneficiaries under SO 4.2 stated that their projects improved horizontal coordination at the local, regional and national levels, as well as vertical coordination between the regional and national levels, and between the national and EU levels. This finding of a much stronger impact on policy coordination both horizontally and vertically is to be interpreted in line with the cross-regional, often cross-border nature and scale of the freight transport systems addressed in this SO.

The institutional stakeholder survey shows that 50% of the respondents consider that the Programme was generally successful at improving coordination and cooperation across governance levels (Q6). More in detail, respondents acknowledge that **the Programme had some contribution to improving coordination between policy-making bodies, but that it was more successful in doing so horizontally than vertically**. National level horizontal coordination seems to be least impacted by the projects funded through Interreg CE. (Q19, shown in **Figure 28**).

Examples of positive, although sometimes modest contributions, refer to:

- supporting the creation of new governance systems for integrated mobility concepts in functional urban areas, through the horizontal and vertical coordination of stakeholders and policies,
- enhancing governance and improving vertical and horizontal coordination of policy-making for integrated environmental management in functional urban areas,
- linking different policies, sectors and administrative levels to adopt sustainable, long-term strategic visions.

Interviews with programme stakeholders confirmed that **participation in Interreg CE is a driver of multilevel governance** (MLG) because of the nature of cooperation in Interreg CE projects, i.e. vertical cooperation between institutions from different governance levels within the same country and horizontal cooperation across borders, involvement of citizens in a bottom-up approach, etc.

"The key features of the Interreg CE programme are: cooperation, synergy, and coordination. To the greatest extent this program describes the term 'cooperation', in particular between project partners at different management levels."

Stakeholder interviewed during the evaluation

It is however noteworthy that the Programme was generally successful in promoting MLG in those regions and countries where the legislative and administrative frameworks were already conducive to such arrangements and where the links between regional and local authorities are stronger. Therefore, some programme stakeholders expressed a more reserved opinion on the contribution of the programme to policy coordination and multilevel governance. More specifically, the limited institutional capacity and/or

institutional willingness to engage in some projects, on the one hand, and the limited means of Interreg CE projects for achieving vertical policy coordination across more than two governance levels, on the other, are constraints to the ambition of achieving multilevel governance - even though the importance of that ambition is widely acknowledged.

Pilot actions have been cited as the most notable example of multilevel governance, where regional authorities – in their role as project partner - reach out to local authorities and entrepreneurs to join the project/activities. This aspect was also confirmed through the case studies ([RAINMAN](#), [LUMAT](#)).

3.5.4. CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER STRATEGIES

Contribution to the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

Most Interreg CE projects mainly target the smart and sustainable growth objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The direct, incremental contribution of the Interreg CE programme to achieving the Europe 2020 strategy targets cannot be quantified, in terms of outputs and funds leveraged, as most project documents do not include enough details to link achievements to the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Most often, **indirect contributions** can be observed, through improved policies which subsequently help to fund projects or measures that positively change values towards the relevant target. Generally, **Innovation** projects contributed to the EU2020 Strategy with regard to its R&D and climate change objectives, in particular those innovation projects aiming at sustainable and resource-efficient solutions (i.e. [BIOCOMPACT-CE](#) and [ENTER](#)). Projects financed under SO 2.1, SO 2.2, SO 3.1, SO 3.3, SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 also contributed to achieving the climate change targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

At the same time, Interreg CE projects were not directly addressing socio-economic issues linked to labour markets and income, and were therefore less relevant to the employment, education and poverty reduction targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Contribution to the Macro-Regional Strategies

Projects financed under SO 2.1, SO 2.2, SO 3.1, SO 3.3, SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 contributed to the climate change, energy and biodiversity priorities of the respective Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS). However, many Low-Carbon (SO 2.1, SO 2.2, SO 2.3) projects had a significant impact on local and regional strategies and policy-making, as their actions were more locally rooted (e.g. in schools) and therefore were less impactful at macro-level. As an illustration, [FIRECE](#) results found their way into the implementation of Regional Energy Plans in Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Croatia. Likewise, [SULPITER](#) results entered into the policy documents of 7 functional urban areas (Brescia, Bologna, Maribor, Budapest, Poznan, Stuttgart, Rijeka).

Environment (SO 3.1 and SO 3.3) projects were highly relevant for tackling the pervasive challenge of climate change. In particular, pilot actions in Environment projects are praised for directly contributing to solving specific problems in relation to climate change adaptation, risk management, urban planning, etc.

At the same time, projects were not directly addressing socio-economic issues linked to labour markets and income, and were therefore less relevant to the employment, education and poverty reduction targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In the case of SO 3.2 (**Culture**), most tangible contributions to wider strategies are to be found in the pilot actions which implemented investments in revitalising heritage sites, better valorising them for tourism, one of the core priorities of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 projects (**Transport**) also contributed to promoting sustainable transport and better transport connections, thereby supporting transport-related priorities across all four MRS (i.e. 'Connecting people in the region' in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 'untapped shipping potential and lack of modern road and rail transport connections' in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, 'Intermodal connections to the hinterland' in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, and 'Environmentally friendly mobility' in the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region).

More generally, the CE area overlaps with all four MRS but is not linked to any of them in particular. However, it can be argued that these contributions are made by design of the programme, as it is the only transnational

cooperation programme covering all four MRS and its focus has been developed against the background of the EU2020 Strategy and the Territorial Agenda 2020. At the level of Interreg and MRS bodies, there was consensus around the alignment of Interreg CE Thematic Priorities with the priorities of other Interreg programmes and MRS, allowing for possible synergies. An example of a project's contribution to MRS is presented in Box 2.

BOX 2 EXAMPLE OF PROJECT CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER STRATEGIES

The [RUMOBIL](#) project aimed to support public authorities and providers of public transport services in remote rural areas. While local contexts are quite different, all participating regions share common needs. These include demographic change, depopulation, lower population density, isolation. Against the backdrop of low demand and under-utilization, the quality of public transport services is low and the costs are unsustainable for the local municipalities. Lack of access to proper mobility services leads people to migrate towards urban areas, further deepening structural problems. To address the challenges, the project aimed to identify innovative, suitable solutions, which could be implemented with limited resources.

The project responded to these challenges by providing local authorities and transport operators with a platform to exchange knowledge, to generate learning through launching pilot applications of state-of-the-art tools and solutions, and to revise local transport policies to better suit changing mobility needs. Main outputs of RUMOBIL therefore are pilot actions, the elaboration of a RUMOBIL strategy and policy decisions to implement this strategy in the eight partner regions through an improvement of their transport plans.

The Urban Mobility Package of the EU (2013) provided the wider policy framework to enhance commitment towards green and inclusive public transport. The EU 2020 Strategy promotes the reduction of the carbon footprint in the EU. RUMOBIL's activities to promote public and collective transport contributed to that objective and both the strategy and the pilot actions had a strong focus on changing attitudes and decreasing the use of private cars, in favour of public transportation.

The pilot action in the Mazovian voivodship as well as the project's Transnational Strategy contributed to the Baltic Sea Region Strategy's objective to "improve internal and external transport links". By implementing a passenger information system and app for mobile devices, regional rail transport services have improved and can provide in-time information about service changes, connections and delays.

Documentary analysis of the project reports showed, however, that beneficiaries cannot always assess the contribution of their projects to the MRS and, often, this topic is regarded as beyond the scope of their projects. Interviews confirmed that sometimes beneficiaries are unintendedly contributing to some macro-regional strategies without necessarily being aware of it or planning for it. Others acknowledged that having a MRS in the Programme area is a strong advantage as it indirectly supports better coordination between the various relevant decision-making bodies and facilitates implementation of the projects.

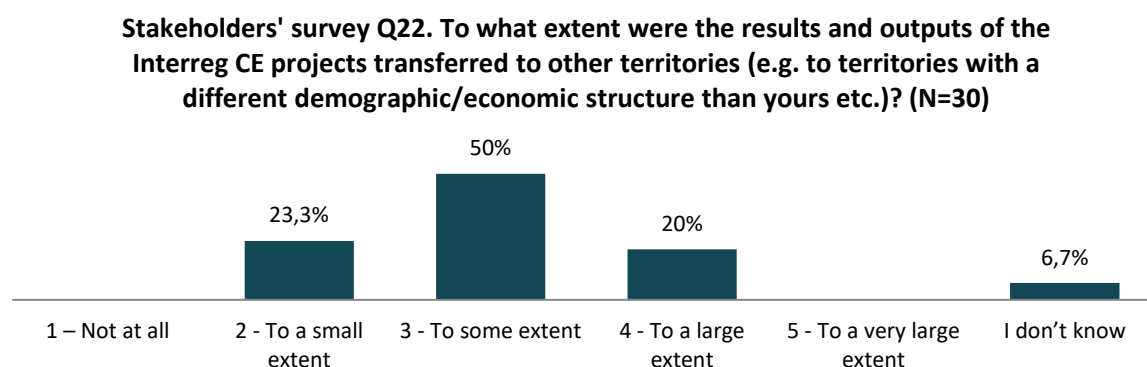
Interviewees also highlighted the role played by **Interact** in coordinating the different programmes and strategies. An important aspect for MRS is the so-called 'embedding process' to establish a consensus for flagship priorities, which could then be taken up by Interreg programmes. **More coordinated and harmonised policymaking could be achieved** in that regard, looking at capitalisation *across* and not only *within* EU-funded programmes (e.g. development of common tools, synchronisation of call, etc.). Indeed, still unresolved or misunderstood aspects regarding the MRS, such as their governance and financing structure, are curbing territorial synergies between Interreg programmes and MRS. The new CPR requirements and the emergence of Managing Authorities networks could help exploit the potential for more synergies in the 2021-2027 programming period.

3.5.5. TRANSFERABILITY OF RESULTS

Transferability of outputs is generally regarded as a mark of quality in projects, assuming that if the outputs of the projects are of good quality, it is more likely that they will be transferred. While not all outputs and results can be transferred, the evaluation showed that **most tools developed with Interreg CE support are easily transferable and adaptable to a variety of contexts**, making them highly relevant for target groups and users beyond the projects and even the Programme area.

The review of the application forms for Calls 1 and 2 shows that beneficiaries often plan for their project outputs to be **replicable** in order to foster transferability. In particular, transferability to other territories was expected to be supported, at the application stage, through wide-ranging **stakeholder engagement and dissemination activities** (e.g. publications, conferences) across CE regions as well as further capitalisation activities and synergies sought with other programmes and initiatives. In terms of transferability to other territories, beneficiaries and Programme stakeholders consider that **projects results were averagely transferred to other territories** (Figure 29).

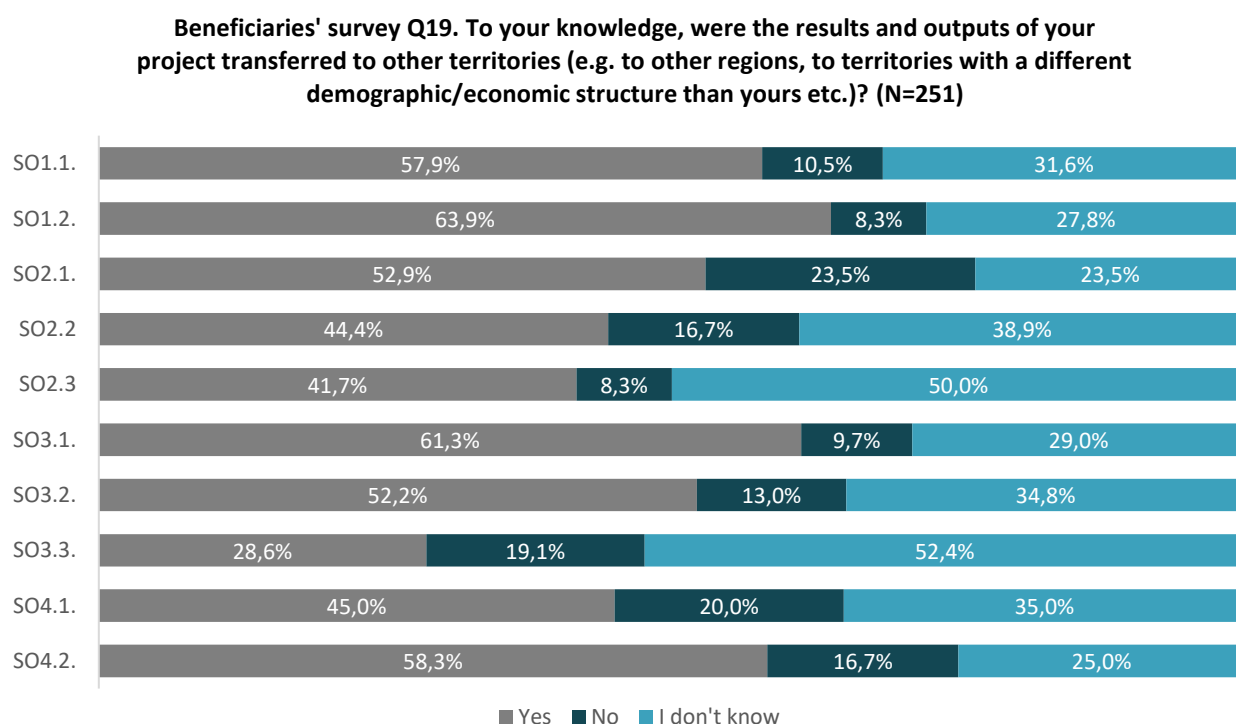
FIGURE 29 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON TRANSFERABILITY OF RESULTS TO OTHER TERRITORIES



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Stronger transfer to other territories was reported for SO 1.1 and SO 1.2 (Innovation), thereby providing a key contribution to closing the innovation gap between CE territories, for SO 3.1 (natural heritage and resources under Environment) and SO 4.2 (freight transport systems under Transport). Specific examples refer to “*Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) [which] spread in 78 countries*”, transfer of results to Interreg MED regions, or the adoption of tools developed in the project in pan-European initiatives (SO 1.2), transfer of results to other watersheds (SO 3.1) and the exploitation of results on a national and international scale (SO 4.2) in all Thematic Priorities (Figure 30).

