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Corrected version

First Phase Evaluation of the CBC programmes managed by Hungary

Hungary-Croatia INTERREG V-A Programme



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The context

2018 is the year of First Phase (earlier: mid-term) evaluation of the cooperation programmes. In February, the Managing Authority of the INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme (operated that time in the Prime Minister’s Office of Hungary) invited the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) to carry out the evaluation of the present programme.

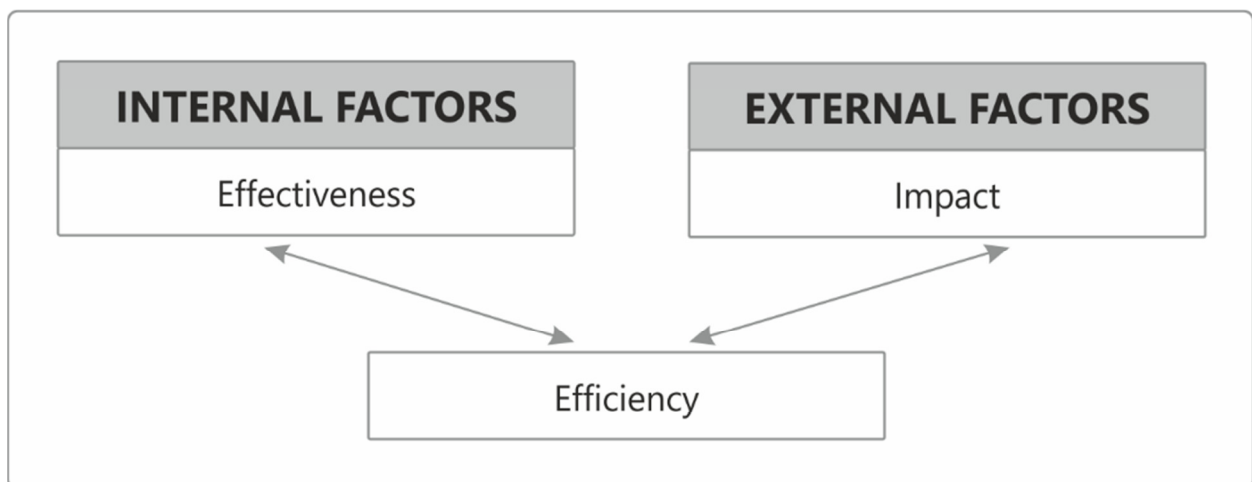
In line with the evaluation plan of the programme, the present document focuses on

- **programme management and implementation** (overall picture, guidelines, development needs, procedures, IMIS, simplification, partnership principle, risks, de-commitment)
- **project application, selection procedures** (quality, successful and weak projects, applicants’ difficulties and assistance given, horizontal principles)
- **communication Strategy** (communication activities, tools, impacts).

As an extra topic, the evaluators were requested to gather information on the effects that Croatia’s joining the EU had on cross-border cooperation.

Within the framework of the current evaluation assignment, the effectiveness, the efficiency and the impact of the cross-border programme were assessed, according to the above three aspects.

Figure 1: The internal logic of the evaluation



Effectiveness means the level of the objectives which the programme has achieved until the date of the evaluation. It refers to the progress made according to the planned implementation.

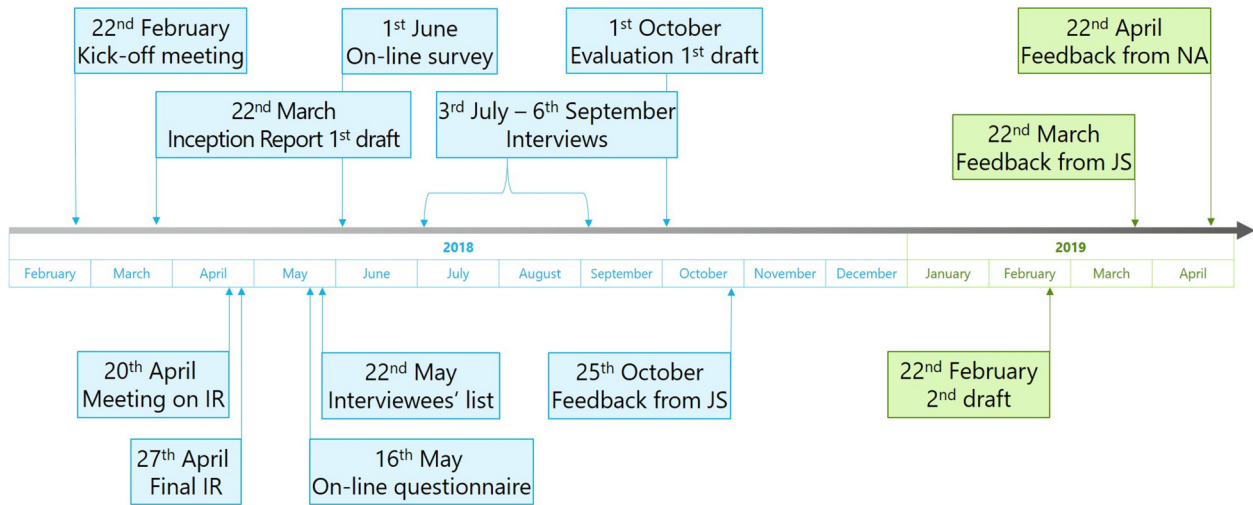
Impact is a very complex term referring to the influence that the programme exercises on the internal cohesion of the programming area and the level of cross-border cooperation. While effectiveness measures the internal success of the programme, the impact rather identifies its external success.

Efficiency refers to the successful use of financial and human resources of the programme. Successful here means 'optimal' and 'resource-efficient'.

Ultimately, among the above three factors, impact is the most important one since it shows the real results that the programme achieved within the target region. At the same time, as the evaluation was made at an early stage of the programme implementation, the real impacts could not be detected yet. However, based on the information gained on the implemented projects, some predictions still could be made and some conclusions on the cross-border impact of the programme could be drawn. This impact can be identified through the analysis of two major factors: the degree to which the programme enhances cross-border territorial, economic and social cohesion; and the quality of cross-border cooperation facilitated by the programme. These two questions are of eminent significance when evaluating the achievements and the performance of a cross-border programme.

The evaluation has been performed in line with the Inception Report approved by the MA at the end of April 2018 including the following methods: statistical analysis of the regional data and the data of the CP available in the IMIS (the electronic system of the programme), interviews with key stakeholders and an on-line survey among the (selected and not selected) applicants. The cut-off date of the data analysis was 30th September while the institutional and administrative developments have been examined until the end of November 2018. It means that the evaluation was carried-out at a very early stage of the programme, when 16 project were closed, 42 project activities were implemented and the absorption rate was quite low (below 14%).

Figure II: Milestones of the evaluation



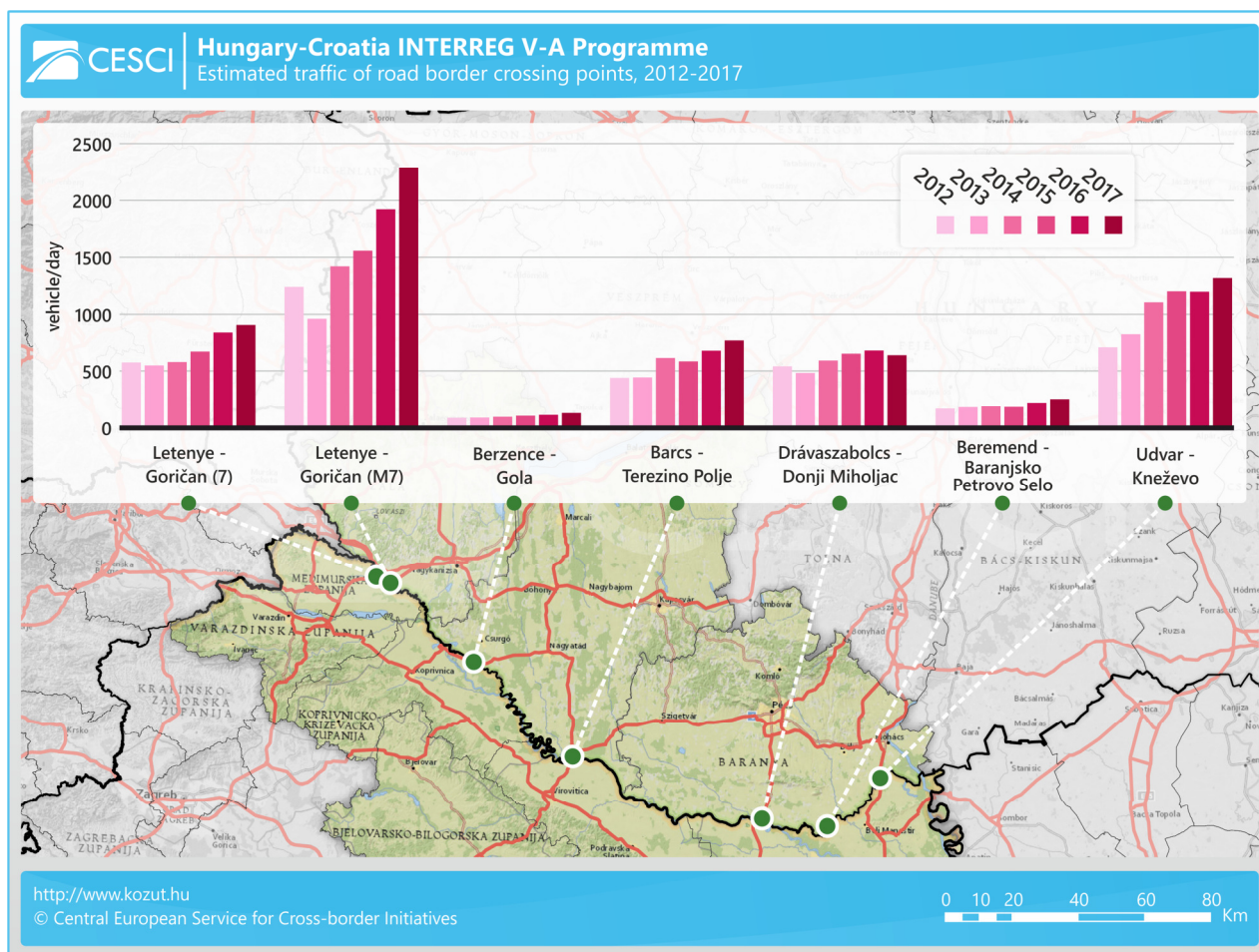
1.2 The key findings of the evaluation

(1) The cooperation programme has a fundamental role in cross-border cooperation between the two countries

As one of the interviewees summarized: *"Without the programme, there would not be cooperation at all across the Hungarian-Croatian border."* It means that the cooperation programme has a prominent role in terms of Hungarian-Croatian relationships. The low level of cross-border cooperation can be explained by three major factors: the weak permeability of the border, the language barrier and the lack of complementarity.

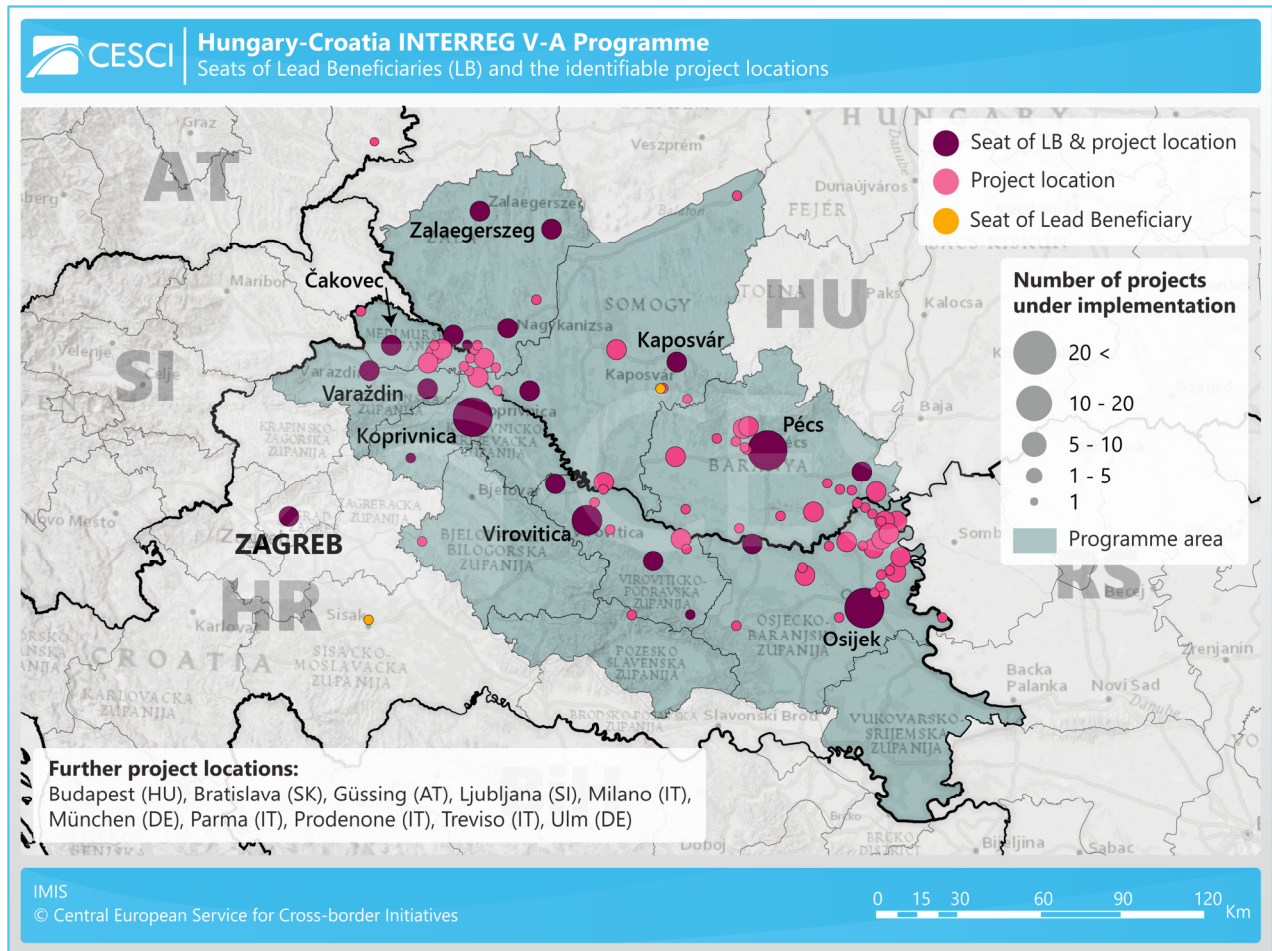
The (355 km long) border itself has the **second weakest permeability** among the EU internal borders (following the Romanian-Bulgarian one). The average distance between road border crossing points is more than 50 km (between Barcs / Terezino Polje and Drávaszabolcs / Donji Miholjac the distance is approximately 1,5 times more than the average) what has a strong negative effect on cross-border cooperation and cross-border cohesion. This phenomenon has been further worsened by the mines and UXOs inherited from the Yugoslav war, making border crossing highly dangerous for the local people.

Figure III: Changes in border traffic between 2012 and 2017



The second factor is the **language barrier**. As one of the interviewees stated: *“It is striking that while many Croats living in Dalmatia speak Italian and the people living along by the Slovene border understand Slovenian, the Croats along the Drava and Mura cannot speak Hungarian at all.”* Another conclusion of the interviews was that regardless of the fact that the official language of the programme is English, the communication is aggravated by the weak language knowledge of the Hungarian partners. Two exceptions can be mentioned: the Croatian minority living in the westernmost and the Hungarian minority living in the easternmost section of the shared borderland, where both languages are spoken. Not surprisingly, the highest intensity of cross-border flow and cooperation as well as the density of cross-border project implementation locations can also be detected in these two regions where the majority of border crossing points are located.

Figure II: Location of supported project activities



Finally, the **lack of complementarity** is the third reason why the quantitative and qualitative indicators of cross-border cooperation do not meet high standards. The two neighbouring borderlands represent similar characteristics and development level which diminishes the attractiveness of the other side. Still, modest labour migration can be detected around Varaždin (from Hungary) and Croatian shopping tourism in the eastern section of the border (towards Hungary). At the same time, the volumes of cross-border flows are at a low standard.

From this perspective, the programme plays a crucial role by creating the basic frames for cooperation and building up new relations. However, the financial means of the CP are really modest. In order to boost cross-border cooperation, several new border crossings should be constructed and opened but the programme cannot afford to cover the construction costs of several new bridges. In addition, Croatia is not interested in new cross-border infrastructure until the country joins the Schengen zone which will reduce border control costs.

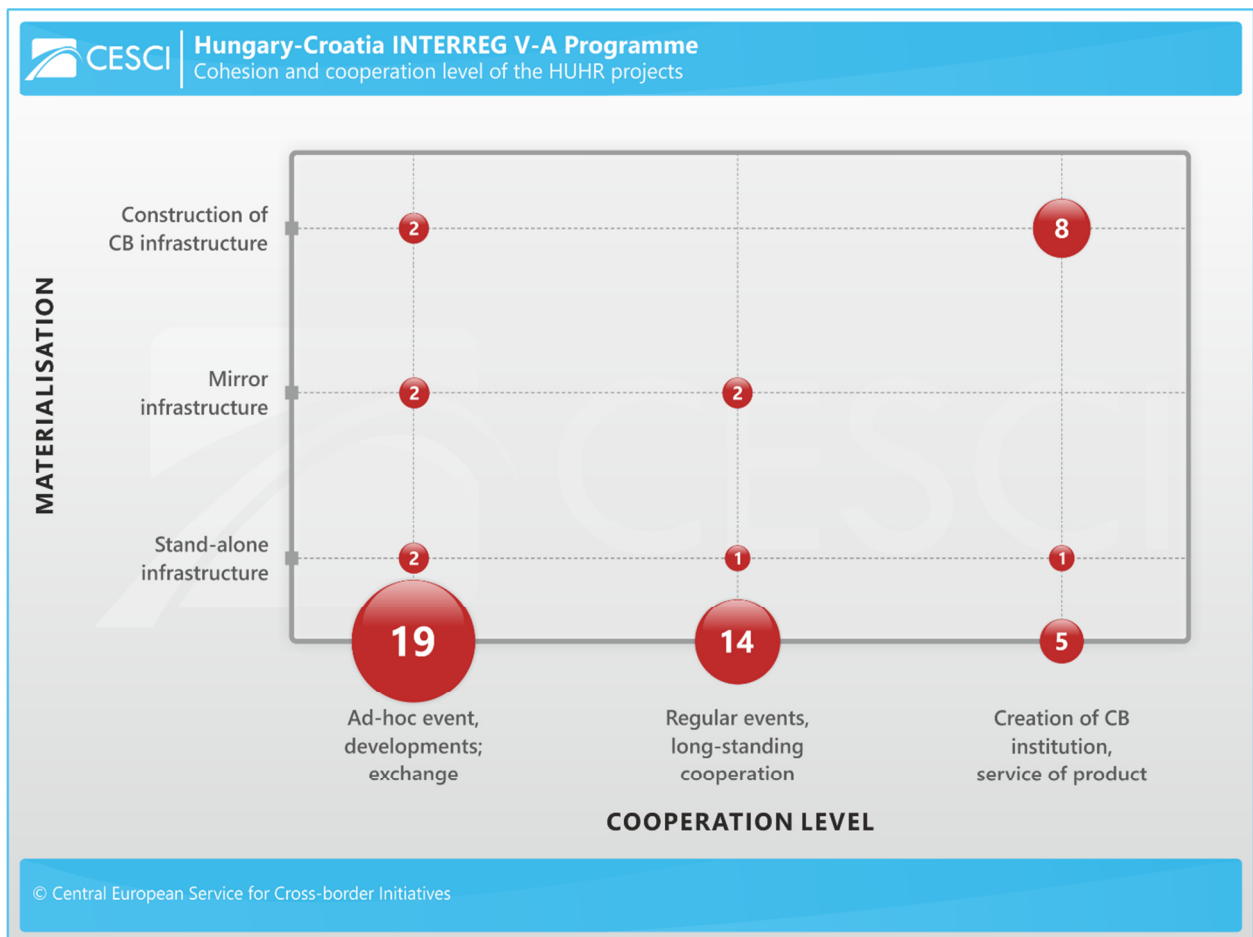
(2) Weak cross-border character of the programme

Taking into account the above factors, it is not surprising that the INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme has weaker cross-border character than the programmes implemented in more integrated border areas.

When analysing the projects from the point of view of the **quality and timely perspective of cross-border cooperation** (along by the level of cooperation and materialisation of the results), we found that 71% of the selected projects had very weak cross-border character and, in total, only 8 project proposals met the highest criteria of CBC.

It means that the programme has weak cross-border character and rather contributes to the realisation of local and regional development plans – separately.

