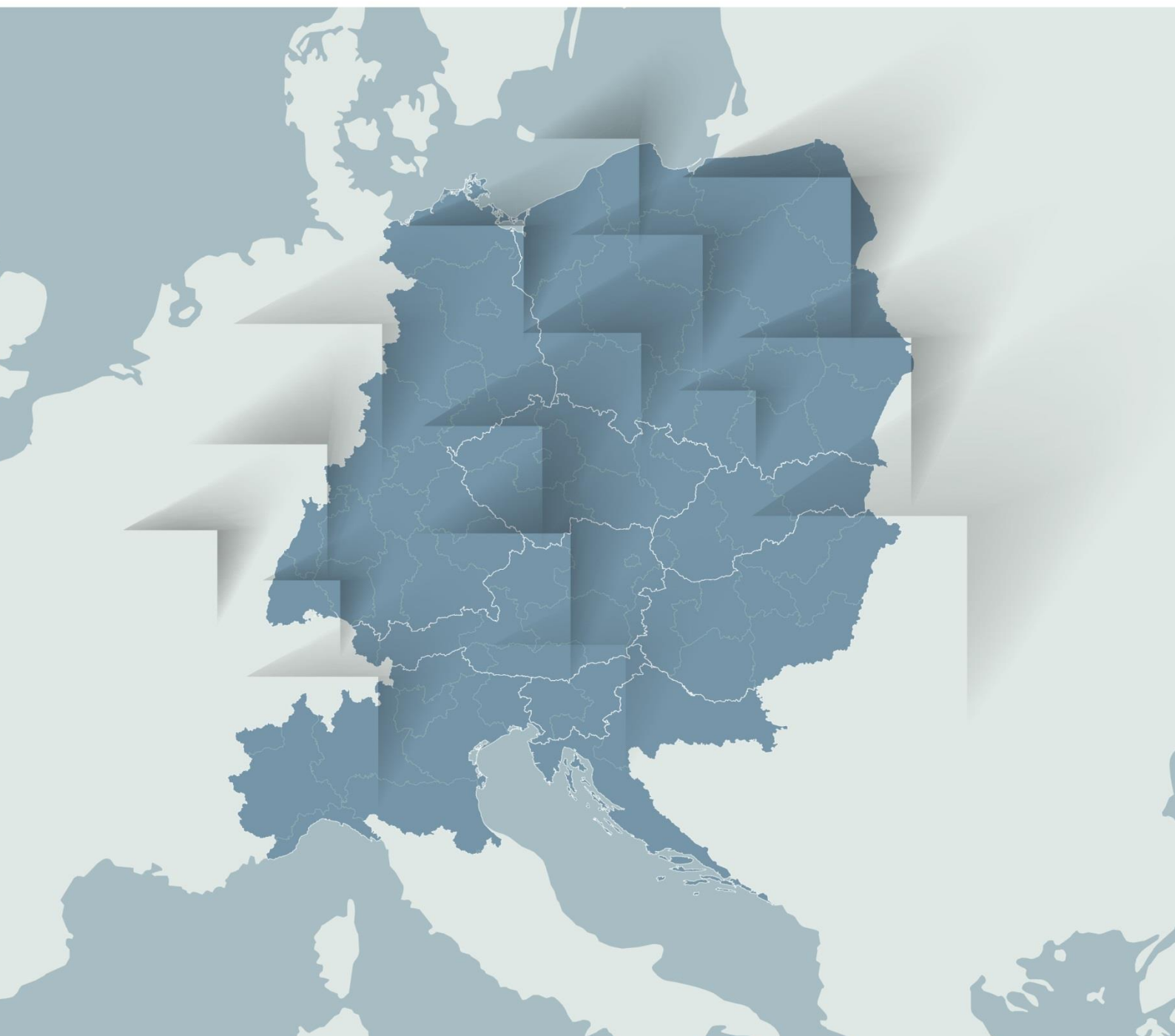


INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE EVALUATION SUMMARY

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The document should support Interreg programmes to summarize the findings of their evaluations (Art. 114 CPR)

1. Overview of the evaluation work

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2014-2020 Programme evaluation started in 2016 and is still ongoing. It was divided into two parts: operational and impact evaluation. Each part was carried out by an independent external evaluation consortium. The overall budget spent on evaluation is 195,810.00 EUR.