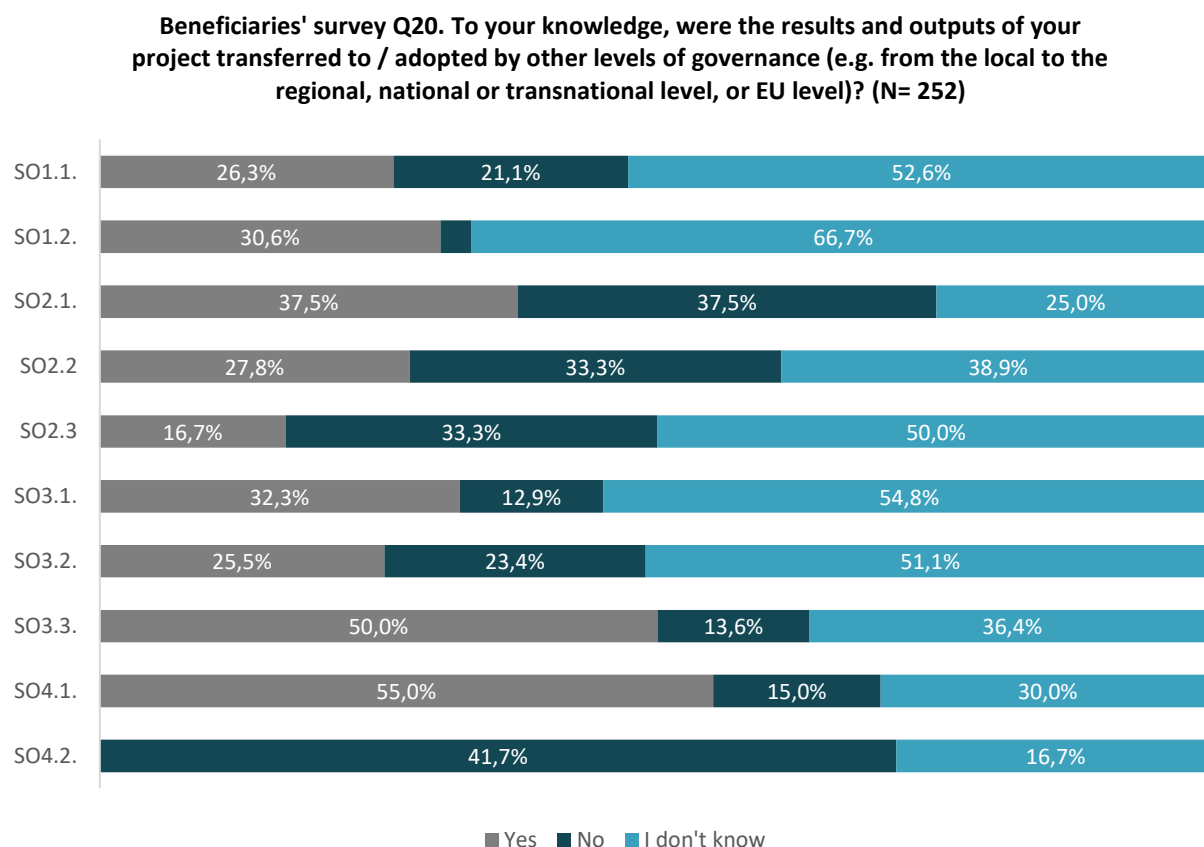
FIGURE 30 BENEFICIARIES' FEEDBACK ON TRANSFERABILITY OF RESULTS TO OTHER TERRITORIES



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

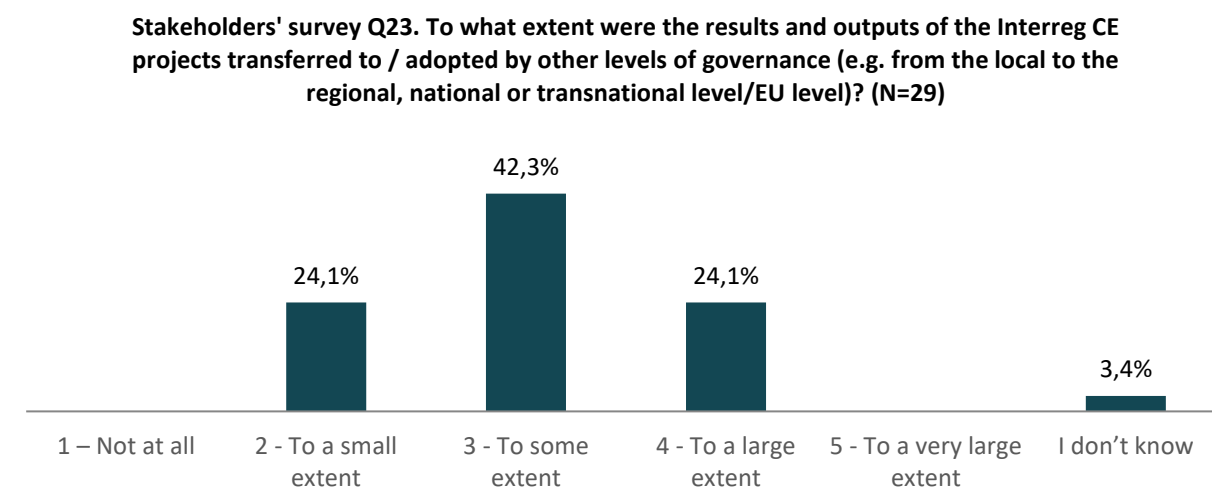
More moderate outcomes were reported in relation to the transferability to other levels of governance (Figure 32 and Figure 31). Specific examples include both horizontal and vertical transfer, from national and regional level to municipalities, across borders or towards the national level. Disagreement is mostly mentioned by beneficiaries under Low carbon SOs, as well as on SO4.2.

FIGURE 31 BENEFICIARIES' FEEDBACK ON TRANSFERABILITY OF RESULTS TO OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

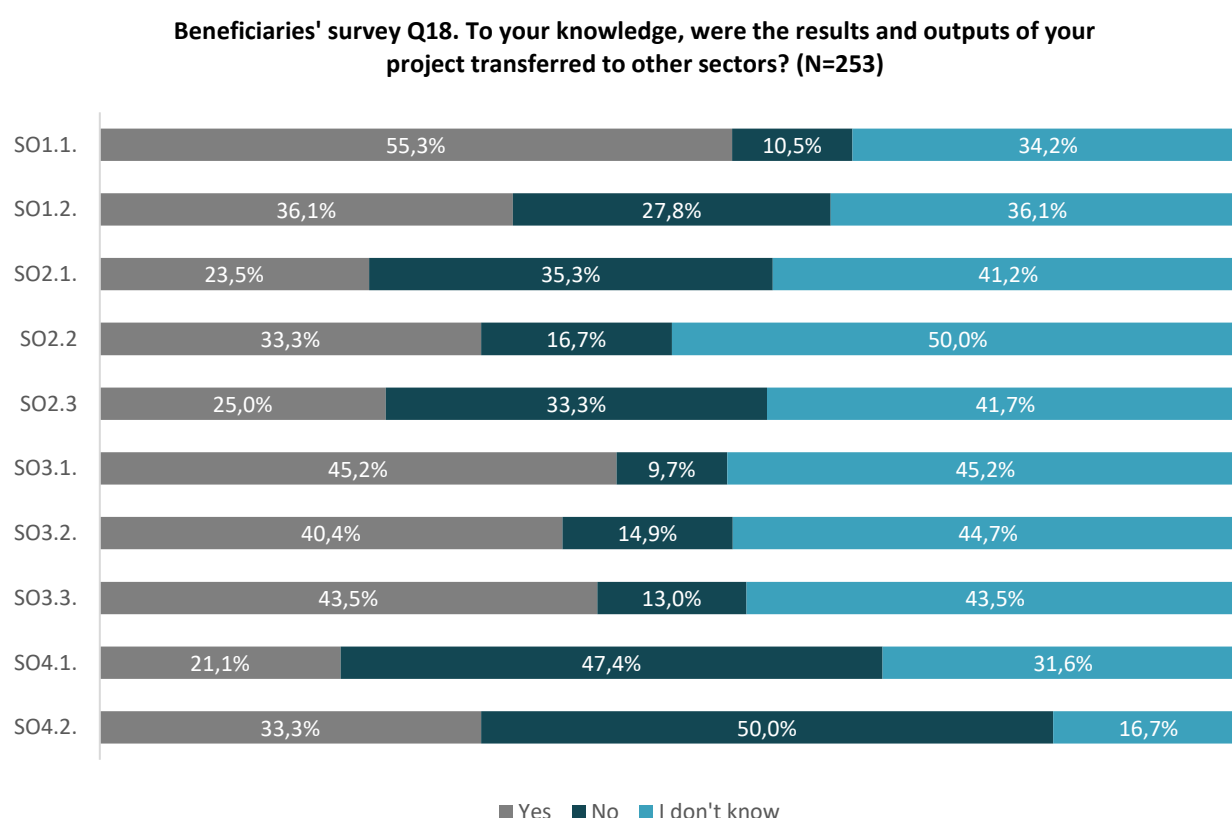
FIGURE 32 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON TRANSFERABILITY OF RESULTS TO OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

With respect to the transferability to other sectors, the aggregate survey results indicate a lack of awareness from project beneficiaries, with wide variation across themes and SOs. Thus, nearly 45% of beneficiaries in the **Environment** Thematic Priority and 40% of those in **Culture** consider that the results and outputs of their project were transferred to other sectors. Beneficiaries mentioned the adaptation and transferability of methodologies and tools developed in the project across different sectors, due to the active involvement of a wider stakeholder involvement. For **Innovation**, around 55% of respondents in SO 1.1 agree that results were transferred to other sectors, as do approx. 36% in SO 1.2. Sectors include education, SMEs, and other stakeholders aside from the target groups of the project (NGOs, public authorities, business support organisations). For **Low carbon**, beneficiaries think that results were not transferred to other sectors in 35.3% of responses for SO 2.1 while SO 2.2 the negative outcome is reflected in 16.7% of responses. (Figure 33)

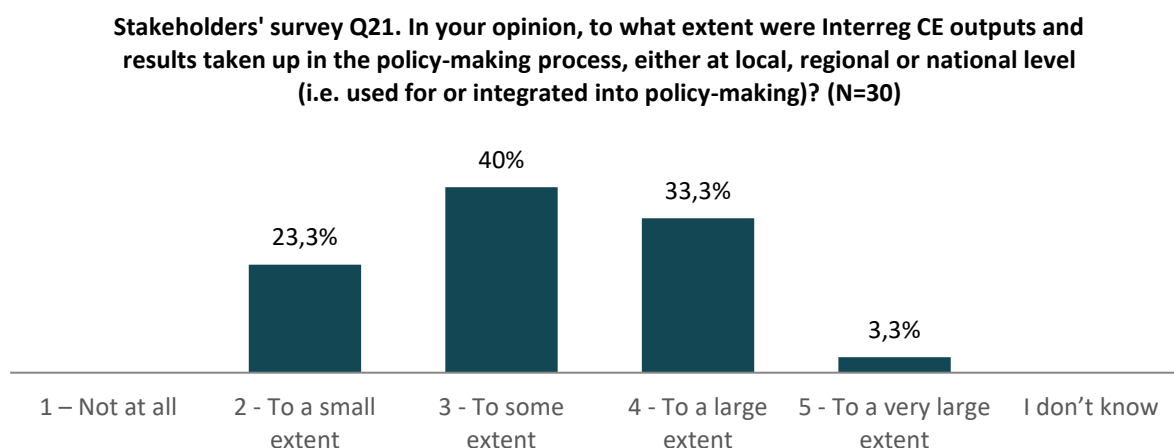
FIGURE 33 BENEFICIARIES' FEEDBACK ON TRANSFERABILITY OF RESULTS TO OTHER SECTORS



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

Interviews showed that the **integration of project results into policy-making is project-specific and depends on the degree of policy-orientation of the project partners as well as a number of other factors**, with however **stronger policy uptake at the local and regional levels** than at the national and EU levels – in line with the focus of the programme. There are good examples of how Interreg CE project results fed into strategic planning at the local/regional level (e.g. smart city concepts, urban revitalisation) or the design of new support programmes (e.g. climate strategy). Policy uptake is facilitated by the endorsement of strategies and action plans by the respective institutions. Overall, stakeholders acknowledge that the **Programme results have been taken up in the policy-making process**, with 37% of respondents reporting an uptake to a large or very large extent, and 40% to some extent (Figure 34).