Figure IV: Cross-border quality of supported projects

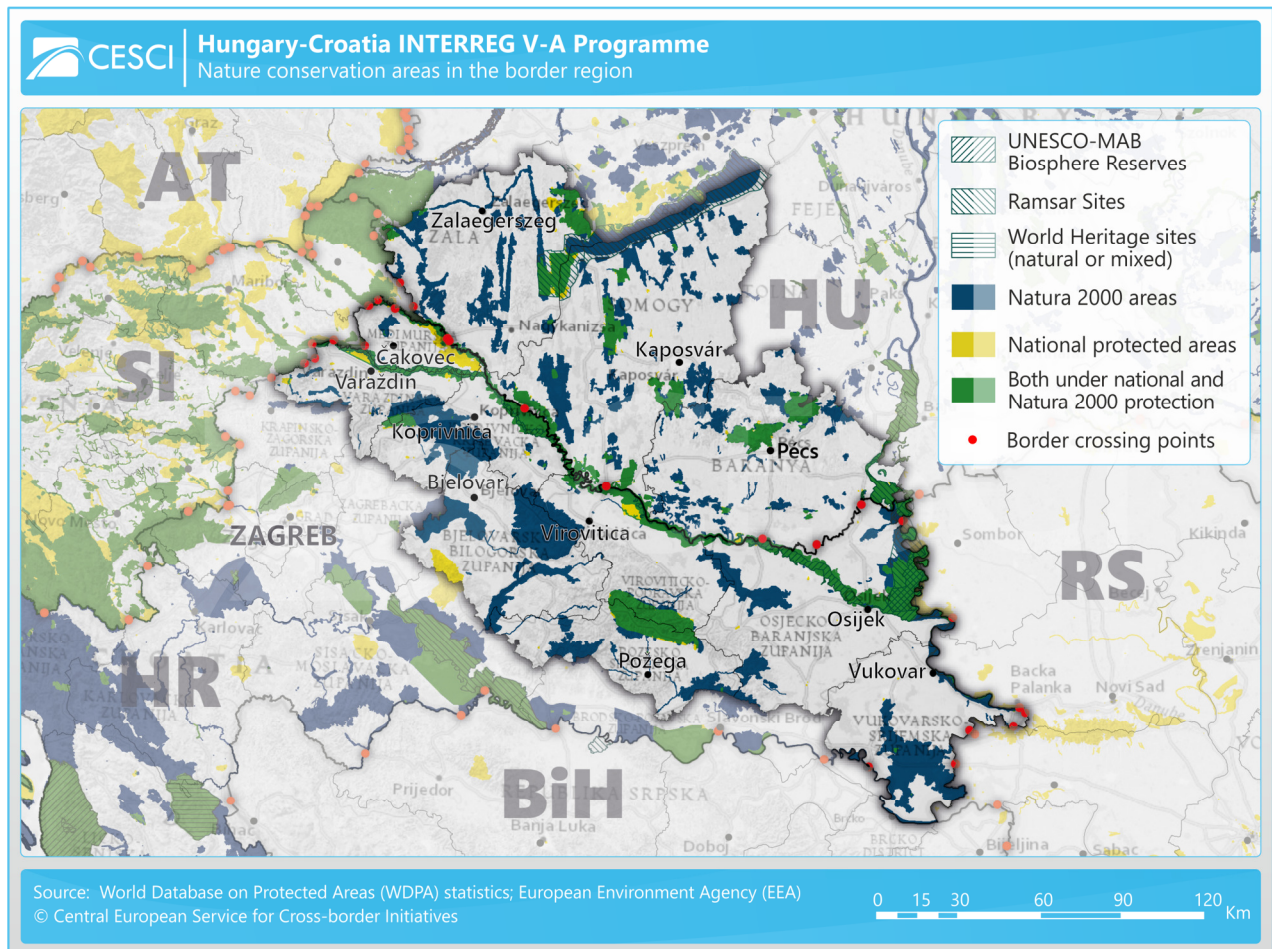


Regarding the selected **priority areas**, it can be stated that the selection was relevant.

On the one hand, the border area is characterised by high density of *natural assets* and *nature protection areas* (laying the basis for the UNESCO Biosphere reserve Mura-Drava-

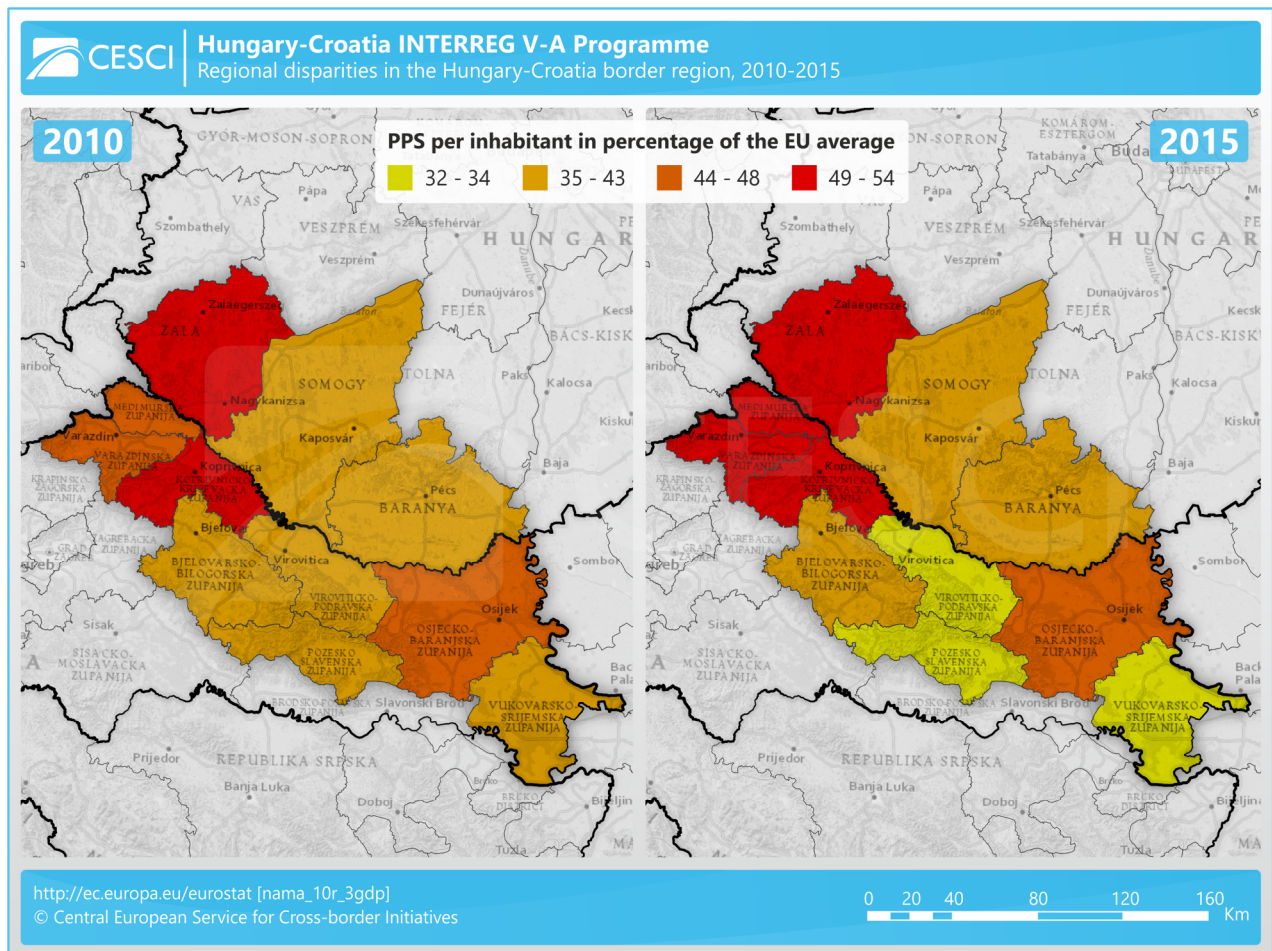
Danube). Consequently, the environmentally sound exploitation of these endowments can logically be one of the main priority areas of the cross-border programme. Therefore, nature provides the local stakeholders with the opportunity of joint protection, management and tourist-purposed utilisation of natural resources. At the same time, the weak permeability of the border makes these nature value and tourist sites hardly accessible what results in rather one-sided and separate exploitation instead of cross-border integrated developments.

Figure V: Nature conservation areas of the programme region



On the other hand, the border area is characterised by a *modest economic performance*. What is more, since the beginning of the programme implementation, in some sub-regions the economic situation has been further worsened. Between 2010 and 2015, only two counties (Varaždin County and Međimurje County) presented remarkable improvement in terms of the level of GDP compared to the EU average, the majority of the counties stagnated and three counties (Virovitica-Podravina County, Požega-Slavonia County and Vukovar-Sirmium County) produced weaker indices.

Figure VI: Regional disparities of economic performance within the border region

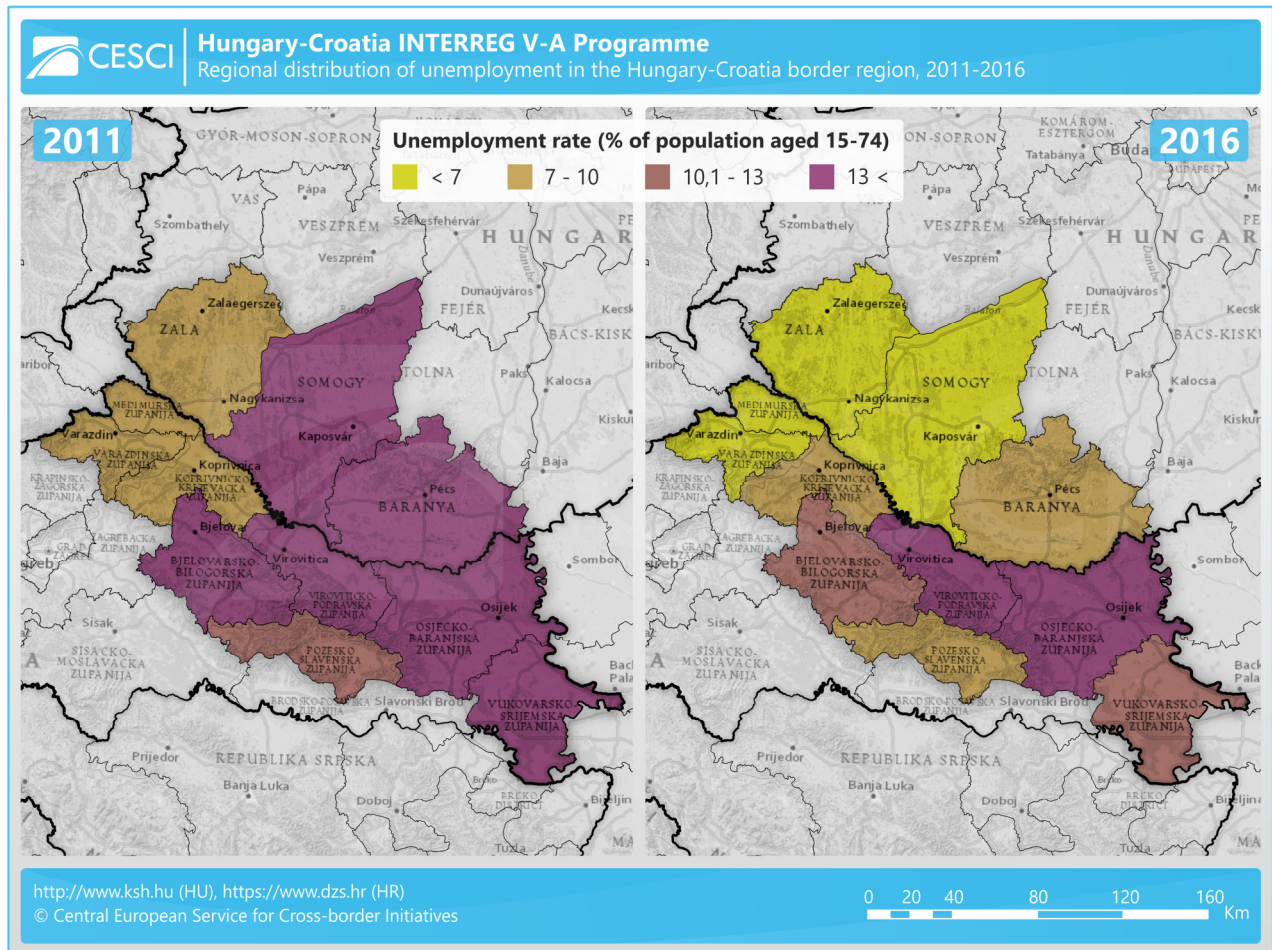


During the analysed period, the unemployment rate has remarkably decreased but it is still high in four Croatian countries which, at the same time, paradoxically, are suffering from huge outmigration. These two parallel processes indicate that the economic situation, mainly in the eastern Croatian part of the programming region, makes reasonable to invest in economic development.

However, the utilisation of the B Light Scheme for boosting cross-border economic performance, raises a number of questions. First, the German-Dutch border area (from where the model of B Light has been “imported”) is much more integrated than the Hungarian-Croatian one. In the western European case, there are more than 60 border crossing points along the 570 km long border. In 2015, nearly 40 000 workers commuted across the border and some 25 000 Dutch citizen lived on the German side of the border. It is the region where the first Euroregion was established in 1958 and since then, cross-border cooperation has been developed to a model for whole Europe especially within the framework of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion (forming part of the TTR-ELAt cross-border technology region) which also represents an example of economic integration (see e.g. the Locator platform). While it is useful to learn from western examples, we have

to be aware of that the B Light Scheme is a result of 40-year cooperation and it has to be adapted to a region the permeability and cross-border integration level of which is very weak.

Figure VII: Regional disparities of unemployment level within the programming region



B Light call prioritises activities like *cross-border joint product, technology or service development, the creation and the further development of the cross-border joint economic clusters, cross-border joint development of marketing, promotional and demonstration facilities and services which all require stronger commitment and mutual trust* – which are seemingly lacking even in the case of the non-profit cooperation in this border area. What is rather expected it is the realisation of separate investments on both sides of the border with very weak or completely missing cross-border character.

Furthermore, according to one interviewee, an entrepreneur cannot be involved in cross-border activities but if he/she considers the expected reward attractive (in financial terms). But if the business is promising, they do not need support from the programme and they cannot wait with their investments for the slow implementation of the calls, they will start their business without the programme support. Even if they apply for support, these are not the strongest and most sustainable businesses.

However, it is clear that direct support of the SMEs has more tangible results than (former model of) indirect support which hardly resulted in real cross-border business cooperation during the previous programming period; and the consultancy services built into the solution can be used as a kind of learning-by-doing tool in order to create more mature business relations. At the same time, the application of the B Light Scheme brings serious risks, therefore its implementation has to be carried-out with special attention.

Thirdly, the most relevant priority area is *Cooperation* that is not surprising – taking into account the above conditions. However, beside inter-institutional projects, the programme should also support people-to-people projects in order to improve the mutual trust between the two border areas' citizens. From this perspective, the fourth priority area (*Education*) can have the longest effect since it involves the youngest generation in cross-border activities. At the same time, for this purpose, real cooperation should be supported rather than local infrastructural investments.

To sum up, the programme is characterised by weak cross-border character. However, the maturity of CBC within the region is at a lower level, therefore, we should not expect highly integrated projects; mutual trust building has a much more important role at the current phase. According to one interviewee, even if the infrastructural investments lack cross-border factor, later on, these infrastructural elements can serve stronger integration. Besides, the local stakeholders should not be imposed to develop integrated cross-border projects that they are not interested in and are not able to sustain. As a general comment formed at programme management level, we can conclude on that still, the projects of the current calls are more mature in terms of cross-border cooperation than those implemented during the previous programming period. Still, it is worth considering that the next programme should enhance further the cross-border character of the projects.

(3) The belated delivery of the IMIS system caused problems in programme implementation

According to the interviewees and the indicator analysis, the biggest problem faced by the programme bodies and the beneficiaries was the belated delivery of the IMIS system. Due to the delay, several difficulties occurred:

- similarly to Slovenia-Croatia programme, also the Hungary-Croatia programme envisaged the application of continuously open calls but it became impossible due to the late opening of the IMIS system;
- the TA module started in 2018; until that time, the financing of the TA activities had to be ensured by the parties themselves;
- the selected beneficiaries of the first call (HUHR/1601) should have uploaded their first reports from September, 2017; instead, they could make it with 7 to 8 months

delay what resulted in blocking of the implementation and financing of some projects;

- similarly, the 'main' project partners of the B Light Scheme call were not able to report their activities for long time; in the time of making the interview, the report was already submitted but the reimbursement had not happened yet;
- the projects could not be modified before the start of the IMIS;
- the strategic project (De-Mine II) ended in May, 2018 realised in a paper format, without being registered in the IMIS;
- at the time of the interviews, there were modules (e.g. irregularities) which were still not available through the system;
- the delay had a negative effect on B Light Scheme as well, since entrepreneurs cannot design their investments in such an uncertain environment;
- the second call should have been published at the beginning of 2017 but the Croatian authorities blocked the launch of the procedure until the IMIS is fully operating.

By some interviewees, the constraints caused by the lack of the monitoring system, negatively affected even the bilateral relations of the partner countries. It has to be added, that the system is still not user-friendly enough, it is not the easiest to generate data, information and reports therefrom.

The situation was further aggravated by the disputes of the service providers of the official websites of the programme. As a consequence, the website could not be updated between January 2017 and September 2018 which was the busiest period of early programme implementation.

(4) Good results in simplification

The simplification test shows that the vast majority of the recommendations drafted at the end of the previous programming period have been taken into consideration and there are many fields where the simplification is advanced. Even more, there are no such recommendations which were not tackled so far.

Table 1: Results of the simplification test (green means successful, yellow partly successful handling of the recommendation)

Recommendation	Response
Electronic submission system	The IMIS as on-line application and reporting tool are going to be launched in line with the publication of the 2 nd Call for proposals. In addition, the projects selected in 2017 are performing their reporting activities already in the integrated electronic monitoring system.
Less/easier submission of supporting documents	The list of mandatory supporting documents is the same as it was in the last programming period. However, thanks to the

Recommendation	Response
	IMIS, only scanned version must be uploaded, instead of sending hard copies.
Simplified cost	Beside the establishment of the IMIS, the application of simplified cost options also enhances the simpler and faster procedures: lump sum for preparation costs, flat-rate opportunity in case of staff costs: 10% or 20% of direct costs other than staff cost, mandatory flat-rate in case of administrative costs: 15% of staff cost, lump sum for general (office) equipment. There is no need for justifying documentation in either case.
Simplified reporting conditions	With the integrated (reporting) system, the preparation of the project report for the LB is much easier and faster than in the previous programming period because basically all data are coming up from the validated Beneficiary Reports. The burden on the LB is much less in this respect. Also, novelty of this period is that Beneficiary Reports are to be submitted on both sides through the system. In the previous period the electronic beneficiary reporting was only available on the Hungarian side but in the current period it has been introduced in Croatia as well.
Tailor-made application and selection procedures similarly to B-Light Scheme and strategic projects	Within the B-Light Scheme the whole amount dedicated to PA1 is allocated to business support organizations as Beneficiaries. They open call for proposals for SMEs in form of a two-step application procedure. Besides B-light Scheme, the introduction of so called strategic projects is also a new type of automatic selection procedure which should be taken into account in the programme.
Involving SMEs	SMEs are eligible within the B-Light Scheme.
More technical assistance	The concerned management bodies provide guidelines and organize focused info days (B-Light Scheme, FLC, LB) for supporting the project application and implementation. 3 JS Contact Points have been set up providing direct personal consultation for local stakeholders, potential applicants, and project beneficiaries.

However, the applicants who filled-in the online questionnaire (43 in total) and some interviewees mentioned a number of difficulties in terms of project administration which should be overcome (see Recommendation 2.10).

(5) Communication is improving

The communication of the programme has been improving during the current programme. The beneficiaries assessed the programme communication rather good both

in terms of availability and user-friendliness of the information – regardless of the difficulties mentioned above.