Operational evaluation started in 2016 and was conducted by evaluation experts from Spatial Foresight GmbH (DE) and t33 srl (IT). It aimed at assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme management system and related structures, in order to detect potentials for improvement already at an early stage of programme implementation. Based on the recommendations from the first evaluation report (2017) various follow-up measures were implemented by the programme. The final operational evaluation report (2019) provided an update of findings from the previous report and concluded that most of the initial recommendations have been taken up by the relevant programme bodies, mainly the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat (MA/JS), Monitoring Committee (MC) and National Contact Points (NCPs) and brought the desired improvements. The final report, which included only minor additional suggestions on potential further improvements, was approved by the MC.

Impact evaluation started in 2020 and is expected to be completed in mid-2023. The task is carried out by an external evaluation team from CIVITTA (RO) and wiiw (AT). The objective is to describe observed changes related to the objectives of the programme (gross effects), analyse to which extent they can be attributed to the implementation of the programme (net effects) and understand which mechanisms of programme implementation are most fruitful in delivering the observed impact (what works best). The first evaluation report analysing results of projects from the 1st and 2nd call was approved in 2022. The impact evaluation continues with analysing results of projects funded in 3rd and 4th call.

The evaluation results and follow-up measures were thoroughly discussed at a dedicated Evaluation Task Force and the MC. Recommendations from the operational and impact evaluation available so far are highly relevant also for the 2021-2027 programming period.

The programme has created a dedicated website to promote the evaluation results. They were also further disseminated in newsletters, on social media and through the Interact evaluation network.

2. Findings by priority axis in relation to result & output indicators

The evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2014-2020 Programme performed so far reveals that the programme is well on track to achieve the set objectives and indicators and the programme management processes are well established.

Main findings from the **operational evaluation** show that the programme has a well-defined management structure and each body has specific functions and responsibilities. It is managed smoothly and according to the planned activities and established targets in the Cooperation Programme and in detailed Annual Work Plans. The programme communication strategy is sound, concrete and coherent to support effective programme management and implementation. The communication approach is assessed as very advanced and highly effective. Application and selection procedure/s have been evaluated as rather efficient. The assessment criteria are considered balanced and the selection process is considered fair and impartial. The set-up of reporting and monitoring processes is evaluated as effectively contributing to the verification of project progress. The timing for the reimbursement of claims is adequate and respects the deadline of 90 days set by the EU Regulation. The programme has well developed mechanisms in place for developing synergies with other EU programmes. The activities at programme level can be evaluated as effective to generate synergies, for instance, the coordination with macro-regional strategies, Interact and other Interreg programmes.

The impact evaluation is still ongoing and the findings included in this report are based on analysis of 85 projects from calls 1 and 2 (out of total 138 projects in priority 1-4). Therefore, the conclusions about the effects and impact of the programme should be perceived with this limitation. So far, the programme has a positive impact with regard to the needs identified across all thematic priorities in the programme area. Analysed projects 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 or the delivery of higher quality services for citizens. The programme is well on track to meet or has already exceeded targets set for 2023 in the Performance Framework. Projects from calls 3 and 4 will add up to the values already achieved and evidence suggests that all the targets will be reached by 2023. Programme result indicator targets for 2023 have in some programme Specific Objectives (SOs) already been met in 2018 and the remaining SOs are well on track in order to achieve them. The Interreg CE projects reached a variety of target groups across the entire programme area. The actual numbers reached exceed 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 actively involved than initially planned. The impact evaluation also confirms that the programme strongly contributes across thematic priorities to building trust beyond national borders, enabling regions and cities to jointly tackle

challenges that go beyond borders and improving coordination and cooperation across governance levels. The added value of transnational cooperation was particularly visible leading to the establishment of interpersonal relationships and lasting cooperation structures as key benefits for local and regional actors.