FIGURE 34 STAKEHOLDERS' OPINION ON POLICY UPTAKE



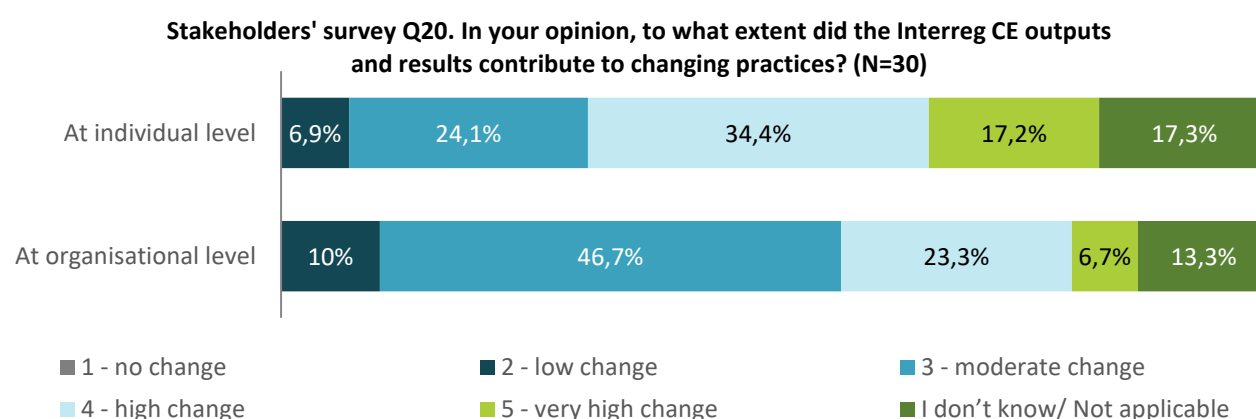
Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

The output transferability scores calculated as part of the CEA ([Section Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.](#)) show little variation across output types (the average transferability scores range from 3.31 for innovation networks to 3.83 for pilot actions and investments combined) but slightly more variation across themes, with circular economy projects' outputs scoring highest on average (4.05) and connectivity projects' outputs scoring lowest on average (3.17).

3.5.6. CONTRIBUTION TO CHANGE OF PRACTICES AT ORGANISATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The results of the beneficiary and institutional stakeholder surveys overall report a **moderate to high change of practices at both individual and organisational level**.

FIGURE 35 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON CONTRIBUTION TO CHANGE OF PRACTICES



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Interviews with programme stakeholders indicate that changes in practices at the organisational and/or individual level are most likely triggered by the policy learning and capacity-building effects of the projects. This is reflected for example in a reported increase in the quality of governance, an increased trust in more 'knowledgeable' and 'capable' authorities or the inclusion of Interreg CE outputs in regional/local strategies and policies. While case studies report that **exchanging on best practices within the project partnership**

surely contributes to changing practices for project partners – thereby confirming the survey result that **Interreg CE contributes to changing practices for beneficiaries, change of practices at target group level is not monitored** and can only be assumed from the success of the project activities. The translation of awareness-raising and capacity-building outcomes into concrete change of practices cannot be determined for sure. Taking the Innovation theme as an illustration, almost half of the SMEs answering the end-user survey considered change of practices as a significant benefit (i.e. rating the benefit on 4 or 5 on a scale from 1-least to 5-most) for their organisation.

If change of practices could not be ascertained for target groups, examples of **project-enabled drivers of changes of practices** are numerous. These include newly created capacities to engage in public-private partnerships to finance projects of public interest and make them economically sustainable – like in the [RESTAURA](#) project on preserving cultural heritage. They also include awareness on and knowledge of available technical solutions to tackle local problems, such as increasing the energy efficiency of public buildings as shown by various Interreg CE projects. Importantly, Interreg CE projects positively affect public management practices, enabling public services through the provision of knowledge, capabilities and tools to address pressing needs. Examples include the improvement of environmental management capacities to protect drinking water resources ([PROLINE-CE](#)), or the management of environmentally sustainable transport like in the [SULPITER](#), [SOLEZ](#) or [MOVECIT](#) projects.

From a thematic perspective, some nuances can be mentioned, in particular:

- **Innovation** projects had overall a strong impact on change of practices at organisational level, e.g. generating cross-border innovation mindsets and opportunities, new innovation methods (FabLabs) or improvements of innovation management. This was achieved inter alia through ‘learning by doing’ and fostering networking abilities, the acquisition of new practices, access to expert knowledge or the change of mindset as a few examples. As evidenced by the case studies, change of practices among target groups is however not monitored and can only be assumed from the experience and observation made during project activities.
- **Low-carbon** and **Environment** projects induced changes of practices at organisational level, though these changes tended to be more gradual. In particular, low-carbon beneficiaries reported a low influence at the organisational level and the need for “much longer projects [...]”.
- The participative approach of taking the target groups on-board in the development as well as implementation of the new solutions in **Culture** projects is regarded as highly effective. At individual level, the learning materials, trainings and awareness-raising activities are likely to contribute to changing practices.
- **Transport** projects financed under SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 have effectively contributed to change of practices at organisational level, for example with respect to freight transport ([ChemMultimodal](#)) and at individual level, in relation to using public transport services ([CONNECT2CE](#), [Peripheral Access](#) and [RUMOBIL](#)). Beneficiaries however noted moderate changes in relation to end-users’ attitudes towards public transport services. Important challenges still remain, in this respect, as noted by one survey respondent: *“Some more people are aware of public transport in these areas and cross-border trips but still the public transport is not enough attractive in terms of price and flexibility to private car use”*. This also confirms the need for long-term sustainability of results, to ensure long-lasting effects and durable changes.

3.5.7. ADDED VALUE OF TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Interviews with programme stakeholders indicate that transnational cooperation produces added value first and foremost in the **(multidirectional) sharing of knowledge and experiences** (best practice examples), thereby helping to achieve more harmonised and more efficient approaches within CE territorial units. In particular, transnational cooperation allows for regional stakeholders to overcome their rivalries and competitive states of mind that sometimes prevail in a national cooperation context, and let them think ‘in a broader way’. The possibility offered by the CP to ‘**pilot**’ and ‘**trial**’ solutions in an international

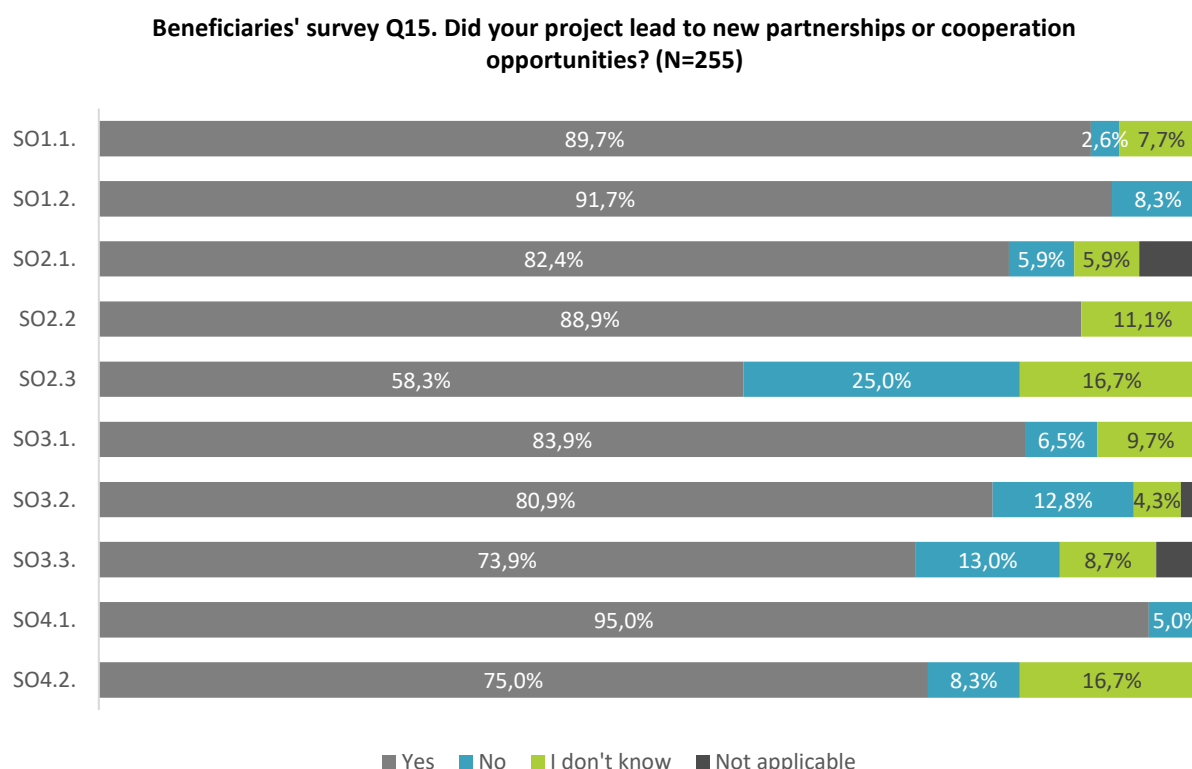
environment was also considered as an added value compared to national funding schemes or other funding sources, including Horizon 2020 programme, albeit the fact that the latter does support pilot actions, as well. The focus of the programme on developing and testing new, innovative solutions gives a visionary perspective to the projects, and the 'experimental' dimension of the Interreg CE Programme differentiates it from other programmes.

While the CP overlaps with many other transnational and cross-border programmes, the programme allows for a unique opportunity of transnational cooperation between several Member States, i.e. between Italian, Hungarian, Slovak, Czech, Polish and German stakeholders, because no other Interreg programme allows for such patterns of cooperation linking these Eastern and Western countries in particular. Building trust across stakeholders and territories beyond the former Iron Curtain was mentioned as a key added value from and for transnational cooperation, as a self-reinforcing outcome of the programme whereby increased trust through positive cooperation experience between partners from different countries strengthens the willingness to cooperate further. Additionally, the establishment of **interpersonal relationships and lasting cooperation structures** were also mentioned as key benefits from transnational cooperation, with strong learning benefits for local and regional actors.

Examples from case studies indeed show that cooperation between partners was, in many cases, sustained after the respective project ended, through the direct involvement of one or more partners in another partner organisation's activities (e.g. for teaching activities in the case of [digitalLIFE4CE](#)) and/or through participation in a follow-up project consortium (e.g. for another Interreg programme also in the case of [digitalLIFE4CE](#)).

Therefore, participation in Interreg CE allowed for beneficiaries to not only build a new or strengthen an existing partnership, but also to widen their network of potential partners for future collaborations. This was confirmed by beneficiaries, from which an overwhelming majority stated that their project led to **new partnerships** or cooperation opportunities.

FIGURE 36 BENEFICIARIES' FEEDBACK ON WHETHER THEIR PROJECT LED TO NEW PARTNERSHIPS OR COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES



Source: Survey targeting project beneficiaries in Calls 1 and 2

One point to consider when talking about cooperation concerns the differences in intensity of cooperation that the projects analysed so far have shown. On one extreme, projects showed strong cooperation – in the literal sense of working together, to solve common problems. On the other extreme, some projects' cooperation pattern was of more limited nature, mostly focused on setting up a partnership of institutions facing similar challenges, yet tackling them mostly on an individual basis. Importantly, the second type of projects still did a) contribute to tackle important issues and b) also benefit from the more limited exchange by at least learning that *“problems are similar across borders”*, thus reducing mental barriers and bringing people closer together. One key learning here is that some sensitivity is required when talking about cooperation.

Nevertheless, the **added value of the Interreg CE programme** as a way to developing solutions through transnational cooperation was undoubtedly praised by beneficiaries, independently from the intensity of cooperation. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of respondents to the beneficiary survey stated that their project results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE funding (**Figure 10, Section 3.3.1**).

3.5.8. ADDED VALUE FOR SPECIFIC TARGET GROUPS

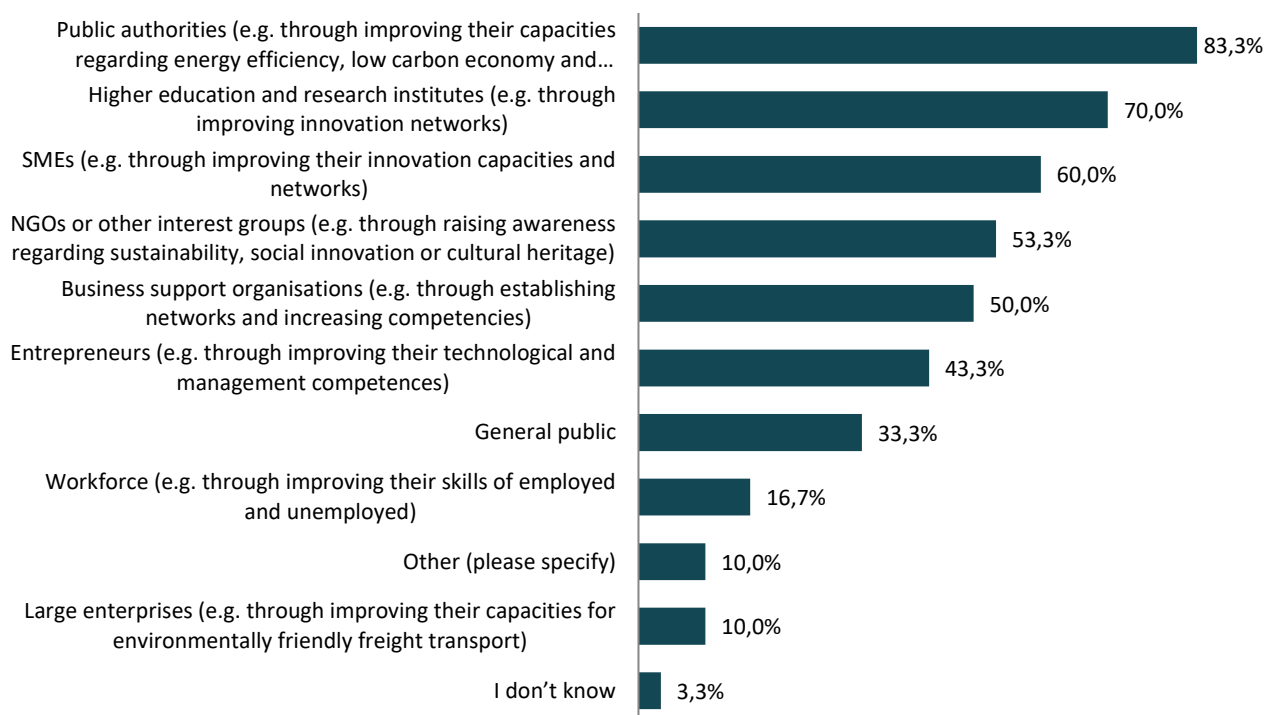
It is difficult to identify one particular target group that could have benefitted more from Interreg CE projects, as the programme overall – just as individual projects - addresses a wide range of target groups and so far, reached high numbers of target groups from both the private and public sectors across different sectors and governance levels, as shown in **Table 8**.