Figure VIII: Assessment of the availability of programme information

The respondents' view on the availability of the information

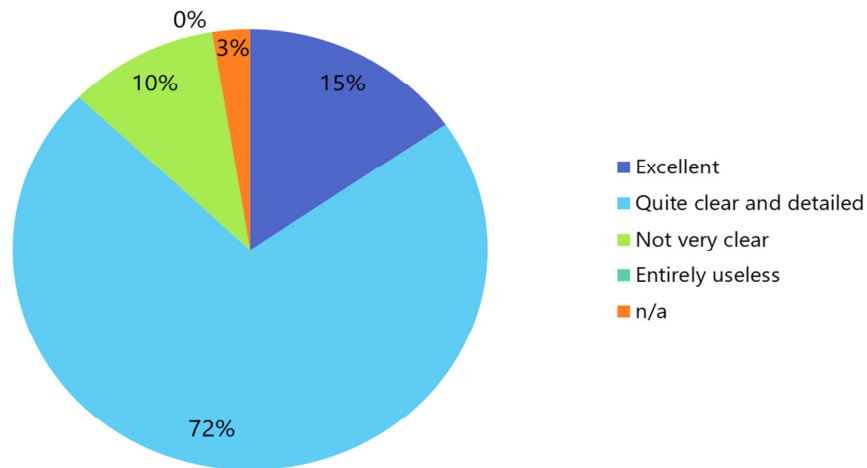
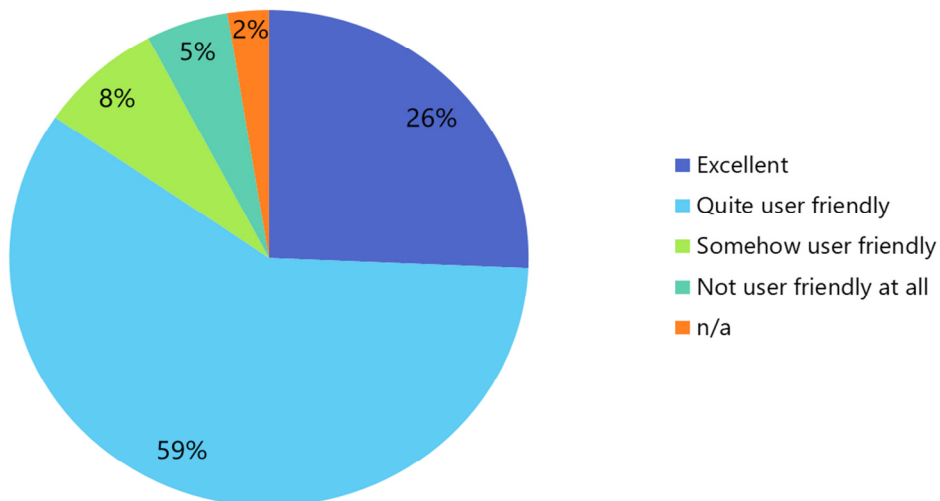


Figure IX: Assessment of the user-friendliness of programme information

The respondents' view on the user friendliness of the information



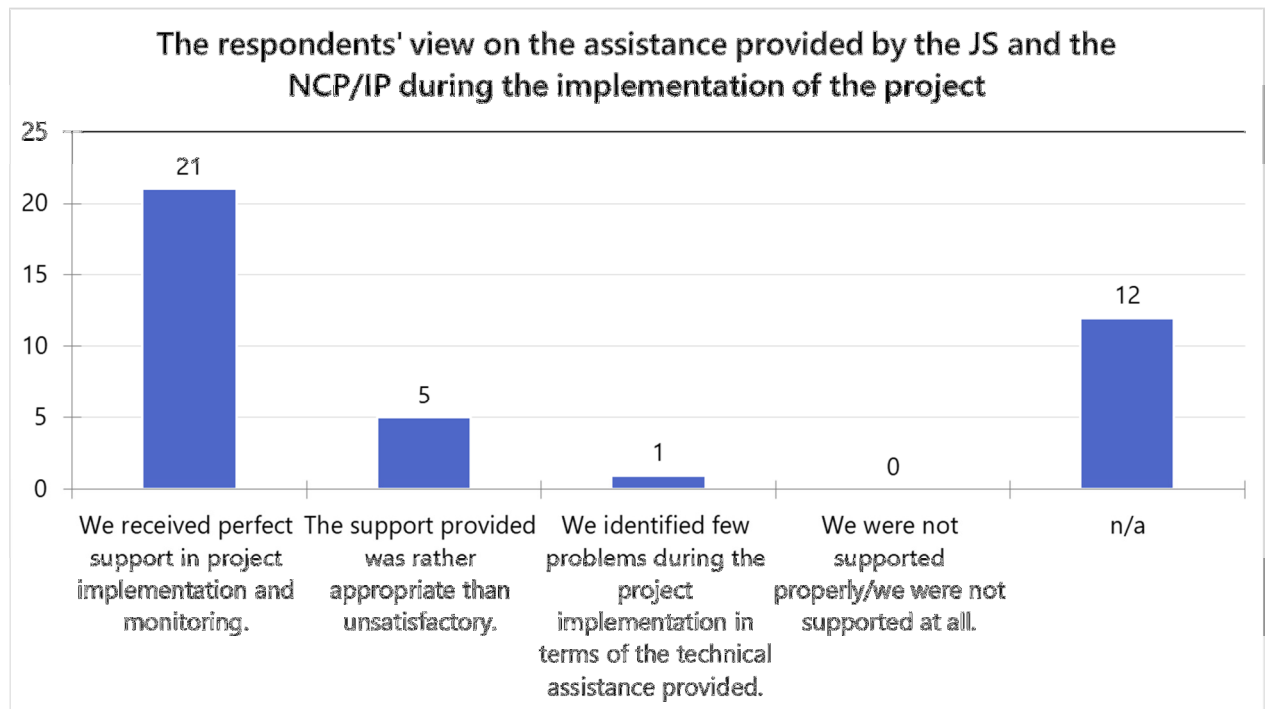
Several reasons of the good results can be mentioned such as every JS staff member has communication tasks or the opening of regional offices (Contact Points) in Pécs, Osijek and Čakovec that brought the programme closer to the local actors. In parallel, also the communication of the projects has improved, thanks to the mandatory designation of a communication manager in each project.

However, a few shortages of communication have been enumerated by the beneficiaries. Some of these were about the mandatory documents, others on the inconsistent information on eligibility rules which caused useless project development because of the ineligibility of a partner previously declared eligible.

(6) The programme management is assessed good

Similarly to programme level communication, the respondents of the questionnaire assessed the work of the JS good or even excellent.

Figure X: Assessment of the assistance provided by the Joint Secretariat



It is important to highlight that the completion of the programme in due time and the indicators delivered are not in danger regardless of the difficulties caused by the delayed starting of the IMIS. This is thanks to the flexible and helpful attitude of the actors involved in programme management (the JS, the two national authorities and the Contact Points). Their efforts made possible that the programme can make up for lost time.

(7) The Croatian accession to the EU has a positive balance

According to the interviewees, Croatia’s accession has brought positive changes. First and foremost, the membership has remarkably eased and boosted labour and student mobility. It is true that the richer western countries attract many (skilled) young people but in the opinion of the interviewees, this phenomenon will not cause dramatic problems and the hoped developments will re-attract the youngsters.

Another impact of the membership is that the SMEs gained new markets. It is true that they were not prepared for the new challenges and the heavier competition, especially in terms of their RDI capacities. Still, the opening of the market offers new possibilities and the Croatian SMEs are accustomed to the new reality and they will be successful.

Concerning the border regions, by the accession, the country got direct access also to ERDF funding which is more advantageous than IPA. In parallel, also the total amount to be spent for CBC has increased. The interviewees expect stronger direct cross-border mobility once Croatia joins the Schengen zone – since the current level of mobility is rather weak what is in harmony with the above analysis.

1.3 Summary of the recommendations

The table below contains the recommendations drafted regarding the present status of the CP with references to the detailed analysis where the issues are elaborated more deeply.

Table II: Summary of the recommendations

Recommendations	References to the detailed analysis
1. Designing of the next programme	
1.1 Strategic frames of programming	
R_1.1 Clearer and unambiguous rules and timely delivered regulation are necessary from EU level	M 1.3 Scheduling
R_1.2 The State Aid rules in INTERREG programmes should not be applied	M 6.6 Simplification test
1.2 Structural factors of programming	
R_1.3 Involve the selected beneficiaries in the designing of the next programme	M 6.7 Assessment of ownership
R_1.4 Avoid delays in implementing the electronic application system	M 1.2 Indicator value analysis M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures M 6.5 Assessment of technical assistance 3.4.1. Major risks the programme is facing
R_1.5 Consider the application of continuously open calls	M 6.3 Lead time assessment
1.3 Programme priorities and tools	
R_1.6 Improve the permeability of the	M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs

Recommendations	References to the detailed analysis
border through cross-border infrastructural development	M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance M 4.1 Mapping of the territorial coverage
R_1.7 Improve the social cohesion of the borderland by enhancing bilingualism	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance M 6.6 Simplification test
R_1.8 Apply small (people-to-people) projects	M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
R_1.9 Improve the cross-border character of the projects	M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance
2. Programme management	
2.1 Communication	
R_2.1 Keep and enhance the good practices of communication	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
R_2.2 Improve the beneficiaries' communication capacities	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
R_2.3 Improve the communication with the beneficiaries on the application system in order to create a more fit-for-purpose model	M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided
R_2.4 Enhance the representation of the programme at local level	M 2.1 Evaluation of the communication plan M 6.1 Institution assessment
R_2.5 Promote the best practice examples	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
2.2 Management procedures	
R_2.6 Follow and analyse the implementation of B Light scheme with special attention	M 1.2 Indicator value analysis M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

Recommendations	References to the detailed analysis
	3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
R_2.7 Create and apply unambiguous eligibility rules	M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided
R_2.8 Enhance the role of the MC in the selection procedure	M 6.2 Capacity assessment
R_2.9 Diversify the quality assessment procedures	M 6.2 Capacity assessment
R_2.10 Simplify further the control mechanisms and make them more user-friendly	M 6.6 Simplification test
R_2.11 Broaden the scope of simplified cost options	M 6.6 Simplification test
R_2.12 Make the IMIS more user-friendly	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects M 6.6 Simplification test
R_2.13 Follow-up the level of contribution to EU2020 targets	M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals
R_2.14 Follow-up the level of contribution to EUSDR	M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals
3. Project implementation	
R_3.1 Encourage the beneficiaries to design their contribution to horizontal principles more seriously	M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals
R_3.2 Enhance the sustainability of cross-border partnerships and project results	M 5.1 Sustainability analysis – project results M 5.2 Sustainability analysis – project partnership

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below address three fields. Some of the conclusions of the evaluation can be useful during the **new programming** starting soon. Others can make the **implementation of the current programme** better. Finally, some of them target **project implementation**.

2.1 Designing of the next programme

2.1.1 Strategic frames of programming

R_1.1 Clearer and unambiguous rules and timely delivered regulation are necessary from EU level

The delays of approving of the EU Regulations (November 2013) ensuring the frameworks for programming generated many difficulties to the programme management since the programme implementation should have started one month after the adoption of the regulations. Next regulations should be drafted earlier facilitating more accurate programming and launching of the programme in due time.

Besides, it was a basic experience during the programming that the legal frames were not self-evident. It was a permanent challenge to request unambiguous interpretation from the EU institutions. The desk officers of the different cross-border programmes interpreted the same rules differently what caused uncertainties and failed interventions. Therefore, the rules should be more evident and interpreted in the same way. For this purpose longer preparatory time is necessary.



M 1.3 Scheduling

R_1.2 The State Aid rules in INTERREG programmes should not be applied

According to the programme management side, the application of state aid rules means a huge administrative burden which requires skilled experts; however, the quantity and financial value of the cases would not justify this. Taken into account that some 2,5% of the total Cohesion Policy budget is spent for INTERREG programmes and only a few of them provides support for SMEs with a very limited budget, it is worth considering to

forget the application of the State Aid rules in these programmes. It would ease the involvement of the entrepreneurs in cross-border cooperation enhancing economic cohesion and the elimination of separating effects of borders which hinder the development of the Single Market.



M 6.6 Simplification test

2.1.2 Structural factors of programming

R_1.3 Involve the selected beneficiaries in the designing of the next programme

Within the framework of the analysis CESCI carried-out an online survey with a sample of 43 questionnaires sent back. 29 of these questionnaires were filled-in by beneficiaries selected for funding representing 52% of the total number of selected projects that time. Only one of the respondents was involved in programming however, they represent the real target group, the real end users of the programme. Consequently, it is recommended to involve the selected beneficiaries in the designing process of the next CP since they have real-life experiences on the difficulties, obstacles and practices of cross-border project implementation. This way, also the level of ownership of the programme can be improved and the partnership principle can better be fulfilled.



M 6.7 Assessment of ownership

R_1.4 Avoid delays in implementing the electronic application system

The realisation of the programme would be much more advanced if the electronic application system would have been ready earlier. Both the interviewees and the beneficiaries the most often mentioned the problems with the belated starting of the IMIS system. In order to facilitate the smooth implementation of the next programme, the electronic platform should be developed earlier.



M 1.2 Indicator value analysis
M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures
M 6.5 Assessment of technical assistance
3.4.1. Major risks the programme is facing

R_1.5 Consider the application of continuously open calls

The Croatian National Authority has very good experiences with the continuously open call applied in INTERREG V-A Slovenia-Croatia Cooperation Programme. What is more, also the present programme planned to apply this solution which became impossible because of the delay with the IMIS. Obviously, the current programme cannot apply the solution anymore. At the same time, it is recommended to publish continuously open calls within the next programming period.

The solution has several advantages. On the one hand, the application of the continuous model makes the peak periods more balanced at management level since the MC can decide on the currently arrived projects with the perspective of further opportunities later on. It means that if there are quality problems with some of the projects, the applicants can be requested to submit it again with a better quality. In addition, the solution enables the JS to plan its activities in a more balanced, more designable way. Another advantage of the model is that the management bodies are exempt of creating new and new calls during the implementation of the programme. However, slight modifications can be necessary. On the other hand, the applicants are less stressed in designing their activities since there are further opportunities to apply later on, with more or less same conditions. It facilitates the designing of the proposals on a more strategic and more elaborate way.



M 6.3 Lead time assessment

2.1.3 Programme priorities and tools

R_1.6 Improve the permeability of the border through cross-border infrastructural development

Obviously, the cooperation programme itself lacks the appropriate financial background for remarkably improve the permeability of the border. However, if every 7-year cooperation programme does not contribute but to the construction of 2 new border crossings (not necessarily bridges but e.g. ferries), it will give the perspective of a more integrated borderland and can intensify cross-border relations (as we can see on the geographic pattern of the selected activities: these are more frequent in the border areas where the crossings are situated).

Furthermore, the cooperation programme is the most relevant platform which can represent and popularise the interests of the border area as a whole. Beside the potential construction projects, the CP should encourage the political level to be more committed to the further opening of the border; and it can support the preparation of relevant

studies and the technical plans of the future infrastructure. It is understandable that before Croatia joins the Schengen zone, the Croatian government does not prioritize the opening of new border crossing points. At the same time, the cooperation programme could and should make the preparatory steps for the post-accession era and push the message of a more integrated borderland at political level.



M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs
M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance
M 4.1 Mapping of the territorial coverage

R_1.7 Improve the social cohesion of the borderland by enhancing bilingualism

According to the interviewees, one of the main obstacles of stronger cohesion and more developed cross-border cooperation is the language barrier between the two neighbouring nations. On the one hand, the Croatian citizens do not speak Hungarian and vice versa. Croatian partners have very often to translate the joint publications to Croatian – from Serbian or English. However, there are very moderate achievements detected within the border area since both the Croatian communities living in Hungary (around Tótszerdahely) started developing their cooperation with Varaždin and Međimurje counties; and the Hungarian minorities living around Beli Manastir have built up fruitful relationships with the neighbouring Hungarian region. These two ethnic minority groups can play a role of a bridge between the two nations that the programme should support and enhance.

On the other hand, thanks to the developing labour mobility toward Goričan and Varaždin from Hungary and the increasing (shopping and thermal) tourism from Croatia to the region of Harkány, as well as, the increasing interest toward minority education possibilities, emerging demand can be detected for using the neighbour's language. Obviously, it is impossible to force the pupils to learn Croatian / Hungarian instead of English or German but still, the interest can be further developed by diverse means. These initiatives can be classified in different group of activities, e.g.:

- *initiatives targeting everyday citizens*: cultural exchanges, school exchanges, summer schools, gastronomic events, organisation of cross-border competitions for young movie makers, musicians, artists – with cross-border topics, etc.;
- *initiatives targeting experts*: publication of bilingual books, organisation of translators' competitions, implementation of language and translator trainings, enhancement of the cross-border linkages of the language schools, etc.;
- *programme level initiatives*: compilation of a trilingual vocabulary for applicants, creation of a virtual academy of interpreters, etc.



M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance

R_1.8 Apply small (people-to-people) project fund

Regarding the previous recommendation, the application of people-to-people calls facilitating many small activities would be very beneficial. It is worth considering to include the tool in the next programme and to support several hundreds of small-scale activities improving the level of mutual trust within the border area. In harmony with a previous position paper of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the draft ETC Regulation, small projects have a significant impact on the quality of cross-border cooperation since they create the possibility of getting experiences on the neighbours for many local citizens. These projects of 10-50 thousand euros do not require serious financial efforts neither from the programme nor from the beneficiaries while they can have direct impact on many stakeholders.



M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools

R_1.9 Improve the cross-border character of the projects

INTERREG CBC programmes are commissioned to weaken the separating effects of the borders and to contribute to the development of a more integrated cross-border region – in line with the EU's Cohesion Policy and its three main pillars (economic, social and territorial cohesion). This integration factor should be taken more seriously. The exemplary cross-border projects are those contributing to stronger cohesion and more intensive cross-border cooperation. According to the main conclusions of the analysis, the cross-border character of the programme is relatively weak. From this perspective, the CP has a pedagogical mission: through its instruments and calls it has the opportunity to educate the applicants and encourage them to start developing cross-border ties. Let us mention some opportunities to apply.

- The Regional Tourism Product Plan is a good practice worth to follow. The strategic document defined the main directions for future tourism developments on an integrated basis. The programme itself can facilitate the implementation of more cohesive projects through similar cross-border strategies.
- The JS can issue a guide on how the cross-border character of a project can be ensured. This guide can make differences between soft and hard interventions and can include best practice examples from other border regions of Europe.

- The calls themselves can contain some requirements going beyond the four criteria of joint projects. A joint preparation matrix is advised to be applied which includes information on the cross-border components of the planned activities and by its cells it orientates the beneficiaries to pursue higher level of integration.
- Finally, the factors of the quality assessment can be changed in a way that the beneficiaries are encouraged to exceed their conventional methods of developing cross-border projects (more detailed description of cross-border character with different aspects and with higher total score). If the quality assessment is modified (see Recommendation 2.9), the JS staff members can rather concentrate on these aspects.



M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance

2.2 Programme management

2.2.1 Communication

R_2.1 Keep and enhance the good practices of communication

The CP has improved visibility and communication (see the chapters M 2.2, M 2.3, M 6.5 and the point (5) of the *Key findings* chapter). The good practices should be kept and further enhanced. The majority of the respondents of the online questionnaire assessed rather positively the availability and the user-friendliness of the information; and the opening of the three Contact Points are evaluated very well by the stakeholders. However, the idea of relocation of the JS from Budapest to the programming region would not be useful – taking into consideration its weak accessibility. (Budapest is still more easily accessible from all parts of the borderlands than a city within it.)

While the online presence of the programme is now ensured, the translations of the news are not up-to-date and taking the weak language skills of the beneficiaries (see the point (2) of the *Key findings* chapter) into consideration, this factor needs further improvement.



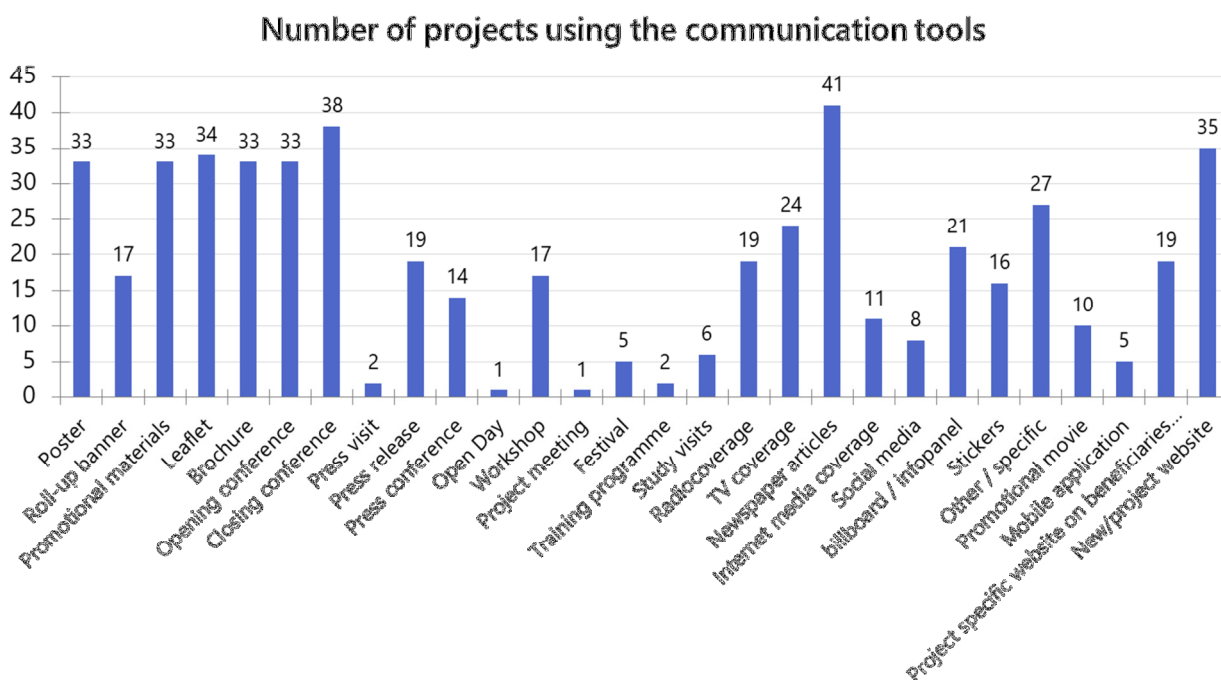
M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme

R_2.2 Improve the beneficiaries' communication capacities

While the programme is quite well known by the applicants and potential beneficiaries, regardless of the efforts made by the JS, the general public and media has no deep knowledge on the achievements or even the existence of the CP. Since the ones who actually carry out the majority of measured communication activities are the beneficiaries themselves, their capacities should be reinforced to carry out better communication with the media and the press, as well as to use more adequate and effective communication tools. From this point of view, the mandatory designation of a communication manager per project was a crucial step.

As it can be seen, the beneficiaries are active in using different types of media (radio, tv, internet, newspapers).

Figure XI: The communication tools applied by the partners



In order to improve the effectiveness of beneficiaries' communication activities, it is recommended to organise communication trainings with the involvement of communication experts. It is very important that the trainings should not focus on theoretical but practical issues.



M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

R_2.3 Improve the communication with the beneficiaries on the procedures in order to create a more fit-for-purpose model

With a view to improve the quality of programme implementation, the beneficiaries' feedback should be gathered and registered in a systematic way. At the moment, this field of communication is not handled yet. Through the online questionnaire, the evaluators managed to gather several ideas and recommendations targeting the improvement of the programme management. (For instance, the current system does not make possible to hire municipality staff; similarly, staff cost rules cannot be applied for the case of school teachers what decreases the attractiveness of the PA4 calls for educational institutions, etc.) This method could also be applied by the management bodies in order to fine-tune the procedures.



M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided

R_2.4 Enhance the representation of the programme at local level

The opening of the three Contact Points within the programming region is considered as a great achievement. At the same time, it might be useful to increase the number of Contact Points even through partly outsourced services (by involving regional development agencies). It can ensure the presence of the programme at numerous local events and make the programme more accessible for the local actors.

As the analysis of territorial relevance of the programme showed, there were some regions without selected projects. In these regions, the JS and the Contact Points should strengthen their communication activities in order to attract more applicants.