The table below provides a detailed overview of the findings, related output indicators and result indicators and actions taken by the programme related to the identifier (EVAL 1 - operational evaluation and EVAL 2 - impact evaluation):

PRIORITY AXES OF INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2014-2020:

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
PA1	1b	Evaluators concluded that common output indicators CO26, CO41 and CO42 were not coherently calculated compared to other transnational programmes due to an insufficient definition of the indicator by the EC. An adaption of monitoring (target values) and counting method for common output was recommended to comply with the comparability objective of common output indicators.	CO26 CO41 CO42	N/A	The programme submitted a CP amendment request to the European Commission in February 2019, including the change of target values of common output indicators CO 1, 26, 41 and 42. This modification (CP Version 3) was adopted by the European Commission in April 2019.	EVAL 1
	1b	Evaluators recommended to skip the monitoring of progress for the programme result indicators as scheduled for 2020, as it would bring hardly new insights compared to the 2018 monitoring. It is seen as sufficient to anticipate the verification of the final achievements (2023) in order to feed still into the impact evaluation to be conducted in 2020/2021.	N/A	1.1 1.2	Revision of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	EVAL 1

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
	1b	Evaluators concluded that projects in Priority 1 have outperformed in delivering outputs compared to Programme targets and this is particularly visible for strategies and action plans. Despite having the lowest progress from all priorities to performance framework target of number of developed tools and services (73%), the tools and services have been delivered by 52% of projects funded under this Priority (projects from call 1 and 2), indicating good progress towards meeting the targets by 2023.	1b.1 1b.2 1b.3 1b.4 1b.5 1b.6 1b.7 1b.8	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	1b	Projects funded under Priority 1 (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 in the programme area.	1b.1 1b.3 1b.5 1b.7 CO1 CO41 CO42 CO26	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	1b	Projects funded under Priority 1 (SO 1.2) responded to the need to build and reinforce the skills and entrepreneurial competences of innovation actors. They 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 supported.	1b.2 1b.4 1b.6 1b.8 CO1 CO41 CO42 CO26	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
	1b	Evaluators observed that the Programme had overachieved its result indicator target for Priority 1 as early as 2018.	N/A	1.1 1.2	No actions taken	EVAL 2
PA2	4c	Calculation of common output indicators CO 41 and CO 42- please refer to explanations under PA 1.	CO41 CO42	N/A	See explanation under PA1	EVAL 1
	4c	Recommendation to review the monitoring process of programme result indicators - please refer to explanations under PA 1.	N/A	2.1	Revision of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	EVAL 1
	4c 4e	Evaluators concluded that SO 2.1 and SO 2.2 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 SO 2.3 produced a more balanced numbers of outputs compared to targets (around 2 times the target value).	4c.1 4c.2 4c.3 4c.4 4e.1 4e.3 4e.5 4e.2 4e.4 4e.6 4e.7	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	4c	Projects funded under Priority 2 (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	4c.1 4c.2 4c.3 4c.4 CO1 CO41	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
		disparities of the public sector in relation to energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions.	CO42			
	4c	Evaluators observed that the Programme has overachieved its result indicator target for Priority 2 (SO 2.1) as early as 2018.	N/A	2.1	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	4e	Calculation of common output indicators CO 41 and CO 42- please refer to explanations under PA 1	CO41 CO42	N/A	See explanation under PA1	EVAL 1
	4e	Recommendation to review the monitoring process of programme result indicators - please refer to explanations under PA 1	N/A	2.2 2.3	Revision of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	EVAL 1
	4e	Projects funded under Priority 2 (SO 2.2) responded to the need for low-carbon energy planning strategies and policies and 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.	4e.1 4e.3 4e.5 4e.7 CO1 CO41 CO42	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	4e	Projects funded under Priority 2 (SO 2.3) contributed to more efficient and environmentally-friendly mobility planning and helped to increase the knowledge and planning capacity of the public sector for integrated low-carbon mobility solutions in functional urban areas, to improve low-carbon mobility planning and to foster smart low-carbon mobility in public urban transport.	4e.2 4e.4 4e.6 4e.7 CO1 CO41 CO42	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
	4e	Evaluators observed that the Programme has achieved its targets as early as 2018 in almost all SOs, except for SO 2.2. For SO 2.3, the achievements exceeded the target by almost double. Given that similar performance is expected from the projects to be analysed in Phase 2 of the impact evaluation, it is almost certain that targets for SO 2.2 will also be exceeded.	N/A	2.2 2.3	No actions taken	EVAL 2
PA3	6c	Calculation of common output indicators CO 41 and CO 42- please refer to explanations under PA 1.	CO41 CO42	N/A	See explanation under PA1	EVAL 1
	6c	Recommendation to review the monitoring process of programme result indicators - please refer to explanations under PA 1.	N/A	3.1 3.2	Revision of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	EVAL 1
	6c	Evaluators observed that strategies and action plans as well as tools and services have been successfully delivered by SO 3.1 projects, while for pilot actions they were 30% below the target. However, this progress has been achieved by only 9 projects (call 1 and 2) out of 15 funded under this SO (60%), indicating that the progress to target is still considerable. Projects funded in call 1 and 2 under SO 3.2 have already contributed to exceeding the targets in all output indicators, most prominently in the delivery of pilot actions (4.6 times the target value).	6c.1 6c.2 6c.3 6c.4 6c.5 6c.6 6c.7 6c.8	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	6c	Projects in Priority 3 (SO 3.1) provided solutions for the sustainable management of protected or environmentally	6c.1 6c.3	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
		highly valuable areas, developed tools for sustainable use natural resources and avoiding potential usage conflicts and tested the application of innovative technologies and instruments in support of climate change adaptation and environment protection. These projects provided successful examples of interventions contributing to EU objectives of protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, reducing pollution and supporting circular economy.	6c.5 6c.7 CO1 CO41 CO42			
	6c	Projects in Priority 3 (SO 3.2) provided successful solutions for revitalizing and reintegrating cultural and heritage resources into the local economies and into the lives of 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.	6c.2 6c.4 6c.6 6c.8 CO1 CO41 CO42	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	6c	Evaluators observed that Programme has achieved its targets as early as 2018 in almost all SOs, except for SO 3.1. Given that similar performance is expected from the projects to be analysed in Phase 2 of the impact evaluation, it is almost certain that targets for SO 3.1 will also be exceeded.	N/A	3.1 3.2	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	6e	Calculation of common output indicators CO 41 and CO 42- please refer to explanations under PA 1.	CO41 CO42	N/A	See explanation under PA1	EVAL 1
	6e	Recommendation to review the monitoring process of programme result indicators - please refer to explanations under PA 1.	N/A	3.3	Revision of the CENTRAL	EVAL 1