At thematic level however, some target groups were reported to have benefitted more, based on the focus of the thematic priority. In Innovation for instance, SMEs were more recurrently mentioned by project beneficiaries, while local and regional authorities (LRAs) were more often mentioned in the other Thematic Priorities. Education centres and research institutes were also quite frequently mentioned by project beneficiaries.

The answers to the stakeholder survey align with this latter finding, mentioning **public authorities, higher education and research institutes, and SMEs** as the three most-benefitting target groups.

FIGURE 37 STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK ON BENEFITS TO SPECIFIC TARGET GROUPS

Stakeholders' survey Q25. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following target group(s) benefited the most from the actions supported by Interreg CE? (multiple choice) (N=30, multiple options)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Furthermore, it is estimated that 1.8 million members of the **general public** have been reached by completed projects so far under Calls 1 and 2, and that many more citizens and local communities should have indirectly benefitted from the achievements of the projects (through e.g. more sustainable transport systems, more accessible cultural heritage, etc.).

Therefore, Interreg CE projects have brought about benefits to a wide range of target groups, in particular LRAs, SMEs, research institutes and the general public, in line with the **quadruple helix approach** that several project beneficiaries highlighted in the surveys and interviews.

More detailed thematic insights show that:

- **Innovation** projects showed to have a high value-added for its target groups, through supporting quadruple helix approaches benefitting each member of the helix. For research institutions, cooperation reduced "nationalist" behaviour, built mutual trust, and started real collaboration and coordination. For SMEs, the projects offered open opportunities for implementation of new (often expensive) technologies. Other benefitting institutions include business support organisations, public bodies or social business support organisations and social entrepreneurs. Local, regional and national policy makers benefited through inputs to their smart specialisation strategies. The main target groups for SO 1.1 are SMEs and business support organisations, while SO 1.2 projects target a wide diversity of end-users.
- **Low-Carbon** projects provided value-added for many different target groups, with an overall stronger representation of local public authorities and sectoral agencies as compared to other types of target groups (with the exception of SMEs for the [SULPITER](#) project). Amongst others these include: a) local authorities in charge of public buildings, through reducing their energy and water bills, b) ministries, c) energy and urban planners, d) local public authorities, who benefitted from trainings and pilot actions, and e) schools and public institutions, which benefitted from the project as they improved their skills in managing energy efficiency in public buildings.

- All projects under the **Environment** theme focused on developing the capacity of local and regional public authorities, acknowledging their central role in developing and implementing environmental management strategies and plans and embedding climate change adaptation and mitigation in the overall strategies and plans of their communities. In the context of FUAs, capacitating local actors and supporting cooperation between the core cities and surrounding areas, particularly in the absence of a clearly established regulatory framework, is essential for successfully tackling environmental challenges.
- **Culture** projects focused on developing the capacity of both the public and private sector with respect to supporting the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources. As such, a wide variety of target groups were engaged in the implemented activities, from local, regional and national public authorities to cultural and tourism operators, businesses, special interest groups, education and research institutions. No particular target group was found to have benefitted more, although most projects focused on small and medium size entities (public or private).
- In **Transport**, the main target groups were local and regional public authorities, transport operators and freight transport stakeholders. Along these lines, a wide array of target groups were engaged or benefited directly from the project activities, such as: business support organisations, infrastructure and (public) service providers, sectoral agencies, and enterprises, as well as the commuters and citizens in the pilot locations. Universities, research institutes, education and training centres were also mentioned by beneficiaries.

3.5.9. ADDED VALUE FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF TERRITORIES

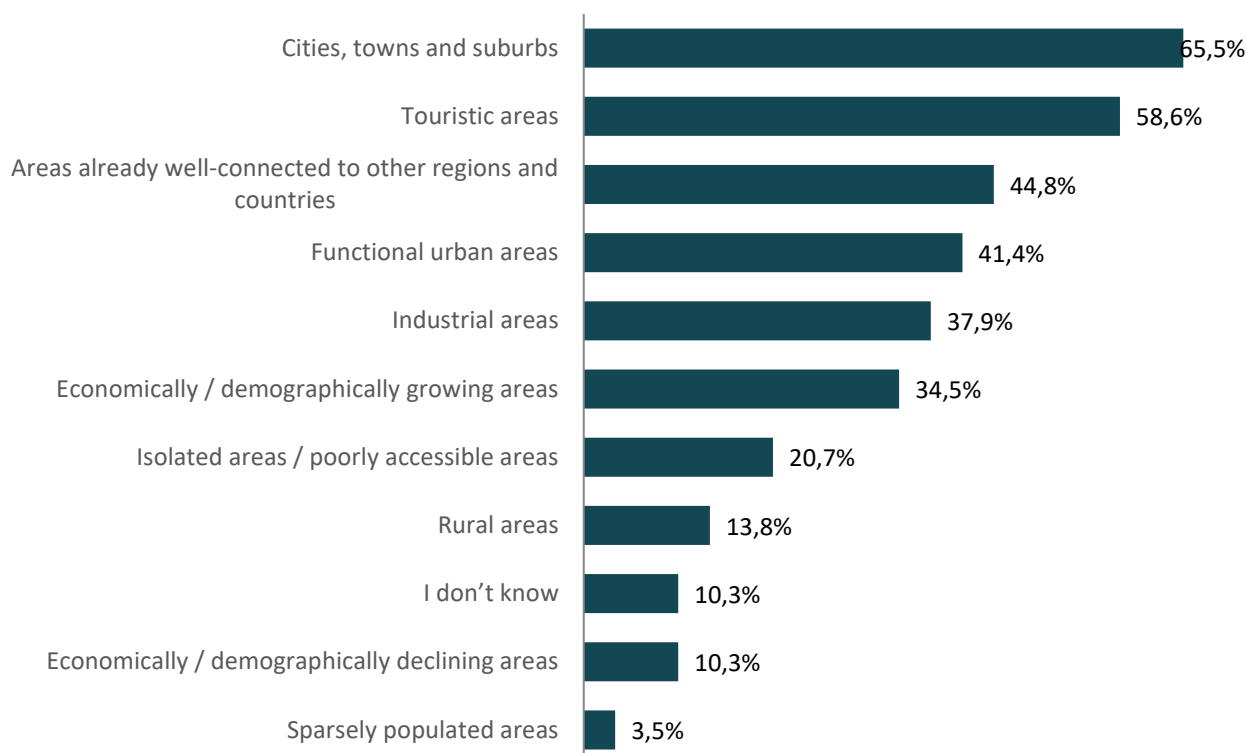
In principle, the CP supports a **wide diversity of territories**, as demonstrated by the geographic location of project beneficiaries and their target groups, however **small and mid-sized cities** have been mentioned by interviewed programme stakeholders as being proportionately more involved in Interreg CE projects, because partnerships with such types of cities are more easily established and project results are more easily visible – the visibility of ‘pilot actions’ in particular is appealing to municipalities and their communities. Likewise, cities with established networks are benefitting more, as they are more ‘attractive’ in terms of cooperation opportunities.

In addition, some large cities such as Budapest, Krakow, Ljubljana or Maribor have demonstrated a higher propensity to attract funding and projects, also due to the institutions settled there. The focus of the programme on functional urban areas also made them privileged territories.

This finding was corroborated by the stakeholder survey (**Figure 38**) which reported cities, towns and suburbs as the most-benefitting types of territories, followed by touristic areas.

FIGURE 38 STAKEHOLDERS’ FEEDBACK ON BENEFITS TO SPECIFIC TYPES OF TERRITORIES

Stakeholders' survey Q24. To the best of your knowledge, which of the following types of territories benefited the most from the actions supported by Interreg CE? (multiple choice) (N=29, multiple options)



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

Some types of territories were reported to have benefitted more, as a result of the focus of the thematic focus of the SOs. In Innovation under SO 1.1 for instance, industrial areas were reported by project beneficiaries to have benefitted more, while functional urban areas have been more frequently mentioned under SO 2.3 and SO 3.3, since addressing FUAs was a requirement of these SOs; similarly rural areas were addressed more frequently under SO 4.1, as peripheral areas were by design the focus of the interventions. Touristic areas were more frequent across SOs 3.1 and 3.2, as many natural and cultural sites also have significant touristic importance.

In conclusion, findings point to a wide and **fairly balanced coverage of territories across the CE** area when looking at absolute numbers of beneficiaries, but also to a more intense cooperation hub concentrated around the Eastern Slovenia NUTS-2 region (i.e. a hot spot covering the neighbouring Slovenian, Croatian, Italian, Austrian and Hungarian regions) when looking at beneficiary numbers relative to population. Interviews have also raised a **potential risk of territorial fragmentation** if existing links between urban and rural areas are not maintained and new links to the more peripheral regions of the programme are not established, as these latter regions often suffer from more limited implementation capacity and fewer institutional seats of relevant organisations. Hence, one of the key recommendations for Interreg CE is to continue supporting the **functional approach** taken so far in the programme (in particular between urban areas and their hinterlands). This risk is increased by the observation that the ability to implement projects, for example the staff size, financial resources, knowledge or the access to a network, differs across regions, with urban centres demonstrating a strong advantage in that regard. This may further exclude economically lagging territories⁶⁹ of the Interreg CE area from participating in and benefitting from projects.

⁶⁹ In the CE area, lagging regions (in the wide diversity of 'lagging' definitions) are mostly located at the EU Eastern external border, e.g. Polish, Slovak and Hungarian regions neighbouring Belarus and Ukraine (source: Pilati, M & Hunter,

3.5.10. SUSTAINABILITY AND VIABILITY OF RESULTS

Generally speaking at project level, Interreg CE outputs tend to have a long sustainability, with the majority of outputs being expected to last for **more than three years** after the respective project has been completed, according to results of the beneficiary survey. This assessment holds across all SOs and types of outputs, apart from trainings which are generally expected to last shorter. Detailed results by SO are available in Annex 9. The review of the final reports has corroborated this finding: for the few projects where a specific No. of years for maintaining project outputs/results was mentioned, this was generally in the range of 3-5 years with no strong variation across SOs.

Importantly, the survey indicates that acquisition of **additional funds, synergies** with other initiatives (e.g. other EU-funded, national or regional programmes), the **durability of the project partnership** or an increased interest from citizens/businesses play a key role in ensuring the sustainability of project outputs and results.

For instance, results of the [KETGATE](#) project are sustained in an Horizon 2020 project for coordination and support action, while [DIGITALIFE4CE](#) results are capitalised upon thanks to funds leveraged through various financing schemes. Another example is provided by the [RAINMAN](#) project, which supported the establishment of a network of experts in the field of heavy rain risk management, committed to present the project in the scientific community for five years following project completion. The [COME-IN](#) project is maintained and extended through calls addressing other museums to apply the accessibility standards and gain the [COME-IN Label](#).

More generally, the final reports of completed projects confirm the results of the beneficiary survey by outlining the key actions taken to foster sustainability: participation in follow-up projects (partnership sustainability), leverage of funds (financial sustainability) and policy uptake (institutional/political sustainability). A more systematic review of final reports also provided slightly more nuance across themes: for Environment and Culture projects, the dissemination of project results for community and institutional engagement seems to play a more important role for ensuring sustainability than what follow-up projects and funds leverage do in Innovation and Low-Carbon projects. For Transport (SO 4.1, SO 4.2) and Mobility (SO 2.3) projects, institutional and political uptake (e.g. integration of project results into transport planning strategies) and dissemination of results also play a prominent role.

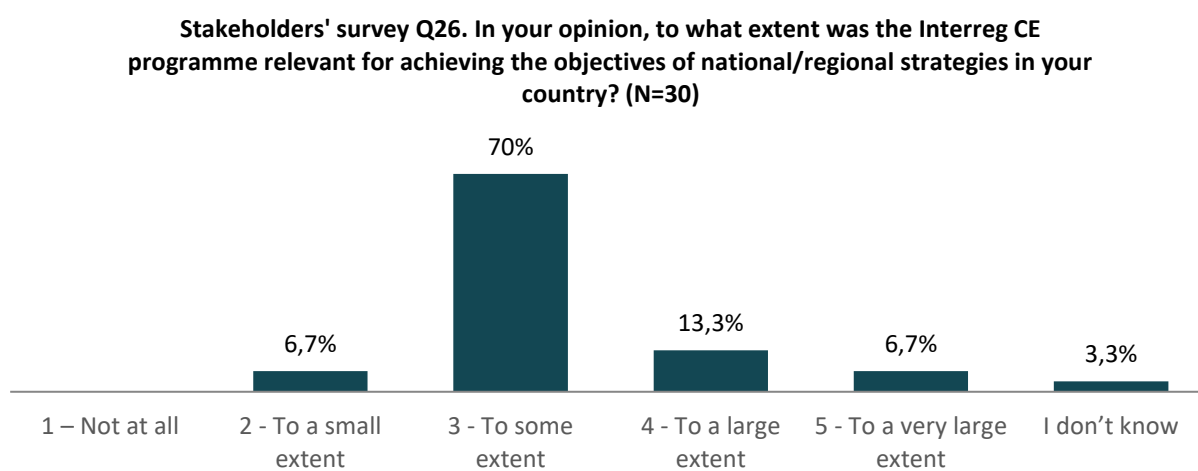
When investigating the issue of sustainability a few months or years after projects ended, case studies reveal that beneficiaries often refer to the *expected* sustainability of projects results rather than their *actual* sustainability. As in the final reports, interviewed beneficiaries mentioned the factors (e.g. application for a follow-up project, integration of project results in a local strategy, etc.) that *should* ensure sustainability, as they were not able to provide a definitive answer on the actual sustainability of their project results. The sustainability of results of capacity-building oriented projects actually materialises in the longer term (e.g. linked to policy cycles). In this case, sustainability can only be assessed several years after the project ended.