M 2.1 Evaluation of the communication plan
M 6.1 Institution assessment

R_2.5 Promote the best practice examples

The general quality and the cross-border aspects of the projects can be improved by sharing the experiences of best and most cross-border projects. For this purpose, delivery of a regular publication (similar to the professional materials published both on-line and printed by the LEADER programme, e.g. guides, fact sheets, compilation of best practices), with explanations on both languages; more field trips and local presence; and project fairs can be applied. The main aim is to better communicate the most successful (i.e. successfully completed) cross-border projects (from and outside the present programme) with a view to transferring the knowledge to as wide public as possible. This way, more integrated proposals can be expected.



M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

2.2.2 Management procedures

R_2.6 Follow and analyse the implementation of the B Light Scheme with special attention

As it has been underlined in the risk assessment chapter and under the point (2) of the *Key findings* chapter, the application of the B Light Scheme presents serious risks. Therefore, its implementation has to be surveyed carefully and necessary interventions have to be taken in emergency situations. It was a good decision to commission an experienced professional institution with the management of the call. However, the JS and the two national authorities should follow the processes since application of cross-border aspects in business cooperation is completely new factor in the programme. For this purpose, beside the quarterly reports of the B Light project, regular meetings with the stakeholders are recommended in order to avoid serious failures.



M 1.2 Indicator value analysis
M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

R_2.7 Create and apply unambiguous eligibility rules

Some applicants reclaimed that their partners who had been identified as eligible during the preparation of the project proved to be ineligible during the formal and eligibility assessment. Obviously, it is not easy task to precisely define the eligibility rules. However, the work of the applicants was useless and their interest in the programme must have

been diminished after this failure. In order to avoid similar situations, the JS should compile a comprehensive list of eligible applicants based on the statistical codes of entities.



M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided

R_2.8 Enhance the role of the MC in the selection procedure

Some MC members mentioned that their role in the selection procedure is rather symbolic since they read the evaluations as taken-as-granted without getting deeper knowledge on the applications. In the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary cooperation programme, the MC members had the opportunity to meet the project owners of the territorial action plans for employment (TAPes) before selecting the winner projects. They got an overview on the integrated projects, they had the opportunity to put on questions, to ask clarifications, to give recommendations. Similar solutions can be applied also within the Hungary-Croatia INTERREG V-A programme. However, the solution known from SKHU programme was feasible because the TAPes include several projects. This factor enabled the representatives of the TAPes to present many projects in packages instead of involving many project holders in the discussion. It does not seem to be reasonable to invite and listen to several dozens of project owners.



M 6.2 Capacity assessment

R_2.9 Diversify the quality assessment procedures

According to the current system, quality assessment is carried out partly by external experts, partly by JS staff members. As some interviewees underlined, this solution causes difficulties since the staff members are not skilled in so many diverse fields represented by the project proposals, from tourism through water management to education systems. However, the involvement of the staff members in the assessment is a good initiative. At the same time, the quality assessment procedure is worth transformed into a three-level system. The JS should assess the projects from the point of view of their cross-border character since they have the broadest experiences with cross-border topics and they have knowledge produced by other European border areas. If the evaluation of cross-border aspects has greater influence (see the Recommendation 1.9), the JS should concentrate on ensuring these aspects in the to-be-selected projects. The professional quality of the projects should be assessed by external experts who have a deeper knowledge on the given topic but who has less information on the specificities of the cross-border programmes. Finally, it is worth involving the counties in the assessment

procedure: their representatives could survey the territorial relevance and strategic adequacy of the project proposals. By using this three-level assessment system, all three aspects of the projects (professional quality, cross-border character, territorial adequacy) could be evaluated by the most relevant actors; the JS staff would not be obliged to deal with foreign topics (what raises questions regarding even the objectivity of the assessments), instead, they can concentrate on the aspects in which they have a deeper knowledge; finally, the representatives of the counties (who used to be in parallel members of the MC) would have a deeper overview on the project proposals, what is a demand on their behalf (see the Recommendation 2.8). The system has to be set in a way that the conflict of interest of the county representatives can be avoidable. For this purpose, the establishment of appropriate ratio of scorings is a good solution.



M 6.2 Capacity assessment

R_2.10 Simplify further the control mechanisms and make them more user-friendly

According to the online questionnaire, regardless of the simplifications carried out by the programme management, still there are room for improving the procedures and make them more user-friendly:

- according to Croatian stakeholders, the requirement of submitting a certification of compliance in the case of services is useless and it cannot justify the delivery of the service in reality;
- same documents have to be uploaded twice during the monitoring process: at the FLC phase and at the partnership reporting phase, too (what seems to be a shortage of the IMIS);
- the requirement of taking a justifying picture on catering is useless: anyone can take a picture on any caterings, the attendance sheet should be enough.

Once implementing regular communication with the beneficiaries (see Recommendation 2.3), similar problems can occur and be tackled more easily.



M 6.6 Simplification test

R_2.11 Broaden the scope of simplified cost options

Simplified cost options are really beneficial for the applicants and the monitoring authorities since they ease the administrative burdens of both parties. However, some

simplifications could not reach the desired effects. E.g. the simplified staff cost option (flat rate) is rarely applied. Instead, real cost is more favourable among the beneficiaries. Even more, there are partnerships where the two options are applied in parallel what causes difficulties during the monitoring process, too.

Regardless, the exploitation of these simplified solutions is expected to be more general if their scope is broadened further, e.g. with the cases of travel and accommodation and mandatory visibility elements and events.



M 6.6 Simplification test

R_2.12 Make the IMIS more user-friendly

As a general opinion, the IMIS is a major problem of the CP. Not only the system itself has been launched with serious delay but also the quality of the services is often insufficient. As a business as usual, the internal rules of the programme are modified in order to harmonise them with IMIS instead of modifying IMIS according to the programme rules. The procedures should be realised the other way around.

Besides, there are solutions, which are not user-friendly.

On the one hand, the applicants reclaimed that

- the LB cannot see the declaration of validations of other beneficiaries via IMIS, they have to request them from the JS;
- the annexes of the Hungarian partners are uploaded with Hungarian titles (according to the rules) which are not understandable for the Croatian (lead) partners;
- during the monitoring phase, the reports and their background documents have to be uploaded twice: once at FLC level, and, later on, during the partnership level reporting what is useless (the system should consider the once uploaded documents).

On the other hand, the system is not user-friendly in terms of data generation. When creating the AIR or generating statistics (e.g. for the purpose of the current evaluation), it is (was) troublesome to find the right place of information and it is impossible to download generalised reports on different issues. Every piece of information has to be compiled one by one.

At the moment, the system appropriately responds the challenges of application and administration of project implementation. However, there are further applications which should be developed.



- M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
- M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
- M 6.6 Simplification test

R_2.13 Follow-up the level of contribution to EU2020 targets

Each European programme has to contribute to the EU2020 targets. However, it is not too easy to detect the real impacts that a programme achieved in this field, especially in the case of those low-budget programmes such as the present one. Furthermore, due to the thematic concentration principle, the programmes cannot contribute to each of the EU2020 indicators.

The evaluators have developed a matrix by which the programme bodies can assess these achievements by substituting the relevant indicators in the relevant cells. It is advised to carry out this assessment regularly in order to interact if there are remarkable shortages observed.



- M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

R_2.14 Follow-up the level of contribution to EUSDR

Similarly to EU2020 targets, the CP has to contribute to the achievement of the macro-regional strategy. In our case, it is the European Union Strategy for Danube Region (the EUSDR). The evaluators adapted the above matrix to the needs of assessment of macro-regional relevance in the same way as it has been done in the previous case.



- M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

2.3 Project implementation

R_3.1 Encourage the beneficiaries to design their contribution to horizontal principles more seriously

As some interviewees appointed and based on the experiences gained during the analysis of the projects uploaded to the IMIS system, horizontal principles are mainly handled as a must that has to be tackled in a rather superficial way. Obviously, cross-border programmes are not the genuine ones in relation with gender equality or antidiscrimination. However, these aspects are not insignificant. The applicants should be encouraged to think through these aspects more deeply. The applicants should be asked

to describe in details, how they intend to overcome the obstacles e.g. when disabled people are participating in an event. Even more, in these cases, the invitation letters should include the information, how these people can attend the event, etc. The JS should publish a guidance on horizontal principles elaborated together with an NGO or an expert involved in the given issues.



M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

R_3.2 Enhance the sustainability of cross-border partnerships and project results

In parallel with the weak cross-border and strong ad-hoc character of the projects, also the sustainability of the project results and the partnerships is quite weak. In order to ensure stronger programme impacts on the border region, the projects should have longer perspectives both in terms of results and partnerships. The assessment criteria should include factors by which these longer perspectives can be awarded, e.g. the prehistory of the partnership (its length, previous joint projects, events, activities implemented together); future joint plans (regarding the concrete project results and further development of the project; cooperation in other projects, initiatives); tools, activities ensuring the sustainability, further development of the projects and synergies with other initiatives.



M 5.1 Sustainability analysis – project results

M 5.2 Sustainability analysis – project partnership

3 Introduction

3.1 Background of the evaluation

3.1.1 Identification of the deliverable

Table 1: General data of the programme

The operational programme concerned	INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme
Programming period	2014-2020
Reporting year	2018
Cut-off date of data processing	31 August 2018
Type of the evaluation	First Phase (earlier: mid-term) evaluation

Figure 1: Programming area

(Source: <http://www.huhr-cbc.com/uploads/editors/Programme-area.jpg>)



3.1.2 Context

2018 is the year of First Phase evaluation of the cooperation programmes. In February, the Managing Authority of the programme (that time operated in the Prime Minister's Office) invited the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) to carry out the evaluation of the present programme. CESCI is a Budapest-based association established according to Hungarian private law aiming to ease cross-border cooperation along the Hungarian borders and in Central Europe. That time, the organisation was one of the strategic partners of the Prime Minister's Office which offered financial support to the CESCI on a yearly basis. Based on this strategic partnership, CESCI was committed to perform the evaluation of the programme. During the evaluation, the Managing Authority has been moved into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The evaluation procedure has been designed in harmony with the evaluation plan of the programme and further previous evaluations as models. The objective of the evaluation is to provide the actors of programme management and implementation with appropriate information on the results achieved, the potential risks identified and the potential interventions needed for the successful and smooth completion of the programme.

3.1.3 The scope of the assessment

Within the framework of the current evaluation assignment, the effectiveness, the efficiency and the impact of the cross-border programme were assessed. While effectiveness and efficiency are rather formal criteria of evaluation, impact is much more a matter of content.

Effectiveness means the level of the objectives which the programme has achieved until the date of evaluation. It refers to the progress made according to the planned implementation.

Impact is a very complex term referring to the influence that the programme exercises on the internal cohesion of the programming area and the level of cross-border cooperation. While effectiveness measures the internal success of the programme, the impact rather identifies its external success.

Efficiency refers to the successful use of financial and human resources of the programme. Successful here means 'optimal' and 'resource-efficient'.

In terms of the impact we have to stipulate two things with major significance:

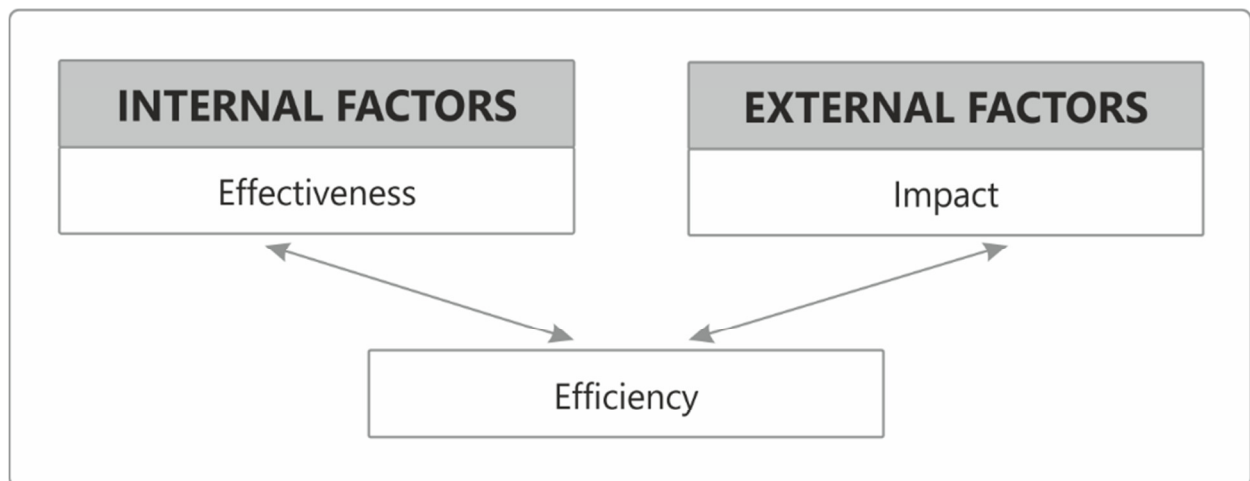
- Impact is the most important aspect of the evaluation since it refers to the tangible and intangible results created by the programme – in line with its strategic

objectives. Effectiveness and efficiency should be assessed in relationship with the achieved impacts. The programme is effective if the achieved impacts are in harmony with the targets set during the programming. The programme implementation is efficient if the resources are exploited so that the targets set are achieved in an optimal way.

- Impacts can be identified and assessed in a long term perspective. Taking into account the short period of time spent since the first calls were published and the small progress the project partners could make so far, at the moment we miss relevant information on real impacts. Consequently, we tried to measure the impact of the programmes exercising on the programming region in a very preliminary phase. These impacts will be measurable in a later phase of programme implementation with a much higher effectiveness.

Efficiency of the programme will be analysed in relationship with the effectiveness and the impact of the programme. It means that we analyse the effectiveness first (i.e. in which level the programme has been progressing so far); then the impact (i.e. in which level the programme made a measurable effect on the programming region); and finally, we assess the efficiency (i.e. how efficient was the way in which the programme managed to achieve the identified level of internal and external effects).

Figure 2: The internal logic of the evaluation



When applying this approach, we can avoid a typical mistake of programme evaluation documents i.e. the purely formal assessment of the achievements, based on quantification of the results and their comparison with the performance framework: the formal and topical aspects should have the same significance. Accordingly, in this document, all three aspects are assessed with the limitations regarding the data availability of the impact.

In line with the evaluation plan of the programme, the present document focuses on

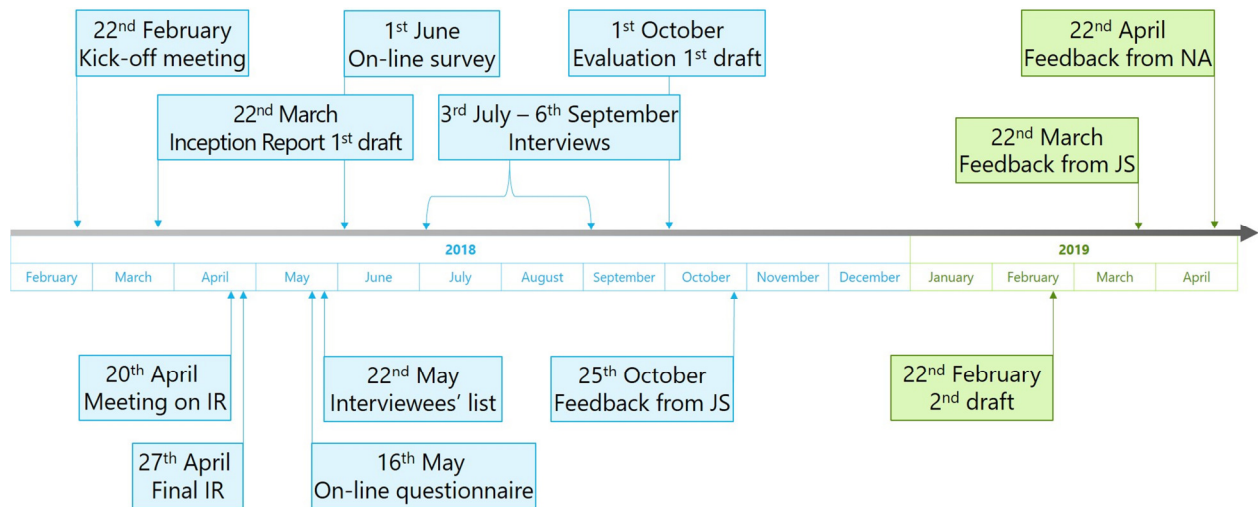
- programme management and implementation,
- Call for Proposals, project application and selection procedures,
- Communication Strategy of the programme.

3.1.4 Performance of the evaluation

The evaluation was carried out along by the following steps and milestones:

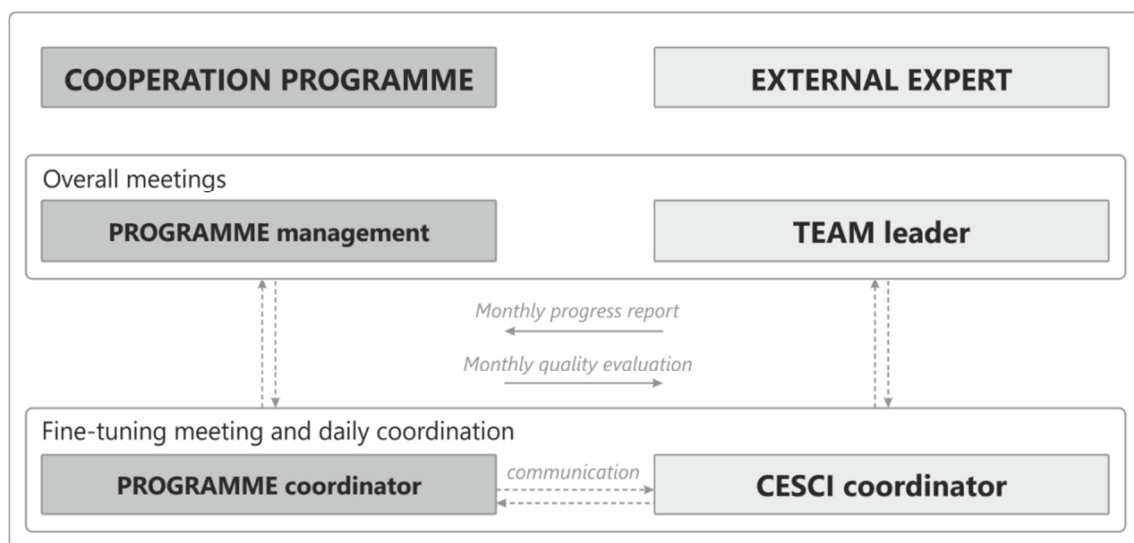
- 22nd February, 2018 – Kick-off meeting
- 22nd March – Delivery of the first draft of the Inception Report
- 20th April – Meeting on the draft Inception Report
- 27th April – Delivery of the final Inception Report
- 16th May – Delivery of the on-line questionnaire targeting the programme beneficiaries
- 22nd May – Information on sharing the link of the on-line questionnaire with the beneficiaries; identification of the interviewees
- 29th June – Interview with Mr János Rakonczai
- 3rd July – Interview with Mr Tamás Molnár
- 25th July – Interview with Ms Veronika Kárpáti
- 8th August – Interview with Ms Ana Kralj (Čakovec), Margareta Aničić and Veljko Radić (Zagreb)
- 6th September – Interview with Ms Zrinka Šajn
- 30th September – Cut-off date of data analysis
- 1st October – Submission of the 1st draft of the evaluation
- 22nd February, 2019 – Submission of the 2nd draft of the evaluation
- 21st May – Presentation of the evaluation at the MC meeting in Noskovci

Figure 3: Milestones of the evaluation



In line with the measures set by the Inception Report, coordination mechanism has been created with a view to ensuring permanent communication.

Figure 4: The coordination mechanism of the evaluation process



Besides, CESCI provided the representatives of the programme with a monthly progress report accompanied by a quality assessment sheet by which the programme coordinators were enabled to add comments and requests.

In addition, CESCI has developed a wixsite dedicated to the evaluation containing the following information:

- *Evaluation document:* it is a Google Drive Word document where the elaboration of the evaluation text can be followed;
- *Background analyses:* results of the on-line survey; (checked) summaries of the interviews; regional analysis;
- *Administration:* inception report, monthly progress reports, templates applied.

Concerning the timing, there were remarkable delays in task delivery. The delays resulted partly from work organisation problems, partly from delays in information provision. For instance, we planned to study the IMIS system from the beginning of April but we got the access thereto in May. We intended to make general overview interviews first and detailed interviews later but all these interviews were conducted in parallel from June to the beginning of September due to capacity shortages. The on-line survey should have been sent out at the end of April but the link had been shared on 22nd May. In the meanwhile, there was a technical failure on the on-line questionnaire site which caused reduced questionnaires; we had to correct the problem and inform the beneficiaries thereon.

3.2 Introduction of the cooperation programme

As part of the EU's Cohesion policy, the cooperation programme (CP) between Hungary and Croatia is one of those European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes which aim to improve the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. Thus the Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme which started in 2014 and is due to end in 2020 covers the following NUTS regions in Croatia:

- HR044 - Varaždinska županija
- HR045 - Koprivničko-križevačka županija
- HR046 - Međimurska županija
- HR047 - Bjelovarsko-bilogorska županija
- HR048 - Virovitičko-podravska županija
- HR049 - Požeško-slavonska županija
- HR04B - Osječko-baranjska županija
- HR04C - Vukovarsko-srijemska županija

and in Hungary:

- HU223 - Zala
- HU231 - Baranya
- HU232 – Somogy.

This particular cooperation programme can be regarded as a successor of the 2007-2013 Hungary-Croatia (IPA) CBC Programme. Subsequently, the process of the creation and acceptance of the programme were backed by the experiences of the 2007-2013 programme which are reflected upon in the current programme's objectives and content.