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
					EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	
	6e	Evaluators observed that all output indicators have been successfully delivered by SO 3.3 projects. The target values for all output indicators were exceeded.	6e.1 6e.2 6e.3 6e.4	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	6e	The projects under SO 3.3 provided adequate solutions for environmental management and contributed to improving planning and decision making at FUA level. They 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, and developed concepts and implemented environmental pilot actions.	6e.1 6e.2 6e.3 6e.4 CO1 CO41 CO42	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	6e	Evaluators observed that the Programme has achieved its result indicator target for SO 3.3 as early as 2018.	N/A	3.3	No actions taken	EVAL 2
PA4		Evaluators recommended priority-specific outreach and support activities on national and transnational level to further promote the participation of priority 4 ‘transport’ stakeholders.	All	All	JS participation in meetings of EU MRS transport coordinators and INTERACT thematic network for transport.	EVAL 1

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
					Comprehensive support measures for the third call (addressing all priorities including a dedicated workshop on PA 4 transport)	
	7b	Calculation of common output indicators CO 41 and CO 42- please refer to explanations under PA 1.	CO41, CO42	N/A	See explanation under PA1	EVAL 1
	7b	Recommendation to review the monitoring process of programme result indicators - please refer to explanations under PA 1.	N/A	4.1	Revision of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	EVAL 1
	7b 7c	Evaluators concluded that both SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 have been successful in achieving the targets for all types of outputs, with SO 4.1 exceeding them to a larger extent (1.7 to 2.5 times) and SO 4.2. exactly meeting the target in the delivery of tools and services.	7b.1 7b.2 7b.3 7b.4 7c.1 7c.2 7c.3 7c.4	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments (if any)	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
	7b	Projects 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.	7b.1 7b.2 7b.3 7b.4 CO1 CO41 CO42	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	7c	Calculation of common output indicators CO 41 and CO 42- please refer to explanations under PA 1.	CO41 CO42	N/A	See explanation under PA1	EVAL 1
	7c	Recommendation to review the monitoring process of programme result indicators - please refer to explanations under PA 1.	N/A	4.2	Revision of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Evaluation plan	EVAL 1
	7c	The projects under SO 4.2 have responded to the challenges in the Programme area in respect to insufficient coordination among freight transport stakeholders and delivered outputs and results addressing various administrative and technical barriers and the lack of shared standards and procedures. They have produced and tested pilot actions for optimizing individual modes of freight transport and for combining them in multi-modal freight transport chains.	7c.1 7c.2 7c.3 7c.4 CO1 CO41 CO42	N/A	No actions taken	EVAL 2
	7b 7c	Evaluators observed that the Programme had overachieved its result indicator target for Priority 4 as early as 2018.	N/A	4.1 4.2	No actions taken	EVAL 2

3. General conclusions

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme had a **positive impact** with regard to the **needs identified across all thematic priorities** in the programme area. The programme 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. The 85 projects funded under calls 1 and 2 have been successful in contributing to strategically important issues across all thematic areas, with transnational cooperation directly supporting institutional learning and enhanced institutional capacity or the delivery of higher quality services for citizens. Projects from calls 3 and 4 will further strengthen these contributions.