At programme level, interviewed programme stakeholders generally consider that there is **no specific pattern of sustainability** across Interreg CE projects. While the sustainability of project outputs in terms of availability should be guaranteed by project partners already during the application phase, in reality it depends on both internal (e.g. capacity of project partners) and external factors (e.g. political context). The sustainability of project results in terms of outreach and uptake is mainly driven by the commitment, motivation and expertise of the project partners, in particular the lead partner, as well as the maturity of project partnerships and the intensity of cooperation. Participation in European networks is also associated with higher sustainability. **Sustainability increases as projects are capitalised upon, supported by other instruments, funds are leveraged, project results are ‘visible’ to target groups – especially those located in other territories - or become institutionalised (political buy-in).** Sustainability can be observed, among

A 2020, Research for REGI Committee – EU Lagging Regions: state of play and future challenges, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels). Those are often also the regions that have fewer programme beneficiaries relative to their population (cf. Figure 4).

other things, through the **uptake** of these results by other regions or cities, or through the **permanent adoption of project results** (e.g. bus line) by local authorities. In that regard, it is noteworthy that project outputs and results were only moderately taken up by policy stakeholders (cf. [Section 3.5.5](#)), according to results of the stakeholder survey. This points to a discrepancy between what beneficiaries (self-)reported at the end of their project in terms of policy uptake (i.e. a total number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and actions plans and institutions applying new and/or tools and services of 5,130⁷⁰, that is 119% of the total target number) and what policy stakeholders actually observed at the institutional level. One of the key reasons would be that Interreg CE, while fostering place-based, locally embedded initiatives, is only ‘to some extent’ relevant for achieving the objectives of CE national/regional strategies.

FIGURE 39 STAKEHOLDERS’ FEEDBACK ON THE RELEVANCE OF INTERREG CE FOR ACHIEVING NATIONAL/REGIONAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



Source: Survey targeting Programme stakeholders

These findings contribute to the overall conclusion that sustainability is more **project-specific** than theme-specific as it depends on three main components - **partnership sustainability** (i.e. continued cooperation), **financial sustainability** (i.e. leverage of public or private funds) and **institutional sustainability** (i.e. policy uptake) – that differ from one project to another with no clear distinct pattern within thematic priorities or SOs.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE

4.1. DATA QUALITY

The data provided by the JS was highly reliable data, ensuring accurate assessments of the programme’s and projects’ features. The data was highly adequate for producing all basic statistics e.g. on the number of projects, outputs, outreach indicators etc. It was more difficult to use the data for the cost effectiveness analysis ([Section 3.4](#)) for two reasons. First, because of the projects’ structure it was at times difficult to clearly allocate costs to individual outputs, necessitating some estimation and thus inducing some automatic estimation error. If a cost-effectiveness analysis is planned in the future, it is recommended that outputs and costs are clearer linked. Second, it was observed that retrieving the data from the programme’s database is not trivial and requires special knowledge. Here it is suggested to reconsider the data collection and storage process in such way that access to the data is simple enough and does not require special programming skills. This would increase the analysis capacity of the JS or other stakeholders as well as

⁷⁰ At the cut-off date of 14th of December 2021.

facilitate the work of external experts. Additionally, it may be considered to put the data into open-data portals (optimally including all Interreg programmes) to make the data available for research and the public.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

5.1.1. AT PROGRAMME LEVEL

Interreg CE so far had a positive impact with regard to the needs identified across all thematic priorities in the CE area. With a still visible **East/West divide** in all areas covered by the Programme, Interreg CE was successful in helping to bridge socio-economic and competitiveness gaps between more and less developed CE regions with regard to innovation, low-carbon, environmental, cultural and transport related challenges (EQ1). This is likely to contribute to reducing the existing gaps in socio-economic development, but, given the limited size and scope of the Programme, achieving this goal is largely dependent on factors outside of its influence, including national policies and initiatives and EU-funds in mainstream programs.

The **85 projects funded under Interreg CE in Calls 1 and 2** have overall been successful in contributing to strategically important issues across all thematic areas, with transnational cooperation directly supporting institutional learning and enhanced institutional capacity (expertise, technical knowledge) or the delivery of higher quality services for citizens. Bringing the EU-level priorities closer to the local communities is another significant contribution of the programme (EQ2).

The **bottom-up approach** tailored to local and regional needs, the combination of complementary skills and experiences within project partnerships and the implementation of target group engagement activities have worked best for the delivery of impactful projects. Furthermore, **pilot actions** have played a pivotal role as “living laboratories”, effectively providing immediate, tangible results at low costs, on average. While being less cost-effective, other types of outputs also performed well and delivered the expected results. Finally, the **support provided by programme authorities** was reported as another key success factor, even though programme-specific reporting requirements as well as administrative procedures at EU, national and regional level were found to be quite cumbersome for the project implementation. Likewise, the **absence of pre-financing** was deemed a barrier for the involvement of partners with lower financing capacity (EQ3).

Interreg CE did produce **strong synergetic and multiplication effects** in terms of leveraging follow-up funding and generating further cooperation opportunities – in particular in the framework of subsequent Interreg CE calls, such as with Horizon 2020 in Call 4, as well as other Interreg transnational and cross-border programmes - even though synergies with national strategies and other EU-funded programmes could be further promoted. Overall, synergies with other initiatives are highly dependent on the size and profile of the partners. Smaller, less experienced organisations are at disadvantage from this point of view, as they do not necessarily have access to wider networks. (AEQ1).

A good number of projects did also produce **positive unintended effects**, going beyond the impact initially anticipated at project start (AEQ2). These effects relate to reaching wider target groups and audiences, raising interest beyond expectations, expanding the scope of the activities.

Importantly, the design of the programme provides the necessary framework for testing and implementing different governance formats such as bottom-up approaches and multilevel governance, but Interreg CE projects eventually contributed to better policy coordination much **more horizontally than vertically** (AEQ3).

The programme also contributed to the implementation of the **Europe 2020 Strategy** for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as **Macro-Regional Strategies**, even though the exact contribution can hardly be assessed by project beneficiaries (AEQ4).

Interreg CE project results were averagely transferred to other territories but more moderately transferred to other sectors and other levels of governance – reflecting the observation that **integration of project results into policymaking is rather project-specific**. Transferability of results vertically across governance levels is therefore still lower than potential, even though many of the tools and instruments are adaptable to a variety of contexts, making them highly relevant for target groups and users beyond the territories of project implementation and even the Programme area. (AEQ5).

Interreg CE projects also created the necessary conditions for (e.g., through capacity-building) and thereby contributed to **change of practices at the individual and organisational level** within project partnerships and target groups, especially at individual level (AEQ6).

Moreover, the programme demonstrated a **high added value of transnational cooperation**, in particular through the multidirectional transfer of knowledge and experiences, the reinforcement of cross-border networks and partnerships as well as the possibility to trial solutions in an international environment (AEQ7).

The programme has brought about benefits to a **large and diverse sample of beneficiaries and target groups**, in particular LRAs, SMEs, research institutes and the general public, in line with the quadruple helix approach adopted by some projects (AEQ8).

Likewise, the programme supported a **wide diversity of territories**, even though regions located in the south of the CE territory and urban areas more generally are likely to have benefitted more. The functional approach taken in the programme (in particular between urban areas and their hinterlands) is likely to have contributed to reducing urban-rural fragmentation in the places where pilot actions were implemented, pointing to need for continuing this approach (AEQ9).

In terms of sustainability of project results, there are numerous examples of projects which have successfully managed to ensure the continuation of activities beyond the end of the financial support from the Programme. Available evidence suggests that it mainly depends on the continued cooperation between the project partners, on their capacity to leverage public or private funds, as well as on their capacity to determine policy uptake, all of which are which are only starting to materialise (AEQ10).

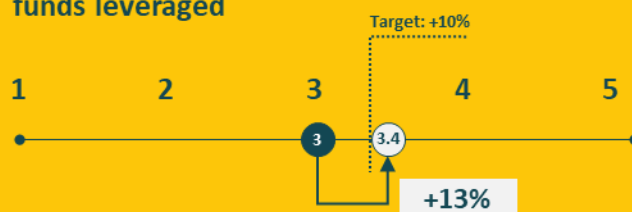
SO1.1. To improve sustainable linkages among actors of the innovation systems for strengthening regional innovation capacity in Central Europe

13 projects

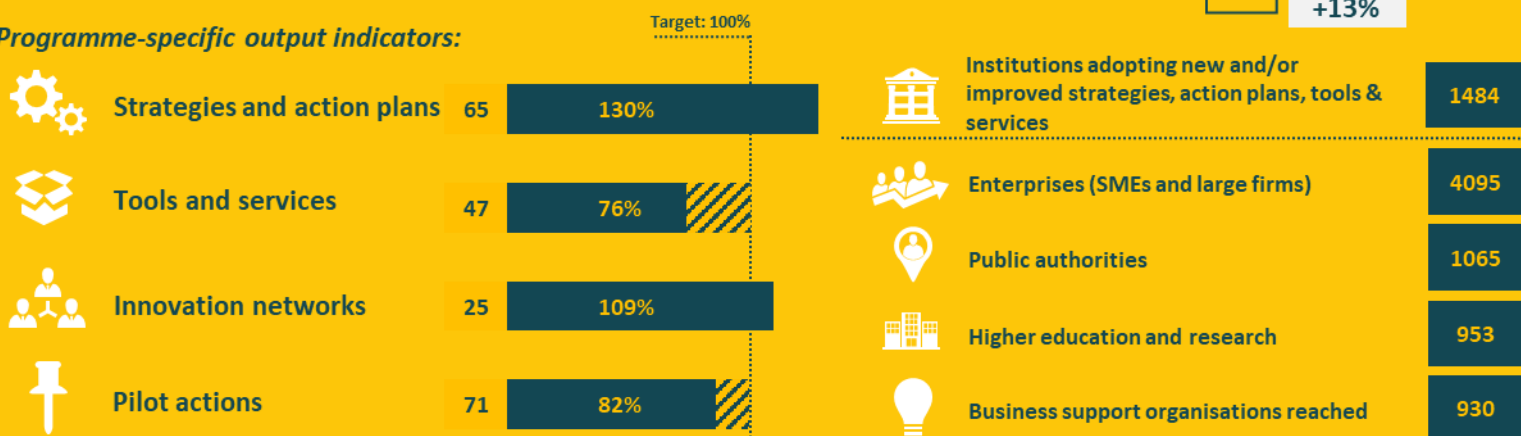
79.5% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

22 mil. EUR
(ERDF)66.4 mil. EUR
funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of linkages among actors of the innovation systems achieved through transnational cooperation in central European regions



Programme-specific output indicators:



Projects funded under SO 1.1 responded to the need to better and more sustainably connect innovation actors within the CE area by producing a wide range of different outputs, including innovation networks. This also helped to address deficient coordination of innovation policies both across territories and across governance levels – especially between the local and regional levels - in the programme area.

In particular, accessing knowledge and funds which are not available nationally was reported by beneficiaries as a major benefit from participating in an Interreg CE project, further highlighting the added value of the programme in comparison to regional and national initiatives. As a result, increasing knowledge, capacity and competences as well as building trust beyond borders were among the key achievements of the programme for SO 1.1 project beneficiaries. Importantly, accessing knowledge and good practices was also a key benefit for end-users of SO 1.1 projects, who were overall satisfied with their participation in project activities.

The evaluation therefore demonstrated that operations were in line with the ToC established initially, by tapping into locally embedded innovation potentials, fostering knowledge and technology transfer between regions and between actors (i.e. research organisations and businesses, in particular SMEs), and building stronger links between them through long-standing cooperation partnerships, sustainable outputs (in particular innovation networks) and newly created cooperation opportunities.

The main target groups for SO 1.1 projects were SMEs and business support organisations, however a wide range of other innovation actors also benefitted from the projects, in line with the quadruple helix approach widely taken in this SO. Industrial areas were also reported to have benefitted more, but project outputs and results were very often transferred to other sectors and territories, thereby expanding the benefits of the programme to a wider range of actors.

Finally, projects also contributed to better policy coordination horizontally at the local and regional levels in particular, as well as vertically between these two levels, while supporting the implementation of wider strategies such as the Europe 2020 Strategy (with regard to its R&D and climate targets) and Macro-Regional Strategies. At the same time, challenges remain in relation to East-West disparities between “innovation leader regions”, on the one hand, and “moderate and emerging innovator regions”, on the other. As many CE regions

saw a decrease in their innovation performance in recent years, the added value of the programme becomes more evident.