The main aim and underlying logic of the programme is to support those cooperative strategic actions and pilot projects that are tackling one or several joint priority fields with special attention to the following four broad territories:

- enhancing economic cooperation, poor accessibility or the business environment;
- enhancement and preservation of environmental and natural assets or preventing the risk of loss related to them;
- fostering the lack of networks among local and regional administrations;
- improvement of communication between educational and training institutions and key actors of local economy;
- interventions and tools.

Priority areas

The Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme defined four main interventions each with their own set of tools and indicators.

- Priority Axis 1: Economic Development - Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs (TO3);
- Priority Axis 2: Sustainable Use of Natural and Cultural Assets – Preserving and Protecting the Environment and Promoting Resource Efficiency (TO6);
- Priority Axis 3: Cooperation - Enhancing Institutional Capacity and an Efficient Public Administration (TO11);
- Priority Axis 4: Education - Investing in Education, Training, including Vocational Training for Skills and Lifelong Learning by Developing Education and Training Infrastructure (TO10);

The priority axis 5 which is the technical assistance is analysed separately in subchapter 6.5.

PA1: Economic Development

PA1's specific object is: 'Fostering value added business cooperation between SMEs operating on different sides of the border'.

The indicators of the PA are listed in the table below:

Table 2: Indicators of PA1

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
1.1	Average GVA per capita of industry and services sectors of the programme area	EUR	5,208.00	2011	5,500.00	National Bureaus of Statistics	Three times during programme implementation: 2018, 2020, 2023

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enter-prises	n/a	n/a	80.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enter-prises	n/a	n/a	80.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Enter-prises	n/a	n/a	80.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
1.1	Financial indicator	EUR	n/a	n/a	11,718,000.00	Programme monitoring	n/a
1.2	Number of enterprises receiving grants	number	n/a	n/a	80.00	Programme monitoring	n/a

PA2: Sustainable Use of Natural and Cultural Assets

PA2's specific objectives are:

- 'Convert the region's natural and cultural heritage assets to tourism attractions with income generating capabilities' and
- 'Restoring the ecological diversity in the border area'.

The indicators of the PA are listed in the table below:

Table 3: Indicators of PA2

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
2.1	Number of guest nights in Zone B defined by the Handbook to Tourism Projects in the Hungary-Croatia IPA Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013	number	1,758,826.00	2013	1,846,747.00	National Bureaus of Statistics, local municipality level data	Three times during programme implementation: 2018, 2020, 2023
CO09	Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Visits / year	n/a	n/a	60,000.00	Programme monitoring	yearly

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
CO22	Land rehabilitation: Total surface area of rehabilitated land	Hectares	n/a	n/a	450.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
2.3	Number of tourism facilities / service providers being certified by an environmental sustainability scheme	number	n/a	n/a	40.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
2.2	Number of habitats with „ A: excellent conservation” status of selected Special Bird Protection Areas	number	179.00	2014	192.00	State Institute for Nature Protection (HR) / National Park Directorate (HU)	three times during programme implementation: 2018, 2020, 2023
CO23	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	Hectares	n/a	n/a	5,400.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
2.2.2	Number of participants in joint education training schemes and awareness raising programmes	person	n/a	n/a	1,000.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
2.2.3	Number of joint international studies	number	n/a	n/a	10.00	Programme monitoring	yearly
2.1	Financial indicator	EUR	n/a	n/a	42,093,711.00	Programme monitoring	n/a

PA3: Cooperation – Enhancing Institutional Capacity and an Efficient Public Administration

PA3’s specific objective is: ‘Involvement of more social and institutional actors in cross-border cooperation’.

The indicators of the PA are listed in the table below:

Table 4: Indicators of PA3

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
3.1.	Number of entities participating in cross-border networks and bilateral co-operations	number	36.00	2015	49.00	survey	three times during programme implementation: 2018, 2020, 2023

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
3.1	Number of institutions participating in joint capacity building actions	number	n/a	n/a	33.00	programme monitoring	yearly
3.2	Number of harmonized processes, shared initiatives, coordinated policies and projects developed jointly	number	n/a	n/a	66.00	programme monitoring	yearly
3.3	People participating in joint actions and events	number			810.00	programme monitoring	yearly
3.1	Financial indicator	EUR	n/a	n/a	6,726,464.00	programme monitoring	n/a

PA4: Education – Investing in Education, Training, including Vocational Training for Skills and Lifelong Learning by Developing Education and Training Infrastructure

PA4's specific objective is: 'Improve the role of educational institutions as intellectual centres for increasing the specific local knowledge-base in the region'.

The indicators of the PA are listed in the table below:

Table 5: Indicators of PA4

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
4.1	Number of educational institutions in the border region that offer courses jointly or with region- or neighbouring country-specific content	Number	29.00	2014	90.00	survey	three times during programme implementation: 2018, 2020, 2023
4.1	Training courses developed and delivered (formal and informal)	number	n/a	n/a	40.00	programme monitoring	yearly
4.2	Number of educational premises refurbished	number	n/a	n/a	15.00	programme monitoring	yearly

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
4.3	Number of educational premises upgraded with technical equipment	number	n/a	n/a	15.00	programme monitoring	yearly
4.4	Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	number	n/a	n/a	860.00	programme monitoring	yearly
4.5	Number of involved marginalised persons in training programmes	number	n/a	n/a	200.00	programme monitoring	yearly
CO46	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	Persons	n/a	n/a	860.00	programme monitoring	n/a
4.1	Financial indicator	EUR	n/a	n/a	6,726,464.00	programme monitoring	n/a

4 The methodology of the evaluation

4.1 Factors of the analysis

For the purposes of the analysis the following factors have been selected for analysis:

Table 6: Factors of the analysis

Factors	Explication	Assessment topics	Components
Effectiveness	When assessing the effectiveness of the programme, we focus on the achievements and the progress the programme has made to date. The evaluation should show where we are and where we were planned to be in 2018 at the time of the approval of the programme.	The actual progress of the programme	Quantification of the results
			Indicator value analysis
			Scheduling
			Financial progress analysis
		Effectiveness of the communication	Evaluation of the communication plan
			Evaluation of the communication of the programme
Evaluation of the communication of the projects			
Impact	Impact assessment measures how successful the programme was in terms of cross-border cooperation and cohesion; in other words, whether the programme can be reasonably justified in its existence.	Relevance	Analysis of regional needs
			Analysis of cross-border relevance
			Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
			Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals
		Territorial impact	Mapping of the territorial coverage
			Assessment of strategic approach
		Permanency	Sustainability analysis – project results
			Sustainability analysis – project partnership
			Assessment of the integrated approach
		Efficiency	This evaluation aspect measures how, with what efficiency the human and financial capacities and resources have been utilised.
Capacity assessment			
Lead time assessment			
Assessment of the procedures			

Factors	Explication	Assessment topics	Components
			Assessment of technical assistance
			Simplification test
			Assessment of ownership
		Costs of operation	Cost efficiency assessment

4.2 Applied methods

During the implementation of the evaluation project, the following methods were applied

Table 7: Applied methods of the evaluation process

Identification of the method	Explanation	Remarks
Document review and analysis	Analysis of the programme documents (cooperation programme document, ex-ante evaluation report, strategic environment assessment, communication strategy, final evaluation report of the previous programme, Annual Implementation Reports, minutes of the MC meetings at their background documents); the documents related to programme implementation (documents of calls for proposals, background documents of the special tools implemented, rules of procedures, internal rules of the programme bodies, job descriptions); and the relevant EU documents (EU2020 Strategy, the Cohesion Policy Regulations of 2014-2020, the basic documents of the EUSDR; guides and background documents of evaluation).	The document analysis aimed at getting an overall picture on the frameworks of the programme and the achievements reached. Consequently, the documents analysed within a desk research were targeted by textual analysis. Based on the collection, the team created a large information basis.
Structured in-depth interviews	The interviews addressed the representatives of the programme implementation bodies (MA: 1, NA: 2, JS: 2, MC: 2; total: 7 persons). The objective of the interviews was to get deeper knowledge on the way of functioning of the programme and on the achievements made.	Originally, face-to-face and phone call interviews were planned but finally face-to-face interviews were made, exceptionally. It was one of the reasons of the delay in performing the evaluation. Group interview was made with the representatives of the NA which proved to be very useful since the participants could complement each other's views and knowledge.
On-line survey	The aim of the survey was to gather information and experiences from the lead beneficiaries of both selected and rejected proposals. The lead beneficiaries of the projects (both selected and rejected) were requested to answer the questionnaire covering many small details of project development and implementation.	We received 43 questionnaires filled-in by the beneficiaries. 3 of them were filled-in partly. The share of selected and not-selected proposals was 29/14. The selected 29 projects represented 52% of the total number of selected projects (56 projects in total, including the priority project which was registered in paper format only hence it has not been taken into consideration during the analysis). It is to be highlighted that the relatively low number of the questionnaires, the heterogeneity of the set of answers and the language problems of the beneficiaries made the survey usable in a limited way.

Identification of the method	Explanation	Remarks
Collection and analysis of data and information on the programme	The primary information source on the progress of the programme was the IMIS system. The available information was analysed with different quantitative and qualitative methods including indices, scaling, benchmark, word cloud method, contextual analysis, etc.	It has to be highlighted that the scope of the information collected from the IMIS and processed with different methods was limited due to the late start of its implementation. (Consequently there were projects the content of which has not been uploaded yet, the application form is available only as the annex of the Subsidy Contract, as a picture what made difficult to analyse the particular projects.) Due to this fact, the results of the analyses should be considered cautiously since the evaluators were able to assess the information only which was available through the IMIS system. In this perspective, document analysis and interviews provided very important contribution with a view to completing the information available in the IMIS.
GIS based territorial analysis	The evaluation team gathered and processed statistical data in order to assess the relevance of the programme priorities in terms of the changing territorial needs. In order to measure the relevance of the current performance framework and the intervention logic of the programmes; and to identify the necessary modifications of (financial, common and programme specific) indicators, the starting and the current socio-economic situations of the programming region were benchmarked.	

5 Results of the evaluation

5.1 Effectiveness

When assessing the effectiveness of the programme, we focus on the achievements and the progress the programme has made to date. The evaluation should show where we are and where we were planned to be in 2018 at the time of the approval of the programme.

5.1.1 Actual progress

The actual progress of the programme will be measured through:

- the quantification of the achievements made
- the analysis of the indicators
- the analysis of the time schedule; and
- the analysis of the financial progress.

M1.1 Quantification of the results

In this chapter we intend to have an overall picture on the progress made so far. For this purpose we gather the following data: number of calls, number of project proposals submitted, number of selected projects, number of projects completed; number of project activities implemented and reported; number of indicators achieved.

The implementation of the programme was launched through three different types of 'calls'.

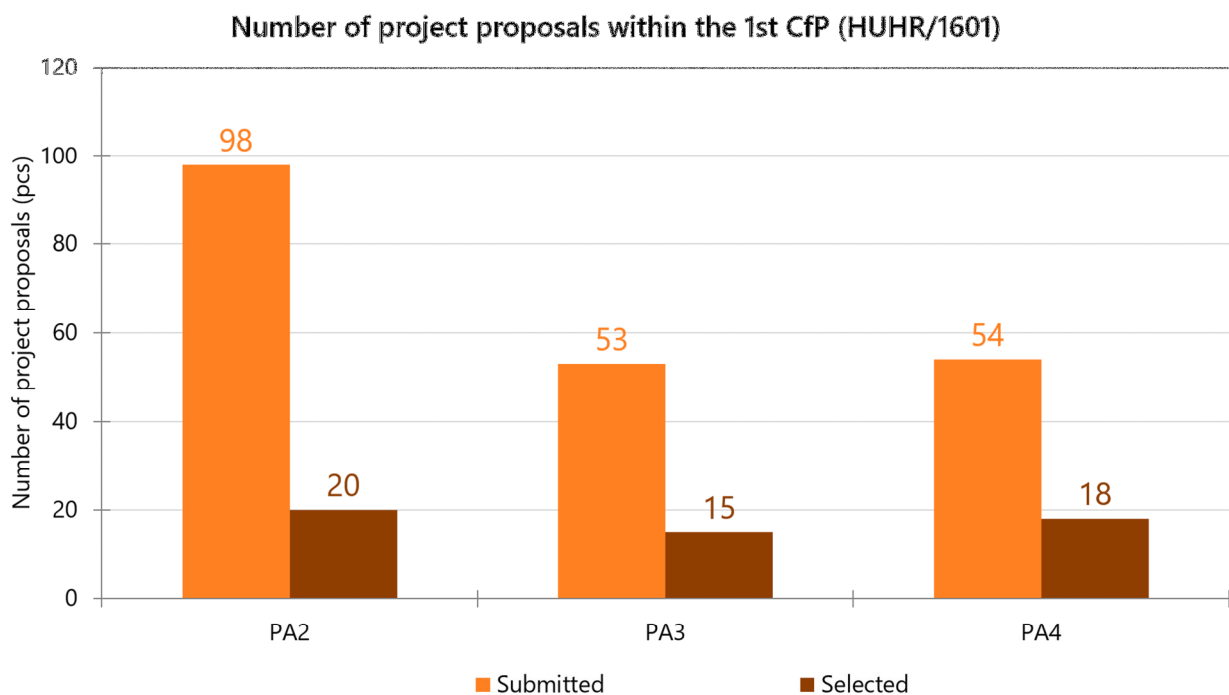
- **B Light Scheme' project (HUHR/1602):** according to the PA1 a special operation will be performed. It is partly functioning like a regular project and partly like a grant scheme. Within the framework of the project, a partnership of 8 members starts tendering Hungarian and Croatian SMEs and supports them in the successful applications and project implementation. The official starting date of the project was February 1, 2017. Out of the submitted 53 proposals, 20 were selected for a second round evaluation.
- **Strategic project 1 (HUHR/1501):** the strategic project belonging to PA2 (called De-mine HU-HR II) is a continuation of the earlier de-mining project of the two

Member States. The project was launched on 1 June, 2016 and it was closed on May 31, 2018.

- **1st open Call for Proposals (HUHR/1601):** the first open call for application of the Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Co-operation Programme 2014-2020 was closed on May 31, 2016. Within the framework of the call, proposals were invited to be submitted under three priorities (PA2, PA3, PA4).

In the HUHR/1601 call, by priority, the number of submitted and selected projects was as follows¹:

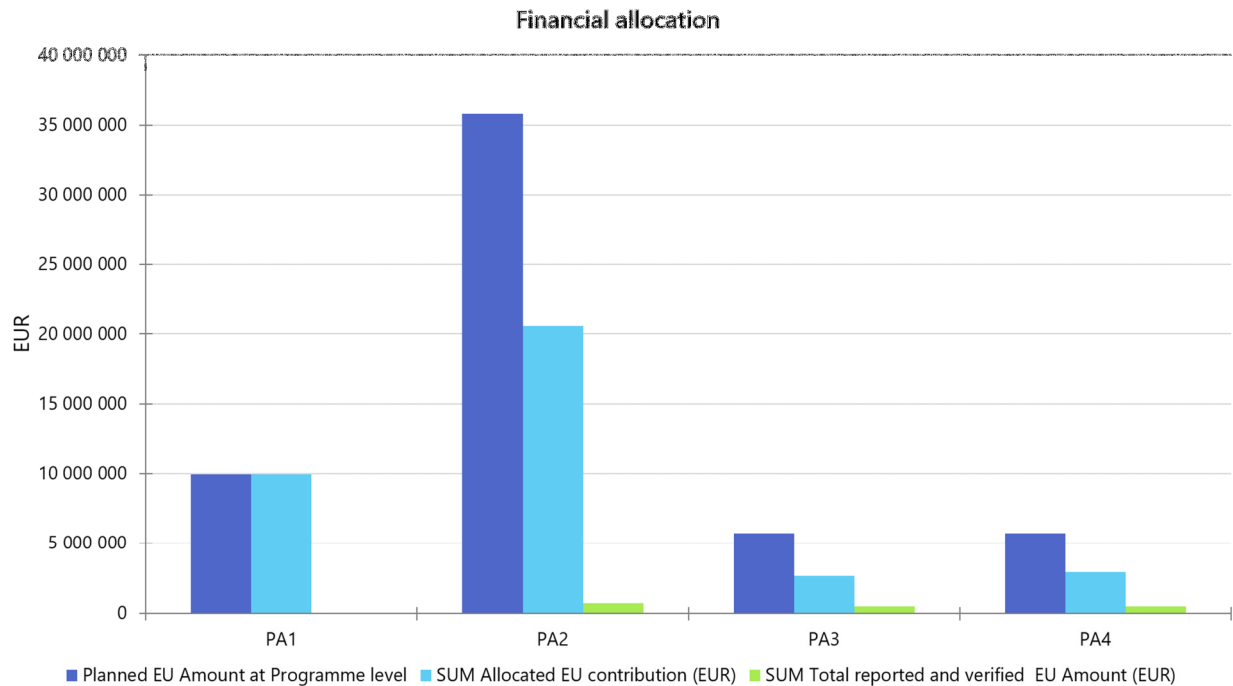
Figure 5: Number of project proposals within the 1st CfP (HUHR/1601) [Source: IMIS]



¹ According to the data of the back office. The Annual Implementation Report gives information about further three submitted project proposals. Reported and verified EU Amount means the aggregated amount spent, reported and verified by projects.

Between 2014-2020, the programme was provided with 60.494.406,00 EUR of EU ERDF contribution. Against this budget, the first calls have allocated the following amounts (per PAs):

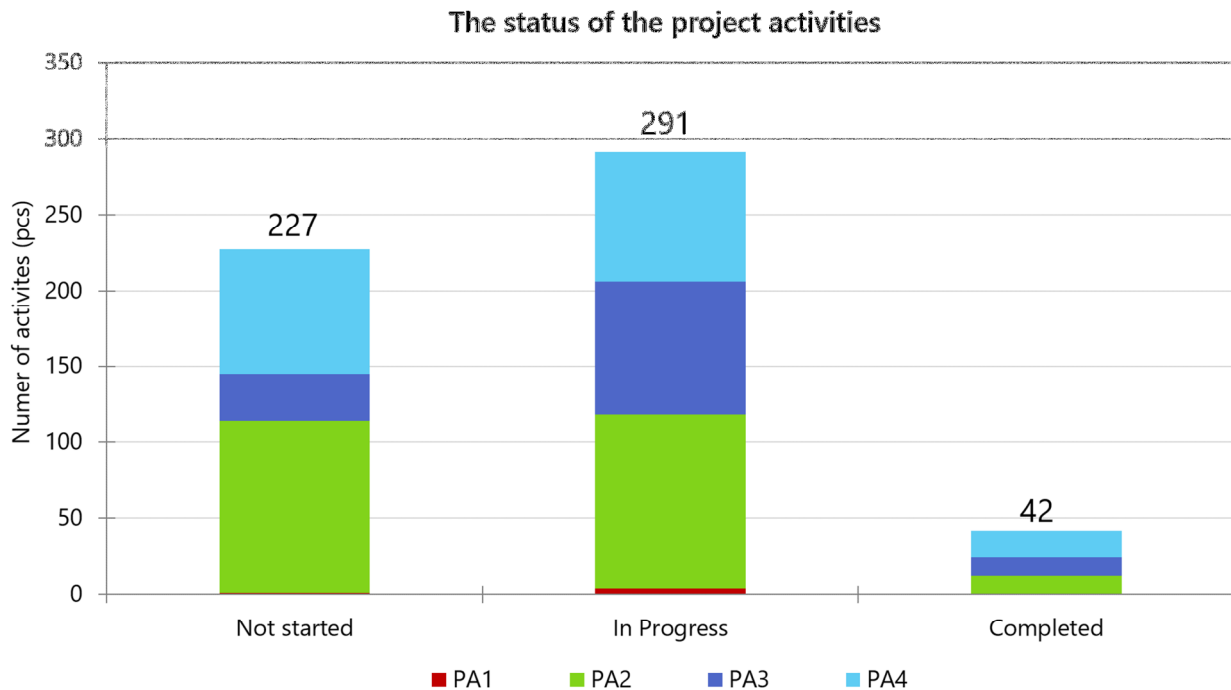
Figure 6: Financial allocation [Source: IMIS]



As it can be seen, thanks to the successful 'B Light Scheme' project, the total amount planned for the PA1 has already been allocated. (At the same time, the major part of this amount will be transferred to further beneficiaries by the 2nd phase calls.)

According to the reports uploaded to the IMIS, the projects within the framework of the programme will proceed with their planned activities as follows:

Figure 7: The status of the project activities [Source: IMIS]



As it is shown on the figure, the implementation of most of the activities is already in progress. Although, the figure only shows the accepted activities, it needs to be mentioned that according to contract date, until the end of September 2018, 16 projects were closed, but reporting is still ongoing in many cases. First of all, the first strategic project, the 'De-mine HU-HR II.' was closed on May 31, 2018. Among the active projects, the project of the 'B Light Scheme' will take the longest time, where the closing date of the project will be on July 31, 2021.