Overall, Interreg CE is **managed smoothly and according to the planned activities and established targets** in the Cooperation Programme (CP). Therefore, it progresses well towards defined objectives and targets from the CP and many were achieved already by implementing 60% of the projects (calls 1 and 2). The programme has a **well-defined management structure** and the distribution of roles and processes is adequate, which is confirmed by the overall results of the programme management. Workflows have been optimised as a result of learning from the past programming period. The relationship between available resources and tasks is efficient and the processes and administrative procedures foresee an adequate and timely flow of information. Decisions concerning the programme are taken by consensus, striving for a balance of interests and positions. Relevant recommendations from the first part of the operational evaluation were already defined in 2016/2017 and corresponding follow-up measures have been implemented on all recommendations since then.

Interreg CE is **strong in generating multiple effects in the programme area**. Bringing the EU-level priorities closer to the local communities belongs to significant contributions of the programme. 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 and tangible results at lower costs. 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.

Projects from calls 1 and 2 already produced strong synergetic and multiplication effects in terms of leveraging follow-up funding and generating further cooperation opportunities. While synergies were more often created with Horizon 2020 and other Interreg transnational and cross-border programmes, creating linkages to national 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. Synergies and multiplication effects of the programme will likely become much stronger with the implementation of projects from call 3 and mainly call 4, which was an experimental call supporting capitalisation of existing outputs and results from projects funded by Interreg CE, other Interreg programmes, Horizon 2020 (including FP6 and 7) and other centrally managed EU funding schemes. These concrete and **active coordination efforts of Interreg CE** with other programmes, notably Horizon 2020, can be highlighted as **good practice among European transnational cooperation programmes**.

A good number of projects also produced **positive unintended effects**, going beyond the impact initially anticipated at project start. These effects relate to reaching wider target groups and audiences, raising interest beyond expectations and expanding the scope of the activities. Importantly, the design of the programme provides 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. The programme clearly 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 is not quantifiable.

Interreg CE **project results** were to some extent **transferred to other territories** but more moderately transferred to **other sectors and other levels of governance** reflecting also another observation that integration of project results into policymaking is rather project-specific. Transferability of results vertically across governance levels is therefore still lower than the 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. Interreg CE projects also created the necessary conditions for and thereby contributed to change of practices at the individual and organisational level within project partnerships and target groups. 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. 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 general public, in line with the quadruple helix approach adopted by some projects. Likewise, **the programme supported a wide diversity of territories**, even though regions located in the south of the programme area and in urban areas benefitted more than other regions. The functional urban area (FUA) approach promoted by the programme is likely to have contributed to reducing urban-rural disparity and fragmentation in the places where pilot actions were implemented.

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.

Annex: Evaluations undertaken in respect of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme

Identifier	Brief description of measures/intervention subject of evaluation	Title	Fund(s) concerned by the eval.	TOs	Link to report
EVAL 1	Operational evaluation of the Interreg CE Programme focusing primarily on programme management issues (including communication) and addressing the evaluation criteria of effectiveness and efficiency. Final evaluation report published in 2019.	Operational Evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme (consortium Spatial Foresight GmbH, t33 srl)	ERDF	TO1, TO4, TO6, TO7	https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/documents/CE-Operational-Evaluation-FinalReport-2aug19.zip
EVAL 2	The Impact Evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2014-2020 focusing on the proximal effects of the programme implementation in the programme area across all Thematic Priorities. The report covers Phase 1 of the impact evaluation and concentrates on projects funded under calls 1 and 2. Evaluation report for phase 1 published in 2022.	Impact Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme - Phase 1	ERDF	TO1, TO4, TO6, TO7	https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/documents/Interreg-CE-Impact-Evaluation-Final-Report.zip