SO1.2. To improve skills and entrepreneurial competences for advancing economic and social innovation in central European regions

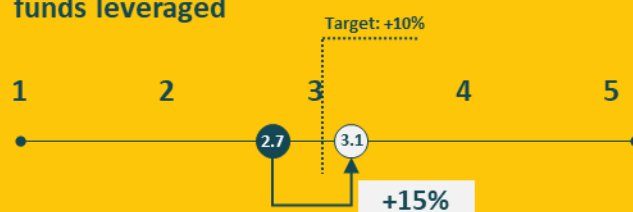
12 projects

91.7% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

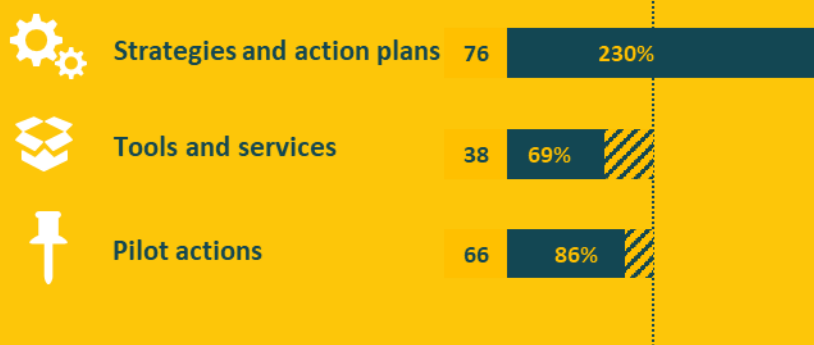
22.7 mil. EUR
(ERDF)

43.2 mil. EUR
funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of capacities of the public and private sector for skills development of employees and entrepreneurial competences achieved through transnational cooperation driving economic and social innovation in central European regions



Programme-specific output indicators:



	Institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies, action plans, tools & services	792
	Enterprises (SMEs and large firms)	5711
	Interest groups including NGOs	1229
	Public authorities	1006
	Business support organisations reached	905

Projects funded under SO 1.2 responded to the need to build and reinforce the skills and entrepreneurial competences of innovation actors by producing a wide range of different outputs. Accessing knowledge and good practices as well as networks which are not available nationally were reported as key benefits by a vast majority of beneficiaries. As a result, increasing knowledge, capacity and competences as well as building trust beyond borders were considered as the most successful achievements of the programme. The evaluation therefore demonstrated that operations were in line with the ToC established initially, by responding to skill development needs stemming from labour market transformations and more global trends. More specifically, SO 1.2 projects were considered particularly successful in improving capacities of the public and private sector for skills development and entrepreneurial competences as well as for supporting entrepreneurship through the development of technological and managerial competences and entrepreneurial mindsets. Social entrepreneurship and social innovation were also envisaged by the supported projects.

A wide range of territories (both urban and rural areas) benefitted from the projects, directly through project activities (e.g. pilot actions) and indirectly through the transfer of project results. Likewise, projects funded under SO 1.2 targeted a wide diversity of end-users, with strong benefits for (social) enterprises – including SMEs - and entrepreneurs. Projects were also believed to have contributed to changes of practices among target groups, in particular at the individual level.

Finally, projects also contributed to better policy coordination horizontally at the local and regional levels in particular, as well as vertically between these two levels, though to a lesser extent than in SO 1.1. Projects also supported the implementation of wider strategies and multiplication effects in terms of newly created cooperation opportunities were also reported.

Nevertheless, demographic challenges with adverse impacts on the availability of skills and competences such as migration and brain drain persist in Central Europe, and social innovation is only slowly emerging. Even though significant progress has been achieved in the availability of public services for innovation support to businesses and entrepreneurship, further support is needed to embrace the latest innovation trends, here again making the added value of the programme more evident.

5.1.3. LOW-CARBON

SO2.1. To develop and implement solutions for increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage in public infrastructures

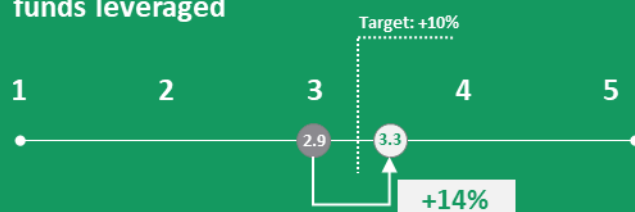
7 projects

82.4% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

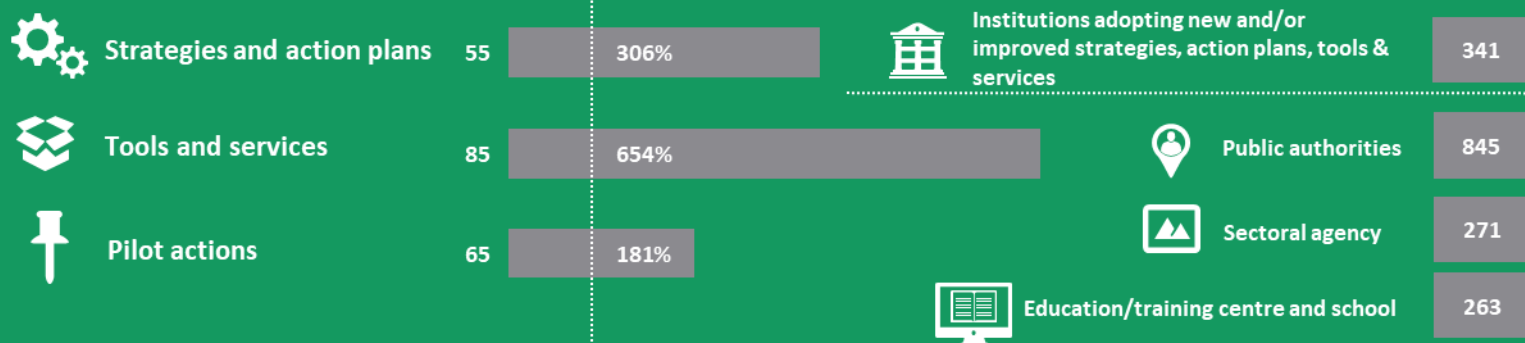
14.4 mil. EUR (ERDF)

112.1 mil. EUR funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of capacities of the public sector and related entities for increased energy efficiency and renewable energy use in public infrastructures achieved through transnational cooperation



Programme-specific output indicators:



Projects funded under SO 2.1 responded to the need for low-carbon solutions in public infrastructures by producing a wide range of outputs to help increase energy efficiency and renewable energy usage. This was in particular achieved by improving the capacities and reducing know-how disparities of the public sector in relation to energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions.

Accessing knowledge and good practices as well as networks which are not available nationally were reported as key benefits by a strong majority of beneficiaries. As a result, increasing knowledge, capacity and competences, delivering higher quality outputs than expected in a national context as well as building trust beyond borders were considered as the most successful achievements of the programme.

The evaluation therefore demonstrated that operations were in line with the ToC established initially, by providing and sharing solutions to reduce energy consumption and related carbon emissions in public buildings. However, the transfer of SO 2.1 project results to other sectors, territories and governance levels was quite limited, and their contribution to better coordination between decision-making bodies was mainly to be observed at the local and regional levels, as well as vertically between the two. More generally, findings of the evaluation point to more locally rooted impacts, in particular where project actions were implemented (e.g. schools), and more limited effects at macro-level (including with regard to wider strategies).

Urban areas were reported to have benefitted more from projects (as they usually host more and larger public buildings, e.g. schools). At the same time, a wide diversity of stakeholders was targeted, with local authorities and, to a lesser extent, sectoral agencies and infrastructure and service providers being more prominently represented among target groups, in line with the focus of the SO. Nonetheless, the contribution of projects to change of practices was overall moderate and mostly achieved at individual level.

Importantly, projects have led to strong multiplication effects, in particular through fund leverage (reportedly above the programme average) and new partnerships and cooperation opportunities, two factors which should help make project outputs and results even more sustainable. Over the past years, Central Europe experienced steady increases in both energy efficiency and the production of energy from renewable sources across the CE area. Yet, sustained efforts to make the public sector an inspiring example in the transition towards a low-carbon economy are needed, as the region is still host to a number of carbon-intensive industries.

SO2.2. To improve territorially based low-carbon energy planning strategies and policies supporting climate change mitigation

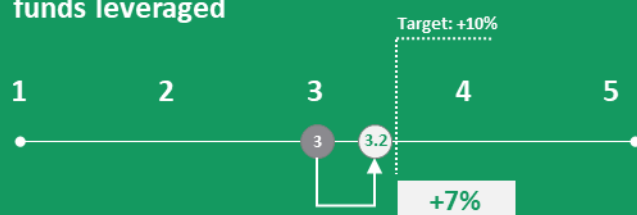
5 projects

94.4% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

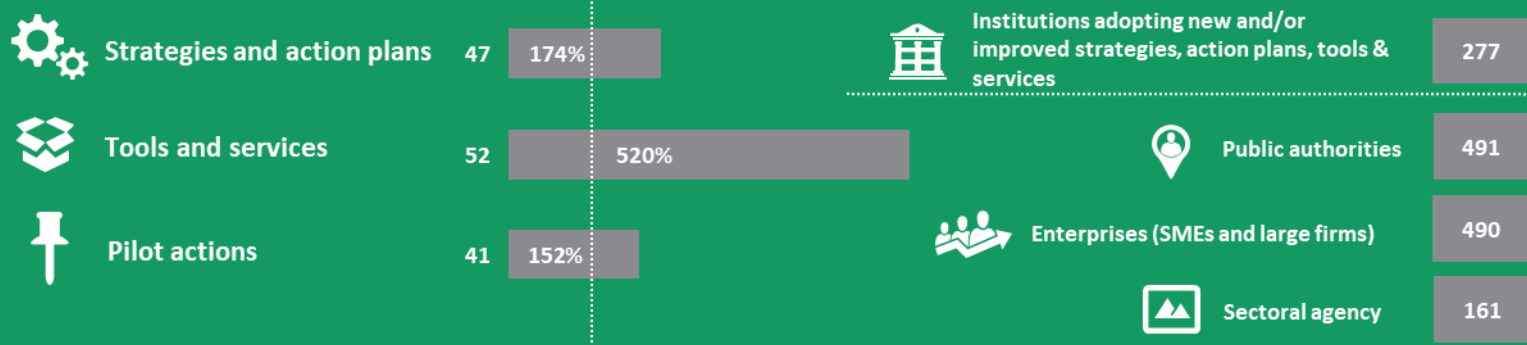
9.1 mil. EUR (ERDF)

125.3 mil. EUR funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of capacities of the public sector and related entities for territorially based low-carbon energy planning and policies achieved through transnational cooperation



Programme-specific output indicators:



Projects funded under SO 2.2 responded to the need for low-carbon energy planning strategies and policies by producing a wide range of outputs. In particular, projects helped improve capacities of the public sector for territorially based low-carbon energy planning strategies and stimulate the exchange of knowledge and experience to help planning, financing and implementing concrete sustainable energy actions. Accessing networks, knowledge and good practices as well as funds which are not available nationally were reported as key benefits by the vast majority of beneficiaries. As a result, increasing knowledge, capacity and competences, building trust beyond borders and delivering higher quality outputs than expected in a national context were considered as the most successful achievements of the programme.

The evaluation therefore demonstrated that operations were in line with the ToC established initially, by promoting innovative local and regional energy planning strategies (e.g. aiming at the monitoring and optimisation of energy use, or fostering behaviour change) thereby leading to energy savings. A wide diversity of stakeholders was therefore targeted, with SMEs and, to a lesser extent, local and regional authorities as well as sectoral agencies being more prominently represented among target groups. Importantly, projects have led to strong multiplication effects, in particular through fund leverage (reportedly well above the programme average) and new partnerships and cooperation opportunities, two factors which should help make project outputs and results even more sustainable. It is noteworthy that the interest of citizens and businesses in the issues addressed by the projects is also a key factor for the uptake and sustainability of project results. Therefore, stakeholder engagement and public outreach play a significant role for the projects' success. Yet, surveyed beneficiaries reported that the contribution of projects to change of practices was overall moderate both at the individual and organisational level.

Even though the transfer of project results to other sectors and governance levels was quite limited, their contribution to better coordination between decision-making bodies was very strong horizontally at the local and regional levels, as well as vertically between the local and regional levels, and between the regional and national levels. Job creation was another key result reported in the project reports, with 29 newly created FTE jobs on average per project (i.e. twice the programme average). As different paces in decarbonisation-enabled employment dynamics have been observed across CE regions, it is important to enable further the exploitation of renewable energy sources, the optimisation of energy distribution and the realisation of energy-saving investments, with expected benefits for the regional labour markets. The added value of the programme to achieve results going in these directions was unanimously praised by surveyed beneficiaries.

SO2.3. To improve capacities for mobility planning in functional urban areas to lower CO2 emissions

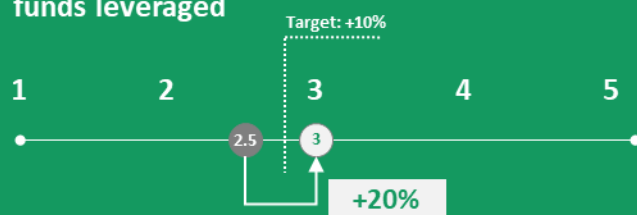
6 projects

75% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

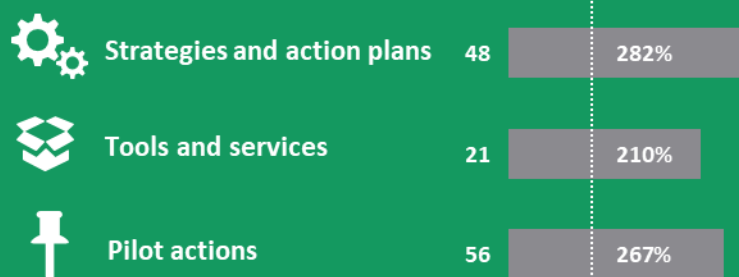
9.9 mil. EUR (ERDF)

176 mil. EUR funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of capacities of the public sector and related entities for low-carbon mobility planning in functional urban areas achieved through transnational cooperation



Programme-specific output indicators:



Projects funded under SO 2.3 responded to the need for more efficient and environmentally-friendly mobility planning by producing a wide range of outputs. In particular, projects helped to increase the knowledge and planning capacity of the public sector for integrated low-carbon mobility solutions in functional urban areas, to improve their capacities for low-carbon mobility planning and to foster smart low-carbon mobility in public urban transport.