Based on the reports and data in the IMIS, in respect of the indicators, the following progress can be identified:

Table 8: Indicator values of the Programme [Source: IMIS]

Name	Measurement Unit	CP Target value	CP 2018 Target value	Projects Target value [forecast provided by beneficiaries]	Projects Actual value actual achievement]
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	enterprises	80		80	0
Number of enterprises receiving grants	enterprises	80	15	80	0
Number of enterprises receiving support	enterprises	80		80	0

Name	Measurement Unit	CP Target value	CP 2018 Target value	Projects Target value [forecast provided by beneficiaries]	Projects Actual value actual achievement]
Total surface area of rehabilitated land	hectares	450		459	0
Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	60 000	9 000	27 557	840
Number of joint international studies	number	10		6	0
Number of participants in joint education training schemes and awareness raising programmes	number	1 000		581	0
Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	hectares	5 400	810	165	2
Number of tourism facilities / service providers being certified by an environmental sustainability scheme	number	40		23	0
People participating in joint actions and events	number	810	125	1 212	775
Number of harmonized processes, shared initiatives, coordinated policies and projects developed jointly	number	66		37	5
Number of institutions participating in joint capacity building actions	number	33		117	21
Number of involved marginalised persons in training programmes	number	200		475	247
Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	number	860	150	1 842	410
Number of educational premises upgraded with technical equipment	number	15		38	16
Number of educational premises refurbished	number	15		7	1
Training courses developed and delivered (formal and informal)	number	40		86	14

M 1.2 Indicator value analysis

In this subchapter we tried to evaluate the implementation, from the perspective of the indicator values. The main purpose of the analysis is to benchmark the indicators of different priorities planned during the programming and those met during the implementation. We analyse the absolute values as well as the reasons of the differences between planned and realised values. For this analysis we used the programme documents, the data available in the IMIS and data of the National Statistical Offices, plus – for reasoning – the relevant parts of the interviews conducted.

As it can be seen at the Table 8, the delay regarding PA1 is significant; no value has been reached regarding its indicators. PA2 is performing similarly, however the completion of the strategic project improves the overall picture. The two indicators of PA3 which refer to participation are near the target, although the “Number of harmonized processes, shared initiatives, coordinated policies and projects developed jointly” has just started to increase. PA4 is the best performing priority of the Programme, only the indicator of “Number of educational premises refurbished” is low in value.

It is a general opinion among the respondents of the interviews that the final implementation of the programme is not in danger; although there are some serious delays compared to the planned progress (the performance framework cannot be followed), these all might be handled without any serious problem. Although, the start of the Programme was problematic, the first project was a large strategic one (DE-MINE), which is already closed. It is also a challenge to successfully implement the new tools and mechanisms (B Light Scheme), because the set-out is rather slow for several reasons. The successful implementation of the B Light Scheme seems to be at risk. Some of the interviewees complained about the deficiency of the planning process due to the non-involvement of all reference groups. The second open call for proposals of the Programme is expected at the earliest possible moment. It is instructive, that respondents say unanimously that the deficient structure and functioning of IMIS is one of the main hindering factors of timely performance.

M 1.3 Scheduling

In this subchapter as an additional component of the indicator value analysis, we tried to give an overview on the differences between the planned and the realised schedule of implementation and its reasons. The main purpose of the analysis is to benchmark the indicators of different priorities planned during the programming and those met during the implementation. We analyse the timely achievements; as well as the reasons of the differences between the planned and realised timings. The analysis will identify the prominent risks related to timely implementation. For this analysis we used the programme documents and the data available in the IMIS.

Table 9: Schedule of indicator values [Source: IMIS]

Priority axis	Indicator	2014	2015	2016	2017	Target value (2018)	Actual value	Difference
1	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	0	0	0	80		0	
	Number of enterprises receiving grants	0	0	0	80	15	0	-15
	Number of enterprises receiving support	0	0	0	80		0	
2	Total surface area of rehabilitated land	0	0	459,85	459,85		0	
	Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	0	0	0	36 548	9 000	840	-8 160
	Number of joint international studies	0	0	0	6		0	
	Number of participants in joint education training schemes and awareness raising programmes	0	0	0	546		0	
	Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	0	0	0	135,37	810	2	-808
	Number of tourism facilities / service providers being certified by an environmental sustainability scheme	0	0	0	23		0	
3	People participating in joint actions and events	0	0	0	1 208	125	775	650
	Number of harmonized processes, shared initiatives, coordinated policies and projects developed jointly	0	0	0	37		5	
	Number of institutions participating in joint capacity building actions	0	0	0	90		21	
4	Number of involved marginalised persons in training programmes	0	0	0	475		247	

Priority axis	Indicator	2014	2015	2016	2017	Target value (2018)	Actual value	Difference
	Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	0	0	0	1 706	150	410	260
	Number of educational premises upgraded with technical equipment	0	0	0	37		16	
	Number of educational premises refurbished	0	0	0	7		1	
	Training courses developed and delivered (formal and informal)	0	0	0	101		14	

In terms of PA1, the indicator target values planned for 2018 have not been reached due to slow progress of indicator called Number of enterprises receiving grants. In PA2 indicator values of the strategic project have been reached but the delay is still significant. In the case of indicators 'Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions' and 'Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status' the actual values remain below the target values for 2018. In PA3 and PA4 the progress is remarkable; all indicators are above the targeted values.

The main reasons of the delays in implementation go back to the late adoption of EU Regulations and the belated starting of the operation of the IMIS. On the one hand, the EU Cohesion Policy Regulations were adopted in November 2013 and became effective in December, in the same year. It means that the CP should have started in less than one-month period of time after the approval what was impossible. Furthermore, the late adoption caused last-minute rush at the DG Regio, too. The stakeholders involved in the programming faced several times interpretation and communication problems: the rules were set and modified in parallel with the programming process and the desk officers communicated differently what resulted in difficulties when drafting the CP.

Finally, the INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia cooperation programme was submitted to the Commission on 24 March 2015, while the opening conference was held on 10 September 2015 what means an extreme speed in the delivery of the new programme document. Still, the programme started almost with a 2-year delay due to the belated adoption of the EU level regulations.

On the other hand, the electronic application system started its operation in the spring of 2018 which fact seriously delayed the procedures: the previously selected beneficiaries of the 1st call could not upload their reports, consequently they could not be monitored and

reimbursed either. Even more, the 2nd call had to be delayed because the Croatian party had been blocking the publication until the IMIS was operational (in order to avoid further complications).

These two factors heavily impacted the scheduling of the programme implementation and the achievement of the planned indicators in due time.

M 1.4 Financial progress analysis

In parallel with the indicator analysis we assessed the current financial progress of the programme against the planned one. The progress is described by three indices:

- allocation rate: the ratio of the aggregated allocated sum (the contracted amount per each selected project) and the planned financial frame by priority, expressed in percentage;
- absorption rate: the ratio of the amount reimbursed by the contracted beneficiaries and the planned financial frame by priority.

For the sake of evaluation, we used programme documents and the data available in the IMIS, plus – for the reasoning – the relevant parts of the interviews conducted.

In the table below we have summarized the target values (target for 2023 and 2018), the allocated and approved amounts, allocation rate (2023 and 2018) and absorption rates, by priority axis and in total.

The performance of the programme is far away from the target values for 2018, and the sums will not meet with the original plans. In PA1 the allocation rate is high although, the absorption has not started yet – this priority is in safe regardless to the delays. The allocation is also in order in PA2 and the absorption has also started, however not very efficiently. PA3 and PA4 are about at the same level: their allocation rate is appropriate, and the absorption is also proceeding correctly. To sum up, the allocation rate of the Programme is satisfactory, but the absorption is delayed. With a next call (in time), the planned allocation and absorption of the Programme should be safe.

The reasons behind the delays in allocation and absorption are the same than the ones which were behind the unreached indicator values (see under chapter M 1.2). Therefore, we do not repeat these conclusions here.

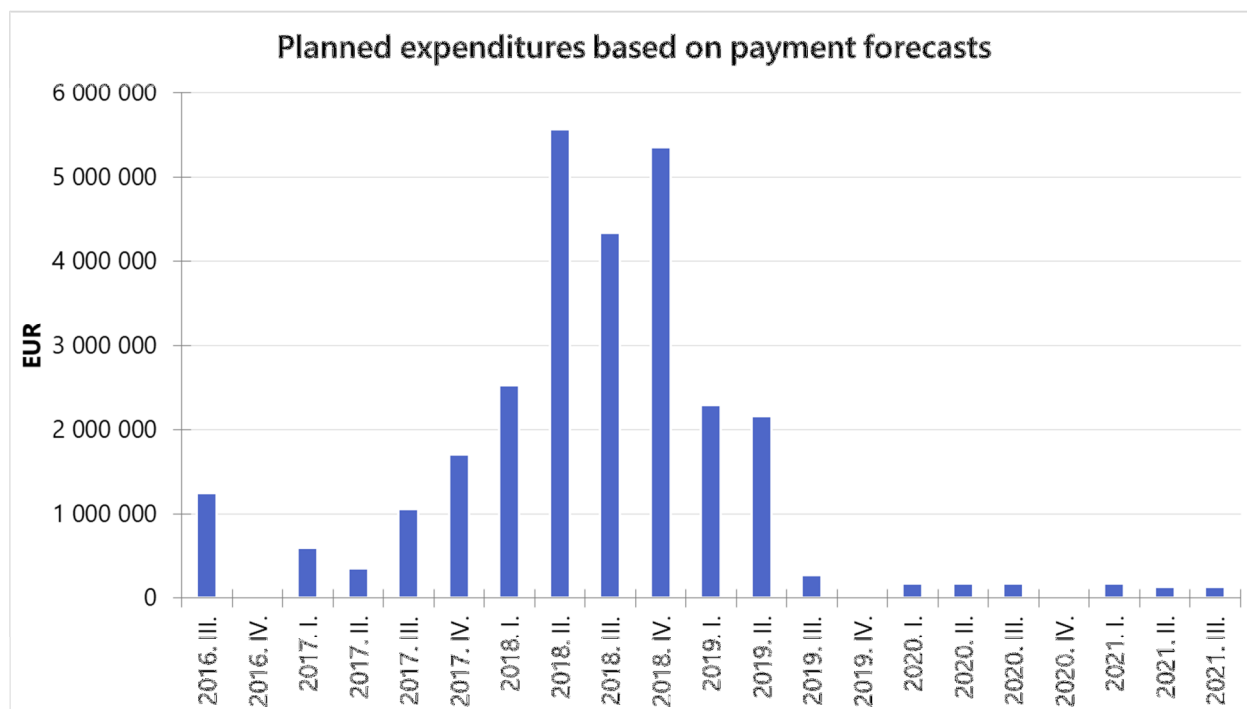
Table 10: Allocation and absorption rates of the Programme [Source: IMIS]

Priority axis	Target Value (2023)	Target value (2018)	Allocated SUM	Reported and verified EU amount	Allocation rate (2018)	Allocation rate (2023)	Absorption rate
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Priority axis	Target Value (2023)	Target value (2018)	Allocated SUM	Reported and verified EU amount	Allocation rate (2018)	Allocation rate (2023)	Absorption rate
1.	11 718 000	2 200 000	9 960 299	0	452,74%	85,00%	0,00%
2.	42 093 711	7 580 000	20 567 676	713 614	271,34%	48,86%	9,41%
3.	6 726 464	1 210 000	2 658 111	484 801	219,68%	39,52%	40,07%
4.	6 726 464	1 210 000	2 929 772	488 044	242,13%	43,56%	40,33%
Total	67 264 639	12 200 000	36 115 858	1 686 459	296,03%	53,69%	13,82%

Referring to the interviews, there is no unmanageable risk due to the absorption in time. However, a further call is needed as soon as possible.

Figure 8: Planned expenditures based on payment forecasts [Source: IMIS]



5.1.2 Effectiveness of communication

M 2.1 Evaluation of the communication plan

By this evaluation we would like to get an overall picture on the communication activities of the programme which we first intend to analyse independently of the activities made in reality.

Introduction

In this subchapter, the COMMUNICATION STRATEGY INTERREG V-A HUNGARY-CROATIA CO-OPERATION PROGRAMME 2014-2020 approved by the Monitoring Committee on the 8th of December 2015 by MC decision No 7/2015 (8.12), prepared by the Joint Secretariat (JS) of the Programme (hereinafter: Communication Strategy) will be analysed.

The Communication Strategy envisages the deepening of the connection of the Programme, with its beneficiaries as first, the general public as second and the media as third, ensuring the Programme and the European funds a continuous presence in the day-to-day activities of the cross-border communities and beyond. The Programme would like to work harder at establishing a strong connection and feeling of ownership among the beneficiaries of the Programme.

The Programme intends to assume a more active role in direct communication with the (potential) beneficiaries, using all the most recent developments in the field of communication technology available to the Programme, to reach as wide audience as possible, and focusing on a more interactive approach in order to engage the target audiences and increase the attractiveness of the Programme.

Overall public awareness is still comparatively low, thus one of the objectives of this document will be to raise awareness of the citizens and to show the benefits that Hungarian-Croatian cross-border cooperation brings to the Programme area.

Objectives

The document identifies different level of objectives.

Message level

The Communication Strategy defines some key expressions to have in mind when considering communication about the Programme as follows: intense and diverse co-operation; shared knowledge; active and motivated communities; sustainable development of rich natural and cultural assets; enhanced competitiveness of SMEs;

enhanced institutional capacity; efficient public administration; investment in education, training and lifelong learning.

Overall programme objectives

According to the document communication activities on both programme- and project level should be constantly highlighting the most successful examples and best practice models. The specific objectives stated in the Cooperation Programme should be supported by the Communication Strategy:

- Fostering value added business co-operation between SMEs operating on different sides of the border;
- Converting the region's natural and cultural heritage assets to tourism attractions with income generating capabilities;
- Restoring the ecological diversity in the border area;
- Involving more social and institutional actors in cross-border cooperation;
- Improving the role of educational institutions as intellectual centres for increasing the specific local knowledge-base in the region.

Communication objectives

The Communication Strategy sets overall objectives which all contain specific objectives.

1) Ensuring transparency of the whole programme implementation process

- To ensure on-going communication with regard to the different stages of programme implementation among the programme implementing structures
- To disseminate information on the status of programme implementation to all the relevant stakeholders, including the media

2) Generating interest among all relevant target groups by providing adequate information on funding opportunities and administrative procedures and requirements related to the application process

- To provide potential beneficiaries and stakeholders with accurate and reliable information to stimulate high quality applications
- To help generate new partnerships by increasing awareness among potential beneficiaries about the funding opportunities offered by the Programme
- To reinforce the already well-established and recognisable visual identity of the Programme within the programme area and to improve the visibility of the Programme among the general public and at higher-than-regional level

- 3) Providing sufficient information and guidance on implementation requirements for beneficiaries in order to achieve the best possible absorption of funds
 - To support and engage beneficiaries in communication activities through all phases of project implementation to guarantee the best possible outcome of the projects
 - To ensure clear and up-to-date information is available regarding all the phases of implementation at any time
- 4) Fostering a positive image of the EU and EU funds within the local communities, engaging the citizens for a more active and positive approach to the EU and its institutions
 - To highlight the role and added value of the European Union, ESI funds in general, and ETC (INTERREG) programmes in particular
 - To promote the benefits of the Programme and ESI funds in general for the local communities, directly affected by them

Target audiences

The Communication Strategy also describes the major target groups. The target audiences include (potential) project participants, relevant public authorities at local, regional and national level, professional associations and business communities, economic and social partners, non-governmental organisations, project operators and promoters, general public, programme implementing structures, EU institutions and the media.

The nature of information to be communicated and the types of communication channels to be employed try to take into account the specific information needs of the targeted groups.

General Public

Regarding the general public transparency is being of utmost importance. Media channels are chosen to be used stronger than average. Special emphasis is given to ICT tools and Social Media. General Public is consisted of Local communities in the Programme area; Citizens of Croatia and Hungary; Citizens of the EU.

Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries are identified as a key target group. The Communication Strategy has not described any special tool regarding the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries include Potential Beneficiaries and Beneficiaries of contracted Projects.

Programme Management Structures

The emphasis has been put on the network approach which would support the flow of information, the use of ICT and the exchange of good practices between the stakeholders dedicated to reach the objectives of the Programme. All relevant organisations should be included in the flow of information, especially the members of the Monitoring Committee. Management Structures include Monitoring Committee, Managing Authority, National Authority in Croatia, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, Control Bodies, Joint Secretariat (JS) and JS Contact Points, Control Bodies.

Key Decision Makers and Social Actors

The main goal is to keep the high level of awareness of the decision makers found at local and regional levels. Another goal is to increase the involvement of national level actors. This group consists of national, regional and local level policy-makers; high-ranked civil servants at national, regional and local level; furthermore key actors of civil society.

European Commission

It is emphasised that a continuous information flow between the Programme and the European Commission is essential for the successful implementation of the Programme, starting from the adoption of the Programme to its closure.

Media

The planned communication activities aim at achieving the widest coverage for the Programme's content and results in all kinds of media. A proactive approach in providing information on the programme implementation process, its achievements, results and events are expected which means regular communication.

Tools

The Strategy also has a description on the communication tools expected to be used with regard to the specific needs of the different previously briefly introduced target groups. The tools include printed materials; events; mass media; internet and social media.

Printed Materials

The main purpose of printed materials is to complement awareness-raising actions and programme-level events. The main purpose of these materials is to draw attention on the CBC Programme and to promote the results of the Programme and individual events and/or campaigns. The printed materials include the map of the Programme area; factsheets/leaflets; accessories; brochures.

Events

Events are planned to play a major role in communication as one of the most used tool. Events aim at serving awareness-raising, dissemination of information about the Programme and its funding possibilities, the rules guiding its implementation, as well as about the Programme results and examples of best practice projects. A large number of programme level events are planned to be organised during the Programme's lifecycle. The event tool includes kick-off / opening event; Annual Programme Event / European Co-operation Day; Europe Day; Information Days; Lead Beneficiary Workshops; Partner Search Forums / Match-making Events; Closing Conference.

Mass Media

The Communication Strategy aims at improving the Programme's presence in the national level media. Tools are the following ones: Press releases; Advertisements; Factsheets; Announcements; Photographic material.

Internet and Social Media

The Communication Strategy plans on increasing the online communication and internet-based outlets. The programme website is envisaged to serve as the focal point for all the most relevant information regarding the Programme, with regular updates regarding programme implementation, events and other programme-related news. The Strategy plans to employ other web-based communication channels as well in order to engage directly with the beneficiaries and to generate a more diversified presence on the internet. Social media outlets will be used to promote the Programme and present the possibilities for funding, rules and procedures governing the selection process and to promote the results of the programme in innovative and creative ways, through an interactive approach. The tools planned to be used include the Programme website; FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) on the website; direct mail; Programme e-newsletter; banners/links on portals/sites and social media (Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter).

Implementation and monitoring

According to the Communication Strategy, activities should follow, be appropriate for and tailored to the individual implementation phases of the Programme's lifecycle.

It is actually the Cooperation Programme itself which defines the responsibilities related to the information and communication measures and the bodies in charge of their implementation.

In the followings, tasks related to the Communication Strategy will only be further detailed.

Managing Authority (MA) is responsible for drawing up the Programme Communication Strategy. MA is responsible for informing the Monitoring Committee at least once a year on the progress in the implementation of the communication strategy and also for including the results of the information and publicity measures carried out under the communication strategy in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) submitted every year to the European Commission, in particular in 2017 and 2019.

The **Programme's Monitoring Committee (MC)** is responsible for approving the Communication Strategy as well as monitoring the programme level communication via the approval of yearly reports and yearly communication plans.

Joint Secretariat (JS) is responsible for collecting data for the Strategy. The implementation of the Communication Strategy is a horizontal task of all programme staff members. This is ensured by planning and monitoring of the activities within the Programme by the Programme and Communication Manager, who is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of the Strategy with the continuous support of the Programme and Communication Officer, i.e. via existence of the JS Contact Points, especially regarding the communication actions targeted at beneficiaries in the programme area.

Evaluation

To enable proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the information and communication related activities, a system of result (Table 3) and output indicators have been developed (see Chapter 2.3. on the Communication Objectives and Indicators, 2.5. Chapter on Internal and External Communication, Chapter 3.1 on the Communication Tools).

The Strategy has compiled a table with the content of the result indicators with the following content: Communication objective; Result Indicator; Measurement Unit; Baseline Value; Baseline Year; Target; Value (2023); Source of Data; Frequency of reporting.

M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme

In this sub-chapter the communication tools applied; the frequency of communication on the programme; the indicators fulfilled related to communication activities; and the estimated impact on public awareness on the programme are evaluated. For the evaluation we use the following methods: desk research with document analysis, interviews with programme bodies and on-line questionnaire.

A major problem that has been making the whole communication of the programme harder is the malfunctioning and the general structure of the IMIS. It needs to be underlined that despite of the programme implementation type of problems, the communication of the programme has managed to be effective in spite of huge problems with technical support (both IMIS and web maintenance/development service provider). The flow of documents and information should be facilitated by correcting the faults of the IMIS. FLC and other responsible bodies are facing the general problems deriving from the IMIS. Many questions have been raised in connection to the usage and the malfunctions of the system.

The actual management structure might also need some slight alterations since some have found it difficult to manage to communicate with so many levels and bodies at the same time. There is a need for a few organisations (e.g. MA or NAs) which can function as real information hubs. Officers responsible for communication have done a good job.

Taking the effectiveness of the communication tools into consideration it has to be clarified that indicators can be fulfilled. The target values were set realistically based on request of the EC and experience gained from the previous programme, therefore difficulties are not expected to rise considering reaching the targets by 2023. The implementation of the communication strategy and plans are going well, however the implementation and effectiveness of the programme is heavily based on limited financial opportunities for programme level communication. In many cases the question is not how the JS will carry out its communication but how the projects plan to communicate. New thing compared to the previous programme is the designation (recommended though) of the communication managers per project. Financing and budget could not be an obstacle for better project level communication. In this programming period obligatory tools for projects are given bigger accent than in the previous programme. Communication can be grasped more efficiently on project level, in the implementation phase. In order to do that project partners were encouraged to have better communication by assigning communication managers to projects and by media tools. Good examples that need to be further examined to create a better communicating programme include B Light Scheme and the project titled *De-contamination of war-affected territories* (De-mine HU-HR II), which have been regularly highlighted on all levels including EC.

The visibility of the programme is guaranteed by the webpage and the Facebook page. Mostly only news and project implementation parts of the official webpage were updated regularly. Furthermore, the page was not updated during the most active phase of the programme implementation, and this was considered as a major fault. Due to the fact that there was no selected service provider responsible for the maintenance of the

website between 1.1.2017 and 30.9.2018, the two programme and communication managers could only manage the basic entering of data via CMS, but not the programming and development of the website; this caused certain problems, such as the non-existence of the interactive project database.