Increasing knowledge, capacity and competences, building trust beyond borders, fostering cooperation and enhancing the quality of governance and coordination at all governance levels as well as supporting public authorities to offer new or better services for citizens were reported as key achievements of the projects. Increasing knowledge capacity and competences was also considered as the most successful achievement of the programme.

The evaluation therefore demonstrated that operations were in line with the ToC established initially, by addressing the negative externalities of a high energy-consuming sector through functional approaches. In line with the requirement of the SO, functional urban areas are believed to have benefitted more under this SO (e.g. through the contribution of projects to their Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans), as did infrastructure and service providers, local authorities and SMEs among target groups.

While the transfer of SO 2.3 project results to other sectors, territories and governance levels was reportedly more limited, their contribution to better coordination between decision-making bodies is likely to have been very strong at and across all governance levels. It is however important to note in that regard that the sample of respondents⁷¹ in this SO is very small and therefore not necessarily representative of the experience of all project partners.

Importantly, projects have led to strong multiplication effects, in particular through fund leverage (reportedly well above the programme average), while access to funds was deemed the most important influencing factor for project results sustainability by surveyed beneficiaries.

⁷¹ For SO2.3, in the beneficiary survey, N=12 for all questions related to the degree of transferability to other sectors, territories or governance levels. More details are presented in Annex 8.

As car remains an important transport mode for commuting and air pollution, noise pollution and road congestion are perceived as important problems in some CE cities, continued efforts for low-carbon mobility planning are needed, making the programme's focus on this issue still relevant.

5.1.4. ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

SO3.1. To improve integrated environmental management capacities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources

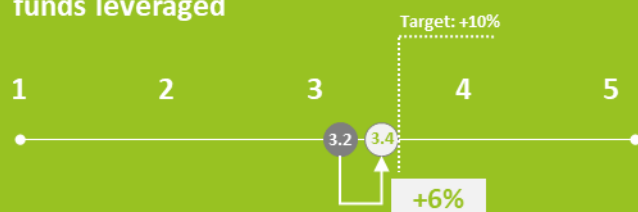
9 projects

86.7% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

16.8 mil. EUR (ERDF)

19.8 mil. EUR funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of integrated environmental management capacities of the public sector and related entities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources achieved through transnational cooperation



Programme-specific output indicators:



In response to the needs identified initially and in line with the ToC, projects under SO 3.1 provided solutions for the sustainable management of protected or environmentally highly valuable areas, developed tools for sustainably use natural resources and avoid potential usage conflicts and tested the application of innovative technologies and instruments in support of climate change adaptation and environment protection. Projects funded under SO 3.1 provide successful examples of interventions contributing to EU objectives of protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, reducing pollution and supporting circular economy. They also showcase the role of natural heritage as a location factor and the use of its assets as drivers for economic development.

The evaluation found that projects under SO 3.1 have effectively contributed to strengthening transnational cooperation among the relevant actors, improving integrated environmental management capacities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and to harmonizing policy frameworks. The evaluation also confirmed that the complexity of the challenges requires integrated approaches based on sustainable long-term strategic visions, linking different policies, sectors and administrative levels.

Projects financed under SO 3.1 were implemented in a variety of territories, including urban, semi-urban, rural and agricultural areas, covering flatland, hilly, mountainous terrains. Usually, the territories transcended administrative boundaries, as they followed the natural landscape (for example in the case of river basins). Diversity of local contexts was in many cases key for project success.

Climate change and environment-related challenges are by nature transnational. As such, projects financed under SO3.1 are highly relevant for tackling the widely present challenges of climate change, prioritised in all Macro-Regional Strategies.

The evaluation confirmed that that the Programme has successfully contributed to developing solutions to common problems and to bringing together stakeholders from different countries, sectors and contexts, to enhance knowledge-creation and knowledge-sharing. The majority of beneficiaries consider that the

Programme has supported them to achieve results which would not have been possible otherwise and has given them access to knowledge, good practices, networks and opportunities which are not available nationally.

Challenges still remain in respect to protecting and valorising natural heritage and resources. Pollution, man-made disasters, and climate change are major factors affecting biodiversity. There are persistent disparities in terms of environmental performance and implementation of environmental policies, determined by the different economic structure and development level, lifestyle, investments in innovation and circular economy of the different countries in the Programme area. Tourism remains one cross-cutting factor impacting natural resources and heritage.

At the same time, technical capacity, attitudes, awareness and approach to environmental protection, preventing pollution and mitigating climate change are different across the region, with a pronounced East-West difference, adding up to the need for more coordination. Language barriers are an important constraint in accessing information which needs to be taken into consideration.

SO3.2. To improve capacities for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources

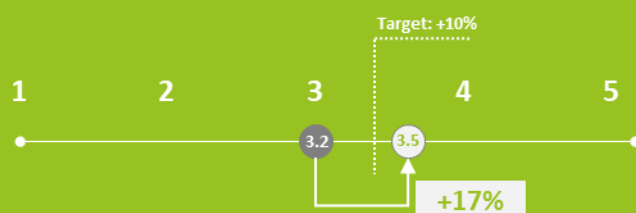
16 projects

97.9% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

28.4 mil. EUR
(ERDF)

74.5 mil. EUR
funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of capacities of the public and private sector for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources achieved through transnational cooperation



Programme-specific output indicators:



In response to the challenges identified initially, projects funded under SO 3.2 provide successful solutions for revitalizing and reintegrating cultural and heritage resources into the local economies and into the lives of the communities, of actively engaging people in the revitalization process and creating new opportunities for education, for leisure or for business. Many projects created the necessary tools and frameworks for more inclusive cultural services, for various target groups.

The evaluation confirmed that operations were in line with the ToC established initially. The implementation of the projects under SO 3.2 has effectively contributed creating harmonized policy frameworks at transnational level, to strengthening transnational cooperation among relevant actors and to achieving the Programme's objectives in terms of "improving the capacities of the public and private sector for the sustainable use of cultural heritage and resources in central Europe through transnational cooperation". There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the improved capacities are likely support better coordination between the various stakeholders in the area, in relation to enhancing the preservation, management and sustainable valorisation of the available cultural heritage and resources.

The outputs and results produced visible effects for the target groups, as well as direct benefits to the communities. The developed strategies, tools and instruments and trainings have provided the necessary

framework and means for coordinated action across borders, facilitating access and participation for wider audiences and enabling new ways of delivering economic and social value. Pilot actions have effectively demonstrated the use of the other outputs in practice and have delivered direct and immediate benefits for the people and communities.

The particular added value of transnational cooperation, as highlighted by the stakeholders in the case of SO 3.2, resides with having successfully contributed to developing solutions to common problems and to bringing together stakeholders from different countries, sectors and contexts, to building trust and enhancing knowledge creation and sharing. As is the case with other SOs, the vast majority of beneficiaries believe that the Programme has supported them to achieve results which would not have been possible without funding from Interreg CE and that the projects lead to new partnerships or cooperation opportunities.

The evaluation found that projects under SO 3.2 are highly transferable and that their results have already been employed in various other contexts, well beyond the Programme area, proving their sustainability and viability. Many projects obtained results which went well beyond the initial expectations of the project partners in terms of outreach or interest of the public. The evaluation also identified numerous examples of actions which have contributed to changing individual behaviour and institutional practices.

Challenges remain and new opportunities manifest themselves in the Programme area. Cultural and heritage assets are increasingly exposed to a variety of pressures and usage conflicts. There are still significant disparities with respect to how existing assets are valorised and gaps in terms of accessibility.

However, culture and heritage have gained a more prominent place in the strategic framework at EU level and their cross-cutting role for development and competitiveness is widely recognized. At the same time, new technologies, digitalization and social media have contributed to better preserving, valorising and bringing culture and heritage closer to the people. Against growing trends of nationalism and anti-Europeanism, there is wide agreement that European cultural heritage can give people a sense of belonging to Europe.

SO3.3. To improve environmental management of functional urban areas to make them more liveable places

8 projects

97.9% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

17 mil. EUR
(ERDF)

38.8 mil. EUR
funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of integrated environmental management capacities of the public sector and related entities in FUAs achieved through transnational cooperation for making them more liveable places



Programme-specific output indicators:



Evidence gathered during the evaluation shows that the projects under SO 3.3 provided adequate solutions for addressing the needs identified initially in terms of insufficient spatial planning powers and capabilities, inadequate coordination between different policy actors or lacking cross sectorial approaches at the level of FUAs. Thus, they contributed to improving planning, management and decision making at FUA level. In line with the ToC established initially, projects have developed and implemented strategies and tools to manage and improve environmental quality and to tackle natural and manmade risks, to reduce land-use conflicts in FUAs, have developed concepts and have implemented environmental pilot actions.

The implemented pilot actions have particularly contributed to empowering local stakeholders and to increasing their capacity, providing them with the opportunity to learn and share knowledge and experience with peers from other countries, confirming the added value of the programme.

Having access to knowledge, good practices, networks and opportunities which are not available nationally was reported by beneficiaries as a major benefit from participating in an Interreg CE project. Beneficiaries also mentioned that the Programme has contributed to building trust beyond borders, which highlights its added value in comparison to national initiatives.

The main target groups for SO 3.3 projects were local and regional public authorities, in order to improve cooperation and coordination between the core cities and surrounding areas. However, actively involving a wide array of stakeholders throughout the implementation of the projects was key not only for successfully carrying out activities, but also to ensuring their sustainability.

Challenges remain on multiple dimensions. Pollution is a severe problem, mainly generated by transport, energy consumption and waste creation. Improving air quality, reducing high levels of noise, tackling contaminated sites, addressing water scarcity/quality, and fostering efficient waste-management cycles are prominent challenges for urban areas, together with ensuring preparedness and response capacity to climate change phenomena, such as flooding and extreme temperatures.

At FUA-level, decision-making power is often dispersed among the numerous policy-actors and institutional structures often remain focused on the core-centric urban model, placing surrounding areas at disadvantage against the core cities. Efforts and practices dedicated to environmental management are unequal across the Programme area, making it a case for further support.

5.1.5. TRANSPORT

SO4.1. To improve planning and coordination of regional passenger transport systems for better connections to national and European transport networks

6 projects

70% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

11.4 mil. EUR (ERDF)

72.2 mil. EUR funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of coordinated planning capacities of the public sector and related entities for regional passenger transport systems linked to national and European transport networks achieved through transnational cooperation

Programme-specific output indicators:



Institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies, action plans, tools & services

120



Public authorities

394



Enterprises (SMEs and large firms)

245



Infrastructure and (public) service provider

239

Projects funded under SO 4.1 responded to the need of better coordination in respect to regional passenger transport, supporting the development of planning and management capacities of the stakeholders at local and regional level. The outputs and results effectively contributed to increasing the accessibility, connectivity and quality of public transport of peripheral regions, rural and intermediate areas (towns, suburbs) to major nodes. As a result of the pilot actions, solutions using demand-responsive transport services, mobility as a service, digitalization, and non-motorized transport, especially by bicycle, have been tested and have significantly improved connectivity in the rural areas. Projects have also contributed to raising awareness in respect to road transport negative externalities and encouraged reducing reliance of private cars, in favour of public transport and more sustainable solutions.

The evaluation confirmed that projects funded under SO 4.1 have provided successful examples of tools which are not only highly transferable but could also provide essential inputs for developing the regulatory framework and guidance at EU level. Overall, beneficiaries declared that projects were successful and very successful in addressing strategically important issues, such as enabling the implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies, particularly from the environmental perspective of supporting clean, sustainable transport. The transnational strategies and tools developed in the projects outline further actions to be taken in the macro-regions, also making the case for future support of these initiatives.

As was the case in other SOs, the added value of the interventions comes from enabling access to networks, knowledge and experience which would not be accessible otherwise. This is even more prominent in the case of smaller municipalities, which lack the necessary resources and connections. Establishment of interpersonal relationships and lasting cooperation structures were also mentioned as key benefits from transnational cooperation, with strong learning benefits for local and regional actors.

In line with the initial ToC, projects financed under SO 4.1 had a pronounced territorial focus, supporting sparsely populated peripheral areas along the national borders and in remote rural areas. The main target groups were local and regional public authorities and transport operators but other stakeholders were engaged or benefited directly, including commuters and citizens in the pilot locations. Universities, research institutes, education and training centres were also mentioned by beneficiaries.

Remaining challenges are still significant and complex, calling for further actions. Integrated passenger transport systems and multimodality are unevenly implemented and face multiple regulatory and administrative constraints, particularly in cross-border areas. Cooperation and coordination among the stakeholders are hindered by the large number of operators and service providers, lack of trust between the operators, high competition, lack of experience or expertise, missing legal framework. Multimodal passenger transport, including integrated ticketing and payment systems, are confined to local, regional, or national levels and are highly fragmented. Attitudes and user habits still make land transport heavily dependent of public cars.

SO4.2. To improve coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally-friendly freight solutions

3 projects

100% beneficiaries considering that similar results would not have been achieved without Interreg CE

4.9 mil. EUR
(ERDF)

32.2 mil. EUR
funds leveraged

Result indicator: Status of coordination among freight transport stakeholders for increasing multimodal environmentally-friendly freight solutions achieved through transnational cooperation



Programme-specific output indicators:



The projects financed under SO 4.2 have responded to the challenges in the Programme area in respect to insufficient coordination among freight transport stakeholders, which represents a barrier to more streamlined, flexible, and sustainable multimodal freight transport. Projects have delivered outputs and results addressing various administrative and technical barriers, the lack of shared standards and procedures and, more generally, of a harmonised framework. They have produced and tested pilot actions for optimizing individual modes of freight transport and also for combining them in multi-modal freight transport chains, as a means to deliver more sustainable transport solutions.

The evaluation confirmed that the projects have contributed to increasing the knowledge and implementation capacities of freight transport stakeholders for multimodal environmentally friendly freight transport systems and logistics and to improving the coordination among freight transport stakeholders, in line with the initial ToC.

Projects under SO 4.2 contributed to improving both horizontal coordination at the local, regional and national levels, and vertical coordination between the regional and national levels. Occasionally, outputs and results were used to improve policy coordination at EU-level, showcasing the EU-level relevance of the topic and the appropriateness of transnational support. Generally, beneficiaries consider that the added value of transnational cooperation resides with the opportunity to learn, exchange ideas and solutions, and to be part of transnational networks.

The evaluation showed that generally, tools developed by projects in SO 4.2 can be transferred and used in other territories or by similar stakeholders, making them highly relevant beyond the Programme area. Smaller-scale actions, such as choosing transport routes or implementing changes in the business models are easier to replicate and particularly successful, while policy level actions are more difficult to promote and implement.

Challenges remain in terms of insufficient coordination and planning capacity of freight transport stakeholders, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving policy and regulatory frameworks. The gradual shift to alternative fuels vehicles will continue to influence the development of the specific infrastructure, fleet development, business models and operation costs. Other changes in legislation go well beyond environment protection and include complex issues such as harmonised technical standards, road charging systems and technologies, signalling, road safety, or fair working conditions for drivers.

5.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2021-2027 INTERREG CE PROGRAMME

The following recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation of Calls 1 and 2 of the Interreg CE Programme. They refer to common issues highlighted in the previous sections as relevant at Programme level, as well as to thematic aspects. Their interpretation, however, must account for the fact that the evaluation did not cover the more recent, third and fourth call.

Recommendations are addressed to the Programme Authorities, particularly the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat (JS), with the aim of informing future actions in relation to the design of the future calls under the 2021-2027 programming period and, also at support of the monitoring of future projects so as to optimize the impact and streamline the implementation of future interventions.

5.2.1. AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL

Following up on the conclusion that the Programme's synergies with national strategies and other EU-funded programmes could be further promoted, it is recommended that the Programme Authorities, particularly the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee, ensure a more systematic approach both to identifying and enabling possible synergies. National Contact Points (NCPs) could take up a more prominent role in identifying and matching existing opportunities, in their respective countries. In particular, Interreg project partners should gain knowledge of the strategic priorities at national or EU-level, and should be encouraged to interact with other entities, implementing projects from other sources.

Considering the positive results obtained by the Programme through targeted calls dedicated to producing synergies and capitalizing results (such as Call 4), this approach should be continued. Further on, Managing Bodies of other programs (transnational, cross-border or with EU-wide coverage) could be engaged more frequently and purposefully to work together for defining possible areas, mechanisms and possibly timelines for enhanced synergies. The results of these actions can be then integrated into the design of the calls for proposals, as specific requirements or suggested actions or they could be delivered as guidance for applicants and beneficiaries.

Taking into account the challenges identified in relation to policy uptake, it is recommended that more sustained actions be carried out in order to engage the relevant stakeholders and to support the use of projects' results in informing policy decisions, at all levels. While some project beneficiaries might be well suited to influence policy uptake at local, regional or national levels, very few can do so effectively at EU level. It is thus recommended that the MA and the NCPs, with the support of the beneficiaries would take a more prominent role in identifying and engaging the relevant stakeholders which would generally be less accessible to smaller beneficiaries (Members of the European Parliament were one example suggested during the evaluation), for example by organizing thematic events or by preparing and delivering materials showcasing the results obtained. This would also allow for the projects results to be exploited to their full potential and be sustainable over the longer term, including by cross-fertilisation and fund leverage.

Considering the significant contribution which the strong project partnerships, the extensive communication efforts and the wide participatory approach had to the success of the implemented projects, it is recommended that the same approach be kept for future calls. In order to ensure high quality projects are financed, and that the actions carried out are innovative and deliver high added value, it is recommended that the MA ensures that sufficient technical capacities are available in the project selection process, particularly in relation to evaluating the potential effectiveness of any cutting-edge technology designed or employed in projects.

It is also highly recommended that pilot actions continue to be supported at large, as a means to test and validate new solutions, of raising awareness and building engagement at local level. Careful consideration should however be given to their sustainability, as it depends heavily (if not exclusively) on the capacity of the local actors. In this respect, the MA/JS/NCPs could provide further guidance to beneficiaries on how to select locations and entities for pilot actions and how to implement the pilot actions, so as to increase sustainability. In order to gain more insights into the direct, tangible benefits produced by the pilot actions for the people and communities in the CE area, voluntary evaluation at project level could also be encouraged, focusing on sustainability and durability of change.

Since the right locations turned out to be essential for the success of pilot actions, it is recommended that the good practices identified be applied in future operations. In this respect, the MA/ JS/ NCPs could provide guidance to beneficiaries on how to select the most suitable locations, how to assess the willingness and the capacity of local stakeholders, how to empower them and to gain people support. To this end, the implemented project provided numerous examples of successful practices, which can be used.

In order to improve the programme's accessibility, it is recommended to increase outreach efforts towards potential beneficiaries from less active regions and/or categories. To this end, the NCPs could play a crucial role in disseminating information about the Programme in their countries, by actively engaging and assisting potential beneficiaries. The MA could also facilitate a unitary approach, as well as exchange of practices between the NCPs.

Promoting the re-use and / or transfer of the knowledge and of the outputs and results obtained in the projects is important for improving the performance and impact of the programme. It fosters synergies and complementarities between projects, and helps avoid double funding of similar actions. Therefore, transferability of outputs and results should be sought at programme level (between the projects), and beyond (at Interreg level and with other EU-funded programmes under the Cohesion Policy).

At project level, the various stakeholders involved in the projects are likely to act as multipliers to promote the use and uptake of results, beyond the project. Programme authorities may encourage these efforts by introducing specific requirements in the guidelines for applicants (asking them, for example, to use existing outputs or results, to present the potential for transferability for their envisaged outputs and results and carry out activities either to support transfer) and by providing guidelines in respect to how this can be pursued at project level.

Taking into account the large number of high-quality outputs produced by the programme, it is recommended that the MA/JS identify the exploitable results. These could then be disseminated to future beneficiaries and to other stakeholders, so as to encourage transfer and capitalization. To this end, the output library is an excellent resource. Programme authorities can also actively promote their transfer through their various events or communication materials. National and EU institutions, agencies or thematic networks may support the transfer and uptake of the tools and measures at policy level or may include them into their own instruments.

On the same note, it is recommended that the programme bodies (MA/NCPs/JS), would take a more systematic approach to collecting and disseminating good practices identified in projects. To this end the MA could initiate a process for identifying and collecting best practices, with the support of the JS. Later on, the NCPs and other stakeholders could support their dissemination. This would enable other projects to improve their implementation, would increase visibility of results and would potentially increase the overall quality of the outputs and results produced with the Programme's support.

Integrated territorial development through tailored place-based initiatives and instruments are gaining interest across the EU and are likely to further encourage cooperation beyond administrative borders at local level. In the future, increased awareness and knowledge on the complexity of urban development processes are likely to determine better alignment of investments in the different areas – energy efficiency, mobility, land use etc. In this context and taking into account both the persistent disparities between the urban and rural areas in the Programme regions, and the excellent results obtained by the projects implemented at FUA level, future interventions should continue to focus on creating of functional links between the different territories and on enabling a fair distribution of benefits between them. To that end, the Managing Authority could seek to embed sound principles for actions targeting integrated territorial development and urban-rural linkages, such as:

balanced partnership (at local level), participatory engagement, financial inclusivity etc. [The Framework for Action to Advance Integrated Territorial Development](#)⁷², developed by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), can provide inspiration in this respect.

Indicators targets set initially at programme level have largely been exceeded by the results achieved from the first two calls. While a conservative approach to target setting is recommended, more ambitious targets might be considered for the future.

5.2.2. INNOVATION

Based on the positive experience of innovation projects so far, it is recommended that further actions be supported, in the 2021-2027 programme, to promote cooperation projects in this thematic priority, allowing for a wide range of topics (e.g. advanced manufacturing, key-enabling technologies, digital healthcare, etc.) to be addressed, depending on the local needs identified and taking into account the wider trends in terms of technological development, societal challenges as well as priorities.

Considering the disparities in terms of innovation performance across the Programme territory, it is recommended that more targeted support be provided for less experienced (potential) project partners in the Innovation-focused interventions, thereby ensuring that the programme does not become fragmented, territorially and individually, between lead innovators and followers. To this end, the MA, JS and NCPs could, for example, organize dedicated events, prepare and disseminate guiding materials and facilitate networking between more and less experienced partners. A focus on less-performing regions is expected, in this respect.

Considering the high potential of the solutions developed in the financed projects, it is recommended that capitalisation of results be supported more intensively, to allow for more transferability of results and spill over effects across sectors, territories and governance levels in the longer term, acknowledging that innovation is a key driver of growth and thereby support convergence processes. This could be done both at Programme level, by the MA/NCPs engaging other stakeholders in a systematic manner, and at project level, by the Beneficiaries. More specific requirements for capitalization could be included in the application package.

5.2.3. LOW-CARBON

Taking into account the complex nature of climate change mitigation efforts, it is recommended to continue to support projects addressing low-carbon issues in their large diversity, with a renewed focus on key challenges such as renewable energy and heating and cooling, strengthening the “testing area” concept of the programme where newly developed or discovered solutions can be applied in practice.

On the same note, bearing in mind that reducing the carbon footprint requires integrated actions in multiple areas, it is recommended that future calls prioritize the creation of synergies between the low-carbon and other actions, especially mobility and transport, addressing functional urban areas, urban-rural links and cross-border flows.

Considering the differences in terms of performance, approach and even attitudes between rural and urban areas, it is recommended that future calls place more focus on rural areas, by encouraging participation of project partners and implementation of pilot actions in rural areas, to mitigate the risk of deepening territorial fragmentation in low-carbon performance.

5.2.4. ENVIRONMENT

Considering the urgent need to step up efforts towards climate change adaptation and mitigation, it is recommended that this topic be approached horizontally in future actions. As such, the MA must ensure that all future operations are fully in line with [Regulation \(EU\) 2020/852 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment](#) and all programme bodies (JS/NCPs) should contribute to providing applicants and beneficiaries with proper guidance in this respect. Further on, it is recommended that green, smart and sustainable development be reinforced as a cross-cutting principle in all operations, with specific focus on

⁷² [urban-rural-land-linkages-a-concept-and-framework-for-action.pdf \(unhabitat.org\)](#) and [url-gp-1.pdf \(unhabitat.org\)](#)

producing long-term changes in attitudes and practices in relation to environment protection, both at individual and at organizational level.

Acknowledging the persisting disparities between the Western and the Eastern part of the Programme territory and the different needs, priorities, attitudes and awareness to environmental topics, it is recommended that future operations be financed on this theme and that they focus more supporting lagging, less performing regions. This needs to be done, however, taking into account the ambitious commitment at EU level in respect to environmental objectives.

Pilot actions have proved particularly successful means to support local communities, by providing them with knowledge and technical solutions which would be otherwise out of reach. Therefore, it is recommended that future actions in environment-focus priorities would encourage the involvement of research institutions in directly supporting local administrations, particularly those which would not have access to their services otherwise. However, the evaluation also highlighted the limited lifespan that the technical solutions developed in this priority are likely to have. As such, it is recommended that this aspect be taken into consideration assessing the sustainability, transferability and cost-effectiveness of results.

5.2.5. CULTURE

Considering the recent surges in political populism, challenging EU legitimacy and hindering further European integration and acknowledging the role that culture bears for consolidating European identity, it is recommended that future Culture-related projects embed the promotion of European values and Central European identity. To this end, specific requirements could be included in the selection process.

Given their proven value to creating high quality outputs and results, it is recommended that innovative solutions and instruments for digitisation, digital preservation and digital access to cultural heritage be further supported. A comprehensive approach in this respect is necessary, one which encompasses skills development, changing business processes and models, reshaping relations with audiences.

Taking into account the cross-cutting roles of creativity for regional resilience, confirmed by the numerous positive examples provided by the projects implemented through Interreg CE, it is recommended that future interventions embed these topics horizontally. To this end, the MA could ensure that future projects, irrespective of their thematic focus, would foster creativity, as well as innovation.

Embedding culture and creativity in other thematic operations, such as business support, innovation, urban development, environmental actions, education, social inclusion etc., would contribute to delivering smart, inclusive and sustainable solutions to current challenges, including in the context of COVID recovery efforts. Along this line, it is recommended that the MA explore the opportunity of supporting operations to promote links between cultural and natural heritage, particularly in relation to nature conservation and valorisation efforts.

5.2.6. TRANSPORT

Considering the challenges affecting the programme area, it is recommended to continue the implementation of pilot actions, to test and validate new solutions. However, it is necessary to focus more on ensuring that these solutions can be maintained by the local authorities, that strategies and plans are implemented and not just adopted and that the responsible entities are actively involved and truly committed to carrying out the activities in the projects. Also, it is recommended that more focus be placed on the transferability of the solutions.

Given the importance of decision-makers support for the projects' sustainability, it is recommended that further efforts be made to involve them throughout the duration of the Programme. Considering that, in the case of Transport priority this has proved particularly challenging, Programme authorities may seek to engage relevant stakeholders /decision-making bodies at EU level, in a more systematic high-level approach.

6. ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Detailed methodology

Annex 2 – Theory of change

Annex 3 – Case studies

Annex 4 – Cost-effectiveness analysis

Annex 5 – Surveys

Annex 6 – Interviews

Annex 7 – Focus groups

Annex 8 – Results from surveys

Annexes can be found in a separate document