Regarding social media, Facebook has to be highlighted as a platform of frequent and rapid communication. Since the beginning of the year there were 246 posts on FB, which is almost 1 per day – including programme related information, programme and project events and EU-institutions related news. The seemingly small number of likes (376) and followers of the Facebook page is not unusual in the case of INTERREG programmes; it is rather an average value. The programme's Twitter account has been less active as that specific communication channel is not as relevant in the two countries involved; therefore it is mainly used as a networking tool for media and EU-wide communication.

According to the interviewees, effectiveness can be raised by a training centre. Language barriers are of major importance in communication. The obstacles would be well advised to ease by free language courses in the respective languages and also in English. For example in relation to the mandatory annex, the lead applicants are not able to identify the documents because of the lack of language skills. The Croatian versions of the project outputs produced by the Hungarian partners are usually of low quality, many times written in Serbian resulting in further tasks dedicated to the Croatian partners.

It is very hard to attract attention at public level. The most popular events include Info Days and implementation workshops dedicated to LBs. It would be important to organise workshops connected to calls in the inactive sub-regions of the border region in order to get new groups of applicants. As a business as usual, the people who attend communication events are those who are already familiar with the programme. There is no real solution for reaching out wider audiences, hence audience development capacities might need to be enhanced on programme level. The programme level communication is aware of the challenge of difficult inclusion of specific groups. In order to tackle this problem, minority groups and other groups have been invited to the Info Days.

Based on interviews, there is still a feeling among some stakeholders that the communication suffers from a geographical and thus communication distance, between the office in Budapest and the given border area and regional stakeholders. It is of outstanding importance to meet local inhabitants and stakeholders personally on the ground, therefore the JS puts emphasis on having multiple personal consultations. Based on the experiences, awareness raising and communication activities can more effectively

be carried out within the programme region. The three Contact Points (Osijek, Čakovec, Pécs) can play a decisive role in this field in the future.

JS colleagues' travels and other communication activities requiring in-the-field type of presence need to be kept supported in the upcoming since it has turned out to be a useful method in reaching larger audiences and spreading information within the border region. Local trainings have high importance in project implementation and thus the realisation of the programme too since there have been a remarkable number of beneficiaries who had limited knowledge on how to deal with implementation tasks, such as reporting. It is important to underline that thanks to the in-site work and presence of JS members considering Info Days, Partner Search, LB workshops and other events the JS can be reached easily. An average partnership has never visited Budapest, and this would be well advised to be kept.

It is a general problem that border people have met with the results and achievements of the programme but they are not aware enough of the fact that those were supported by the programme. To maintain and raise awareness European Cooperation Day campaign has to be held in the years to come, too.

Indicators fulfilled

In this chapter both the output indicators and the result indicators will be analysed. In order to conduct this part of the study, the Annual Communication Plans were used, namely Communication Plan for year 2017 and Communication Plan for year 2018 (draft version) since these documents contained information on the progress of the measured indicators. In the case of each indicator the focus is on the trends and also on the realisation of the target value. The process or trend is shown by change of the indicator in percentage, while the realisation of the target value is measured by the achievement of the given year in percentage of the target value. Along with comparing data on a timeline (2016, 2017 and 2023), cross-sectional analysis is carried out when the status of implementation is measured by comparing the same type of indicators (result or output). Furthermore, it is also analysed that compared to the target value how the achieved value should look like assuming that the targeted value is being reached by the same pace every year (e.g. in the middle of the programming period the achievement should be about 50% in relation to the target value). In the case of both types of indicators the total numbers, shares and the overall averages are calculated, too. The main aim is to detect how the Programme performed in reaching the planned values and to detect under average and above average performances.

Output indicators

Regarding the achievements of 2016 *Number of events held in co-operation with other programme bodies* (44% of the target value for 2023) performed significantly better than all the others. Additional above average indicators include *Promotional material disseminated at publicity events* and *Social media updates*. *Number of communication actions with potential media impact* and *Programme website updates* especially had under average achievements compared to their share out of the target value. The former will be significantly increased owing to the implementation of several projects in late 2018. The relatively low number of website updates are owing to the lack of maintenance of the website between 1.1.2017 and 30.9.2018, therefore the site could not be developed by the JS officials.

Regarding the change between 2016 and 2017 in the case of *Number of communication actions with potential media impact* was significant (29 percentage points), while *Social media updates* (23 percentage points), *Promotional material disseminated at publicity events* (18 percentage points) and *Programme website updates* (17 percentage points) also increased by higher rate than the average of all indicators. *Promotional material disseminated at publicity events* and *Social media updates* are the two indicators which had high values already in 2016 and increased by above average rate. However, it has to be kept in mind that taking into account the starting dates of implementation of the First CfP projects (from 1.5.2017, furthermore B Light from February 2017), in 2016 there was only the project called De-mine II to communicate, and it was carried out successfully.

Regarding the achievements reached by 2017 *Social media updates* (59% of the target value) and *Number of events held in co-operation with other programme bodies* (56%) represent significantly higher levels of implementation than other indicators. Indicators also with above average percentages are *Promotional material disseminated at publicity events* (54%) and *Number of communication actions with potential media impact* (53%), while *Number of e-newsletters issued* (42%) and *Programme website updates* (35%), especially the latter, performed way under the others. The latter is due to an 'external' problem in relation to communication activities, i.e. the lack of maintenance of the website and not the bad performance of communication.

Table 11: Comparative table of the performance of the output indicators [Source: Communication Plan for the year 2017 and 2018]

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Achievement (with 2016)	Achievement (with 2016, %)	Achievement (with 2017)	Achievement (with 2017, %)	Change between 2016 and 2017 (%)	Projected achievement (2017)	Projected achievement (2017, %)	Target Value (2023)
Promotional material disseminated at publicity events	pcs	1800	36	2700	54	18	1667	33	5000
Number of events held in co-operation with other programme bodies (technical- and FLC meetings, FLC workshops, special information days etc.)	events	7	44	9	56	13	5	33	16
Number of communication actions with potential media impact (including project level assistance from JS)	actions	35	23	79	53	29	50	33	150
Number of e- newsletters issued	pcs	4	33	5	42	8	4	33	12
Programme website updates	updates	89	18	176	35	17	167	33	500
Social media updates	updates	179	36	293	59	23	167	33	500

Regarding the projected achievement and the factually reached values, it can be stated that the realisation of the Communication Strategy in term of output indicators has been successful, and by 2017, reached higher value than expected.

Result indicators²

Regarding the achievements of 2016 only “Increase in the number of participants at publicity events” (69% of the target value) reached a value above the average of all indicators. The one which almost reached the average level was the “Increase in the number of visits to the website” (54%), and “Increase of the number of articles published” (51%) was also close to the average level. All the other indicators fell well behind the average. “Number of new contacts established via social media” (27%) and “Number of projects with designated Communication Manager” (5%) both reached low numbers since project implementation started only as late as May 2017.

Regarding the change between 2016 and 2017 outstanding increase was experienced in *Number of projects with designated Communication Manager* (by as much as 180 percentage points) smaller in *Increase of the number of articles published* and *Number of new contacts established via social media* (15 percentage points). The indicators *Increase in the number of visits to the website* and *Increase in the number of participants at publicity events* increased by a much lower pace.

Regarding the achievements reached by 2017 *Number of projects with designated Communication Manager* (185% of the target value) has already reached the target value of 2023. *Increase in the number of participants at publicity events* (78%) and *Increase of the number of articles published* (66%) have achieved a high level of implementation as well. *Increase in the number of visits to the website* (58%) stays below the average of all indicators only by a percentage point. *Number of new contacts established via social media* (42%) is the only indicator which stays under average significantly.

² Result indicators are expected to be reached only by the end of the programming period, therefore hereby we could only give an analysis based on the progress of the related indicators, and even if they are below does not mean their realisation is in true danger. Due to lack of collected data indicators called “Positive evaluation of internal communication and Increase in the number of citizens in the Hungarian-Croatian border area familiar with EU funded cross-border co-operation activities in the region” are listed on the table but left out of the analysis below. The lack of such data is justifiable: according to the Communication Strategy these indicators will be measured and published at the end of the programme implementation, thus it cannot be considered as a malfunction.

Table 12: Comparative table of the performance of the result indicators [Source: Communication Plan for the year 2017 and 2018]

Communication objective	Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Achievement (with 2016)	Achievement (with 2016, %)	Achievement (with 2017)	Achievement (with 2017, %)	Change between 2016 and 2017 (%)	Projected achievement (2017)	Target Value (2023)
Ensuring transparency of the whole Programme implementation process	Increase of the number of articles published	pcs	453	2015	488	51	628	66	15	317	950
	Positive evaluation of internal communication	mark 1-5	0	2015	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	3 or above
Generating interest among all relevant target groups by providing adequate information on funding opportunities	Increase in the number of visits to the website	visits	116777	2015	133283	54	143079	58	4	81667	245000
	Increase in the number of participants at publicity events	number of participants	7385	2015	10335	69	11625	78	9	5000	15000
To provide sufficient information and guidance on implementation requirements for Beneficiaries	Number of projects with designated Communication Manager	number	0	2015	1	5	37	185	180	7	20

Communication objective	Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Achievement (with 2016)	Achievement (with 2016, %)	Achievement (with 2017)	Achievement (with 2017, %)	Change between 2016 and 2017 (%)	Projected achievement (2017)	Target Value (2023)
To foster a positive image of the EU and EU funds within the local communities, engaging the citizens for a more active and positive approach to the EU	Increase in the number of citizens in the Hungarian-Croatian border area familiar with EU funded cross-border co-operation activities in the region	percent	43	2015	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	17	50
	Number of new contacts established via social media	contacts (likes / followers / shares / subscribers / views)	0	2015	272	27	420	42	15	333	1000

Regarding intervention logic, the objective “To provide sufficient information and guidance on implementation requirements for Beneficiaries” has already been reached. However, objective called “To foster a positive image of the EU and EU funds within the local communities, engaging the citizens for a more active and positive approach to the EU” seems to perform well.³ Ensuring transparency of the whole “Programme implementation process” and “Generating interest among all relevant target groups by providing adequate information on funding opportunities objectives” have performed well, the previous having higher level of growth.

Regarding the projected achievement and the values reached factually it can be stated that the realisation of the Communication Strategy in terms of result indicators has been successful, and, by 2017, it has reached a higher level of implementation than expected.

Results of the on-line questionnaires

During the evaluation process beneficiaries were asked about the programme level communication activities, by an on-line survey. In the followings, 38 distinctive answers (some respondents did not answer the relevant questions) which have been recorded will be analysed in relation to the quality of communication of the programme (programme-level communication). The answers connected to communication are grouped around the questions raised within the survey.

From where were you informed about the call?

The majority of the applicants obtained information via the internet (58%). Internet is followed by programme events of the cooperation programme (11%). Other relevant platforms included other professional events (8%) and media (8%).

What is your opinion on the tools and ways of the communication of the programme?

The communication is outstandingly well organised, the information is easy to get and the frequency of information provision is appropriate, this is shared by 68% of the applicants. The remaining experienced only smaller problems in the communication, and there was only one response which rated the communication as unsatisfactory. Thus, tools and ways of communication enjoy a general satisfaction with limited space for improvement.

³ However, it has to be noted that the related indicator called as „Increase in the number of citizens in the Hungarian- Croatian border area familiar with EU funded cross-border co-operation activities in the region” cannot be taken into account by the time of this assessment due to the time of evaluation set in the Communication Strategy (it will be measured at the end of the programme implementation).

If you think, that the communication of the programme isn't well organised, please describe why do you think so.

- Problems with the website and server often caused failure in communication;
- Although there has been a progress, all the templates and communication guidelines need to updated, more detailed and prepared;

Do you have any recommendations how the programme implementation could be improved?

Workshops about project implementation should be organized before projects get started;

Ensure the IMIS as a well-functioning system in order to guarantee that communication activities can be carried out more smoothly.

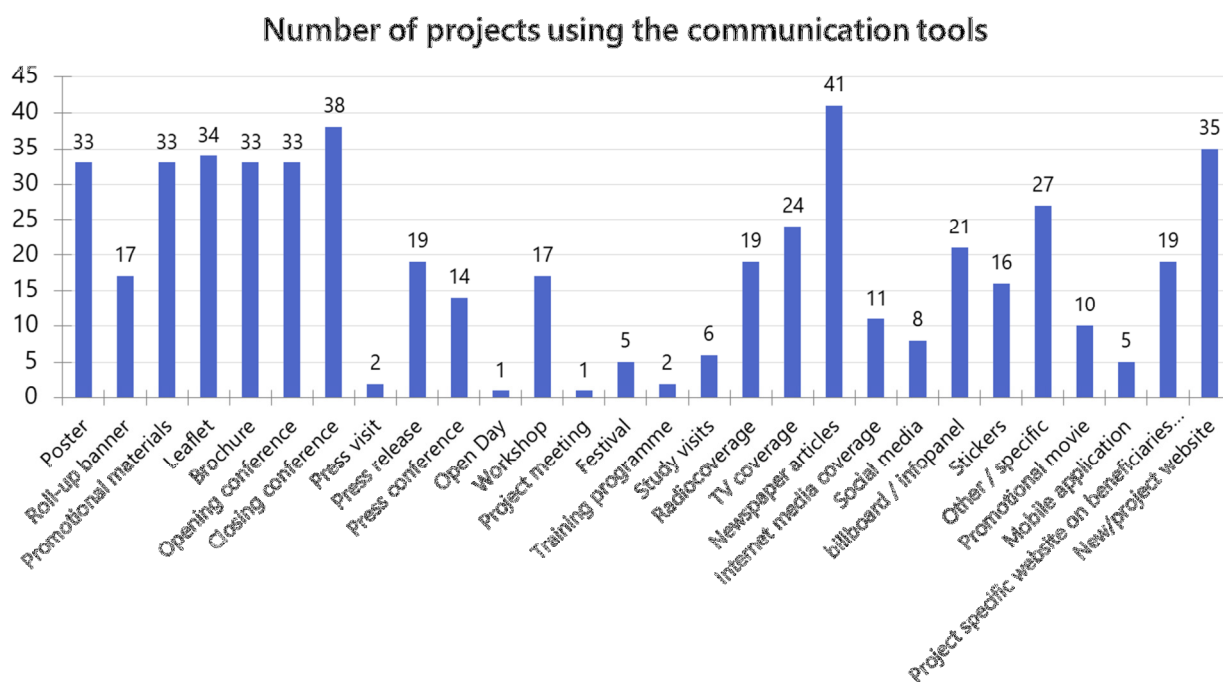
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

Communication tools used – IMIS

In order to assess the communication tools applied, the project database of the IMIS was used accompanied by analysis of the results of the interviews and the on-line questionnaires. Quantitative and qualitative information was gained from the so-called "information and publicity" menu item from every single project as many as 55 (total number of contracted projects). The extracted data were compiled in an Excel table to get detailed and comparable information and a full picture of the tools applied.

Due to lack of data, the total number of communication tools used (e.g. pieces) cannot be provided, what is a general problem of the IMIS database. Therefore, availability of some data is a general problem of the system along with the lack of transparency of data regarding communication tools, efficiency in particular.

Figure 9: Number of projects using the communication tools [Source: IMIS]



Promotional materials⁴ enjoy high popularity; promotional materials (of which t-shirts and USB sticks are the most common, 33 projects), leaflets (34 projects) and brochures (33 projects) share similar usage levels. Promotional movie (10 projects in total) and mobile applications (5 projects) are much less widespread.

In relation to events⁵ the most frequently used tools are, understandably, the opening and closing conferences (reported in the case of 33 and 38 projects). Other significant tools include press release issued at project events (19 projects, 41 in total), press conference (14 projects, 28 in total) and workshops (17 projects, 59 in total). Study visit, training programme, project meeting, press visit are much less popular.

With regard to mass media⁶ newspaper articles are outstandingly important (41 projects use it, and a total number of 140 articles are expected to be issued). Newspaper is followed by TV coverage (24 projects) and radio coverage (19 projects). Internet and social media have a limited role (11 and 8 projects). Facebook is by far the most used social media platform, while LinkedIn and YouTube were mentioned only once.

Considering the two web tools in the programme it is more frequent to create new project websites (35 projects) than simply or only add a project specific site to the

⁴ Promotional materials include as follows: Promotional materials (t-shirts, caps etc.), Leaflet, Brochure, Promotional movie and Mobile application.

⁵ Events include as follows: Opening conference, Closing conference, Press visit, Press release, Press conference, Workshop, Project meeting, Festival, Training programme, Study visits.

⁶ Mass media includes as follows: Radio coverage, TV coverage, Newspaper articles, Internet media coverage, Social media.

beneficiaries' homepages (19 projects). Taking into account all the other tools it can be said that posters are very widespread (33 projects, 193 in total) along with billboards (21 projects). Roll-up banners and stickers are also quite general tools (17 and 16 projects). Other tools, such as CDs, DVDs, information days, advertising are all very limited in use.

Results of the on-line questionnaires

In the followings, the 30 distinctive answers recorded will be analysed in relation to the quality of communication of their projects (project-level communication). The answers are listed according to the relevant questions of the survey.

Please evaluate the effectiveness of your communication activities! (How effective was your communication during the project? Did you manage to reach your target groups? What was the reason if not? Were your target groups representing both sides of the border?)

There were some difficulties in answering these questions since the majority of the beneficiaries have just been selected for funding or launched their projects, thus modest communication activities have been carried out at the time of the survey. Due to limited time frame of the implementation phase and thus limited experience many beneficiaries have not reported any further details.

The vast majority of the respondents were very satisfied with the effectiveness of their communication activities; they reached all target groups they planned from both sides of the border. All planned indicators have generally been reached in time. Communication measures are well-tailored and could reach out the different target groups of the distinct events. Social media, especially Facebook, can be mentioned as a very effective tool in reaching (young) audiences. According to some respondents, the main communication burden is language itself. Only two respondents mentioned slight problems in meeting the indicators.

Please describe what kind of difficulties you met during the project implementation!

The most notable difficulties can be summarised as follows:

- Language barriers to communication with partners especially from Hungary
- IMIS has not been user friendly, making reporting difficult
- Difficult communication with businesses

5.2 Impact

5.2.1 Analysis of the relevance

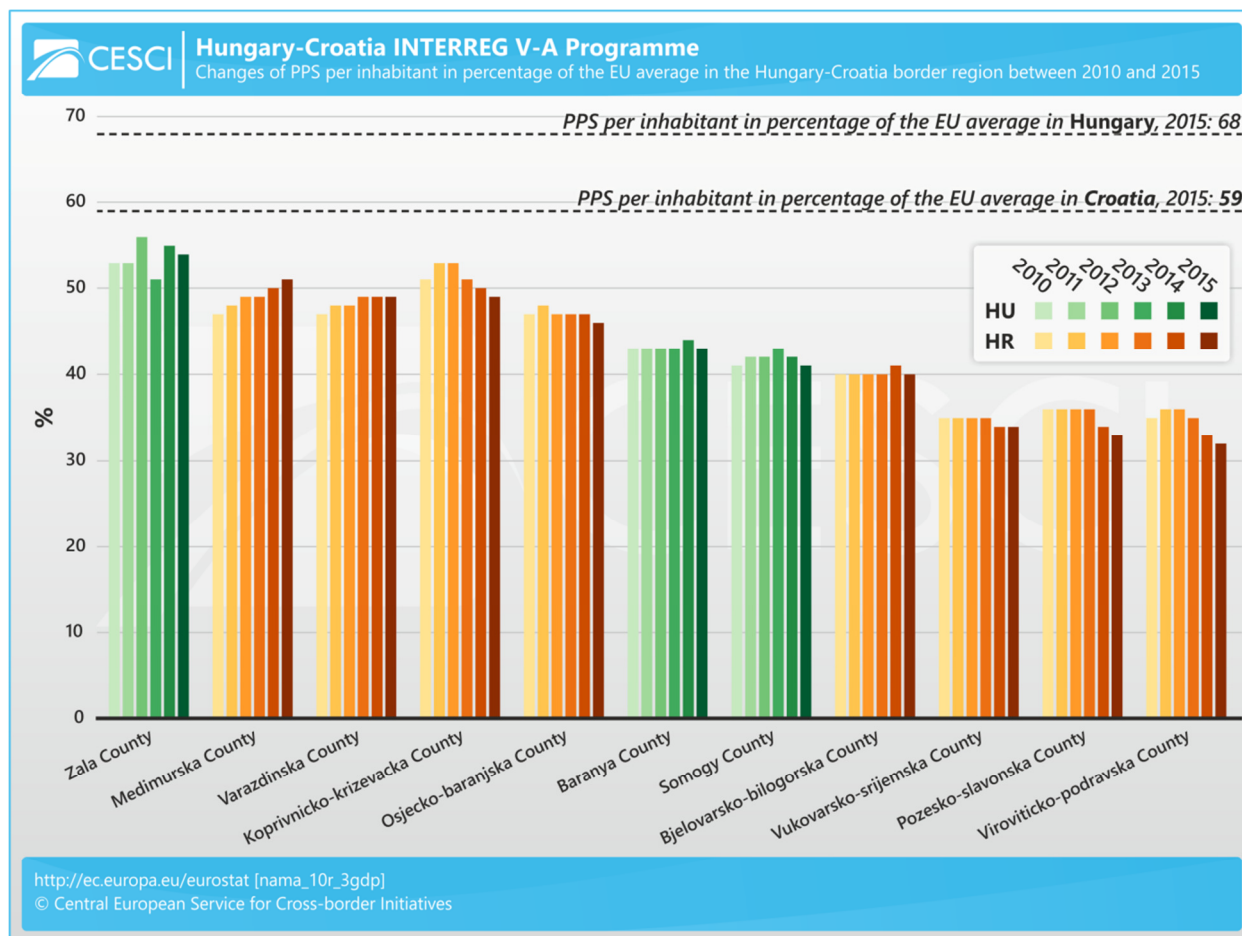
M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs

In this subchapter the analysis aims at unfolding whether the objectives drawn from the original regional analysis of the programme are still relevant or the socio-economic changes would justify some modifications which can have an effect on the intervention logic of the programme, as well. The main components of the regional analysis are arranged according to the priority axes. In all cases, the original justifications for the choice of investment priorities are compared to the current situation of the border area. For this purpose, the evaluators compiled data, especially using the information sources of national statistical offices.

Priority Axis 1: Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs

Regarding Priority Axis 1, the status and the trends in border economy has to be shown. First, the evolution of GDP will be analysed within the border region. In order to do that the changes of PPS per inhabitant of the EU average between 2010 and 2015 is shown on the figure below.

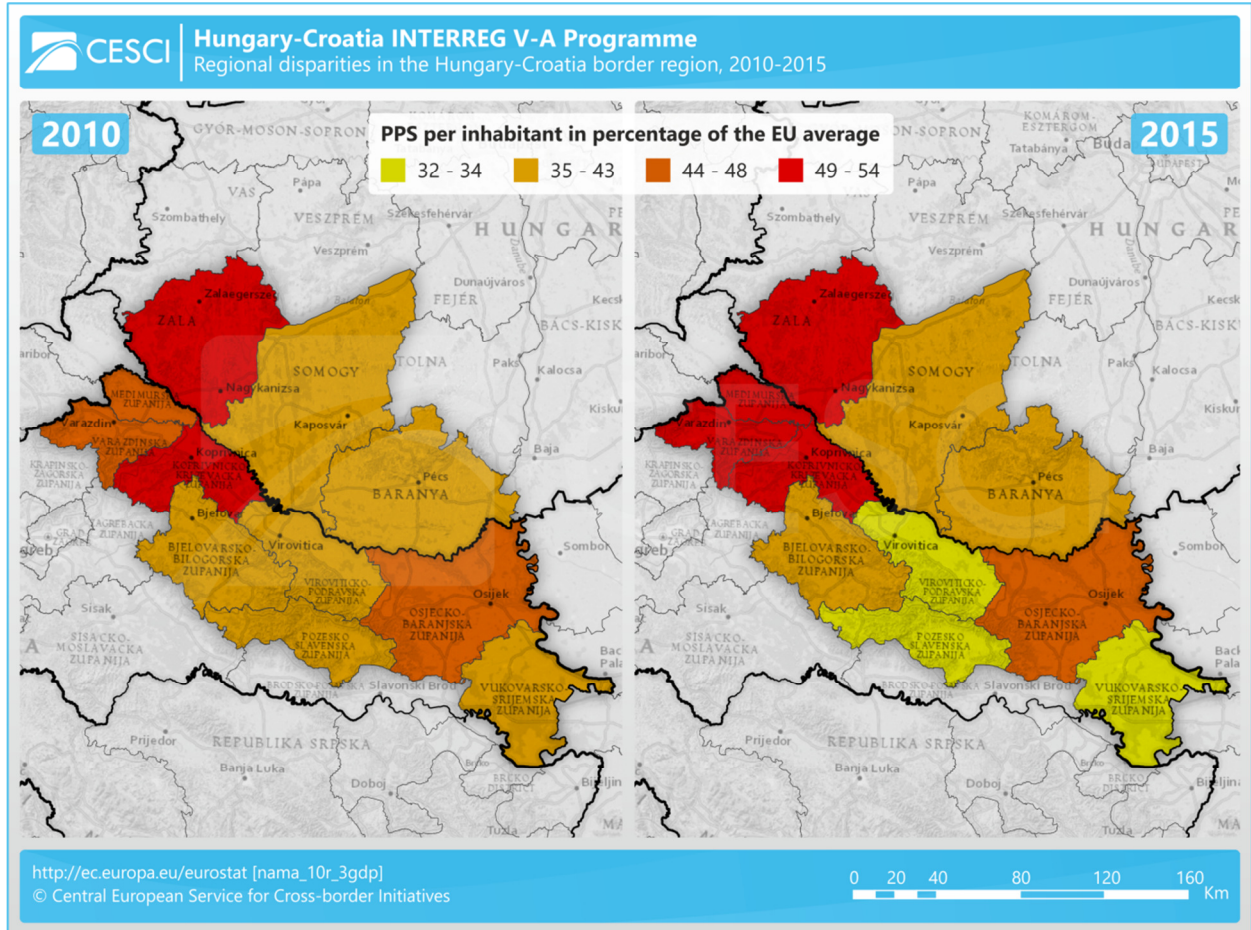
Figure 10: Changes of PPS per inhabitant



The counties of the programme area performed economically rather mediocre or weak. Međimurska County from Croatia was the single NUTS3 region where significant unbroken increase took place year by year. The other well-performing counties were Varaždinska from Croatia and Zala from Hungary, with some fluctuation regarding the latter though. Most counties were characterised by stagnation or decrease in relation to the EU average. The catching-up of the border region did not happen; the whole region is still lagging behind their respective countries' averages, not to mention the EU average. Only three counties have reached at least the half of the EU average in recent years, namely Zala, Međimurska and Koprivničko-križevačka counties. The statement can be

found in the justification of the selected investment priority 3c, that the economy has slow growth rates has remained valid.

Figure 11: Regional disparities in the Hungary-Croatia border region



According to the related map, regional disparities have been very much present in the border region. The north-western part consisted of Zala, Međimurska, Varaždinska and Koprivničko-križevačka counties are the most developed ones, the exception is being Osječko-baranjska County with relatively high rate on the southeast. In the examined period, territorial inequalities have continuously been increasing; three counties from Croatia experienced dropping out to a lower category while two entered a higher category. As a result regional differences in GDP have increased.

Table 13: Share of value added by main groups of economy (%)⁷

COUNTRY, COUNTY		A	B,C,D,E	C	F	G-U	G,H,I	J	K	L	M,N	O,P,Q	R,S,T,U	A-U
Varaždin	2010	3,8	40,3	35,4	4,8	51,1	14,8	2,4	4,0	8,2	4,3	15,3	2,1	100
	2015	6,3	34,1	29,7	5,6	54,0	14,6	2,9	4,2	8,2	4,9	16,9	2,2	100
	change	2,5	-6,2	-5,7	0,8	2,9	-0,2	0,5	0,2	0,0	0,6	1,6	0,1	
Koprivnica-Križevci	2010	14,0	35,4	25,5	4,8	45,8	14,2	0,7	4,6	8,4	4,0	12,0	1,9	100
	2015	15,3	39,3	22,9	4,0	41,3	11,6	0,9	4,5	7,7	3,6	11,1	1,8	100
	change	1,3	3,9	-2,6	-0,8	-4,5	-2,6	0,2	-0,1	-0,7	-0,4	-0,9	-0,1	
Međimurje	2010	8,3	42,6	38,6	4,2	44,8	13,7	2,0	3,0	9,5	4,7	10,6	1,3	100
	2015	10,2	36,5	32,6	5,4	47,9	14,1	2,6	4,1	9,6	5,1	11,3	1,3	100
	change	1,9	-6,1	-6,0	1,2	3,1	0,4	0,6	1,1	0,1	0,4	0,7	0,0	
Bjelovar-Bilogora	2010	21,0	22,1	18,2	4,6	52,3	11,8	1,5	5,4	10,9	4,0	17,0	1,8	100
	2015	20,2	22,2	18,7	4,8	52,8	11,6	1,9	5,8	10,5	4,1	17,1	1,9	100
	change	-0,8	0,1	0,5	0,2	0,5	-0,2	0,4	0,4	-0,4	0,1	0,1	0,1	
Virovitica-Podravina	2010	17,5	22,0	17,0	6,7	53,8	12,5	1,1	4,1	12,7	3,1	18,3	1,9	100
	2015	21,9	20,7	17,0	7,4	50,0	11,4	1,3	4,3	11,2	2,8	17,4	1,7	100
	change	4,4	-1,3	0,0	0,7	-3,8	-1,1	0,2	0,2	-1,5	-0,3	-0,9	-0,2	
Požega-Slavonia	2010	12,6	23,8	18,1	5,5	58,1	14,2	2,5	2,1	14,1	2,4	21,0	2,0	100
	2015	15,4	21,1	17,1	5,4	58,2	13,1	5,8	1,9	12,5	2,2	20,7	2,0	100
	change	2,8	-2,7	-1,0	-0,1	0,1	-1,1	3,3	-0,2	-1,6	-0,2	-0,3	0,0	
Osijek-Baranja	2010	12,5	21,9	16,6	6,4	59,2	15,8	3,4	3,5	9,9	5,8	18,2	2,7	100
	2015	13,5	17,8	13,5	8,0	60,7	16,5	4,0	3,9	9,5	5,4	18,9	2,5	100
	change	1,0	-4,1	-3,1	1,6	1,5	0,7	0,6	0,4	-0,4	-0,4	0,7	-0,2	
Vukovar-Sirmium	2010	15,5	17,4	12,8	8,1	58,9	15,3	1,4	1,9	13,5	3,0	21,7	2,2	100
	2015	17,0	14,5	10,6	9,9	58,6	14,4	1,7	2,1	12,6	3,4	21,8	2,6	100
	change	1,5	-2,9	-2,2	1,8	-0,3	-0,9	0,3	0,2	-0,9	0,4	0,1	0,4	
Croatia	2010	4,2	21,1	14,9	5,3	69,4	22,1	4,4	6,4	10,2	8,3	15,0	3,1	100
	2015	4,8	20,2	14,1	6,7	68,2	20,2	4,9	6,7	9,6	8,3	15,6	2,9	100
	change	0,6	-0,9	-0,8	1,4	-1,2	-1,9	0,5	0,3	-0,6	0,0	0,6	-0,2	

⁷ The codes are representing the statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community (NACE Rev. 2). Codes: A: Agriculture, forestry and fishing; B: Mining and quarrying; C: Manufacturing; D: Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; E: Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; F: Construction; G: Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; H: Transportation and storage; I: Accommodation and food service activities; J: Information and communication; K: Financial and insurance activities; L: Real estate activities; M: Professional, scientific and technical activities; N: Administrative and support service activities; O: Public administration and defence; compulsory social security; P: Education; Q: Human health and social work activities; R: Arts, entertainment and recreation; S: Other service activities; T: Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use; U: Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies. Aggregated groups: B-E: Manufacturing, mining and quarrying and other industry; G-U: Tertiary sector; G-I: Wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities; M-N: Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities; O-Q: Public administration, defence, education, human health and social work activities; R-U: Other services; A-U: All economy groups.

COUNTRY, COUNTY		A	B,C,D,E	C	F	G-U	G,H,I	J	K	L	M,N	O,P,Q	R,S,T,U	A-U
Baranya	2010	8,0	20,2	15,0	4,6	67,2	15,1	3,0	3,3	10,4	7,8	24,1	3,5	100
	2015	9,9	19,4	14,3	4,7	66,0	14,3	3,1	2,1	9,0	8,3	25,8	3,4	100
	change	1,9	-0,8	-0,7	0,1	-1,2	-0,8	0,1	-1,2	-1,4	0,5	1,7	-0,1	
Somogy	2010	9,1	16,3	12,5	5,9	68,6	22,6	1,4	2,5	10,8	5,1	22,3	3,8	100
	2015	11,3	19,4	16,7	4,6	64,7	22,3	1,3	1,3	8,7	5,3	22,7	3,0	100
	change	2,2	3,1	4,2	-1,3	-3,9	-0,3	-0,1	-1,2	-2,1	0,2	0,4	-0,8	
Zala	2010	5,5	33,8	30,1	5,0	55,6	18,5	1,5	2,2	8,9	5,7	15,8	3,1	100
	2015	5,9	33,9	30,5	5,1	55,1	19,9	1,4	1,5	7,2	5,6	16,5	2,9	100
	change	0,4	0,1	0,4	0,1	-0,5	1,4	-0,1	-0,7	-1,7	-0,1	0,7	-0,2	
Hungary	2010	3,5	25,7	21,5	4,2	66,6	17,6	5,4	4,9	9,1	8,9	17,7	3,0	100
	2015	4,4	27,6	24,4	4,1	63,9	18,4	4,9	3,6	8,0	8,9	17,2	2,9	100
	change	0,9	1,9	2,9	-0,1	-2,7	0,8	-0,5	-1,3	-1,1	0,0	-0,5	-0,1	

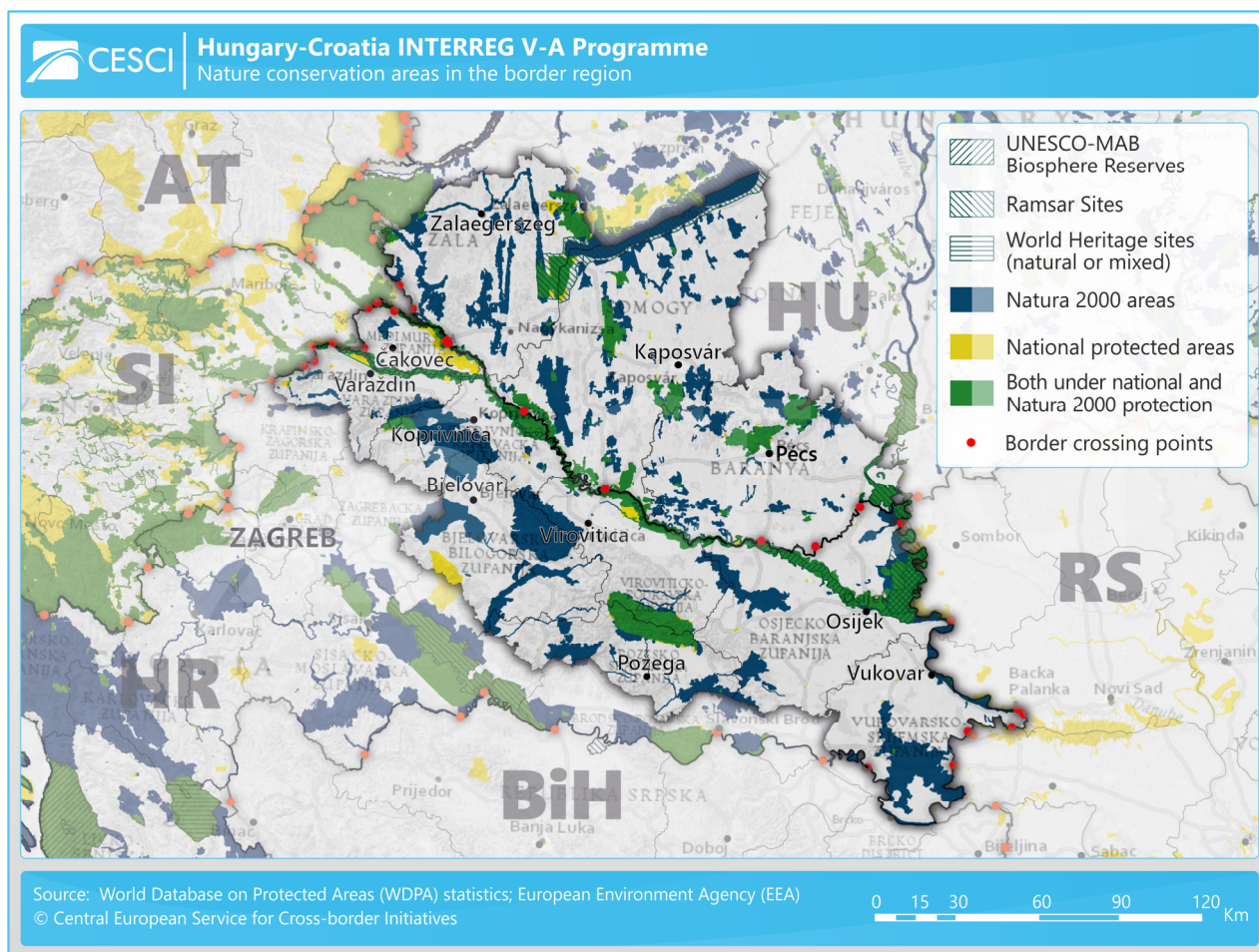
As it can be seen, the share of value added by economic sectors decreased in general. Notwithstanding Bjelovar-Bilogora County the share of agriculture, forestry and fishing increased in the case of all counties and the two countries, too. Economic sectors representing industries and services decreased, there seems to be a general loss of added value across the non-agricultural activities throughout the border region with some exception only.

Therefore, it can be stated that the poor gross value added figures of secondary and tertiary sectors of the border area mentioned in the justification for selection of the selected investment priority is still valid.

Priority Axis 2: Sustainable Use of Natural and Cultural Assets

The border area is characterised by high density of *natural assets* and *nature protection areas* (laying the basis for the UNESCO Biosphere reserve Mura-Drava-Danube). Consequently, the environmentally sound exploitation of these endowments can logically be one of the main priority areas of the cross-border programme. Therefore, nature provides the local stakeholders with the opportunity of joint protection, management and tourist-purposed utilisation of natural resources.

Figure 12: Nature conservation areas of the programme region



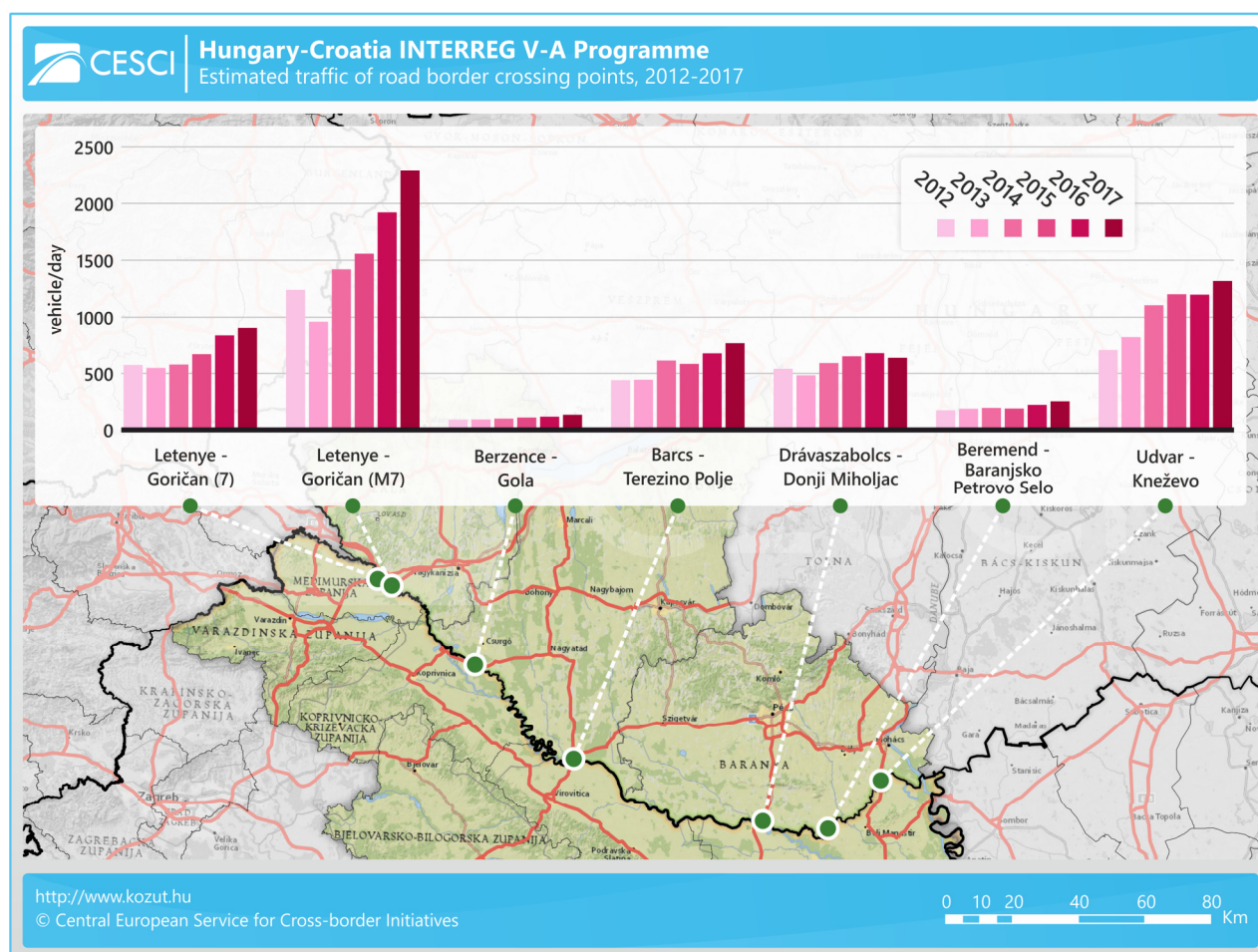
At the same time, the weak permeability of the border makes these nature value and tourist sites hardly accessible what results in rather one-sided and separate exploitation instead of cross-border integrated developments. The traffic volume has increased significantly with regard to all border crossing points. The average increase was 67%, which was even surpassed by the Letenye-Goričan and the Barcs-Terezino Polje crossing points. However, new crossings have not been introduced to traffic ever since creating larger congestions and waiting times at some periods of the year at the border control checks. Thus, it has to be confirmed that the Hungarian-Croatian border is an exceptionally non-permeable one and as a consequence accessibility of tourist sites is weak hindering the development of tourism networks and tourism products, as it is stated in the justification of priority 6c in the programme document.

Table 14: Border crossing data

BORDER CROSSING POINTS	2012	2017	change
Letenye - Goričan (7)	209 875	331 055	+ 58%
Letenye - Goričan (M7)	452 600	834 755	+ 84%

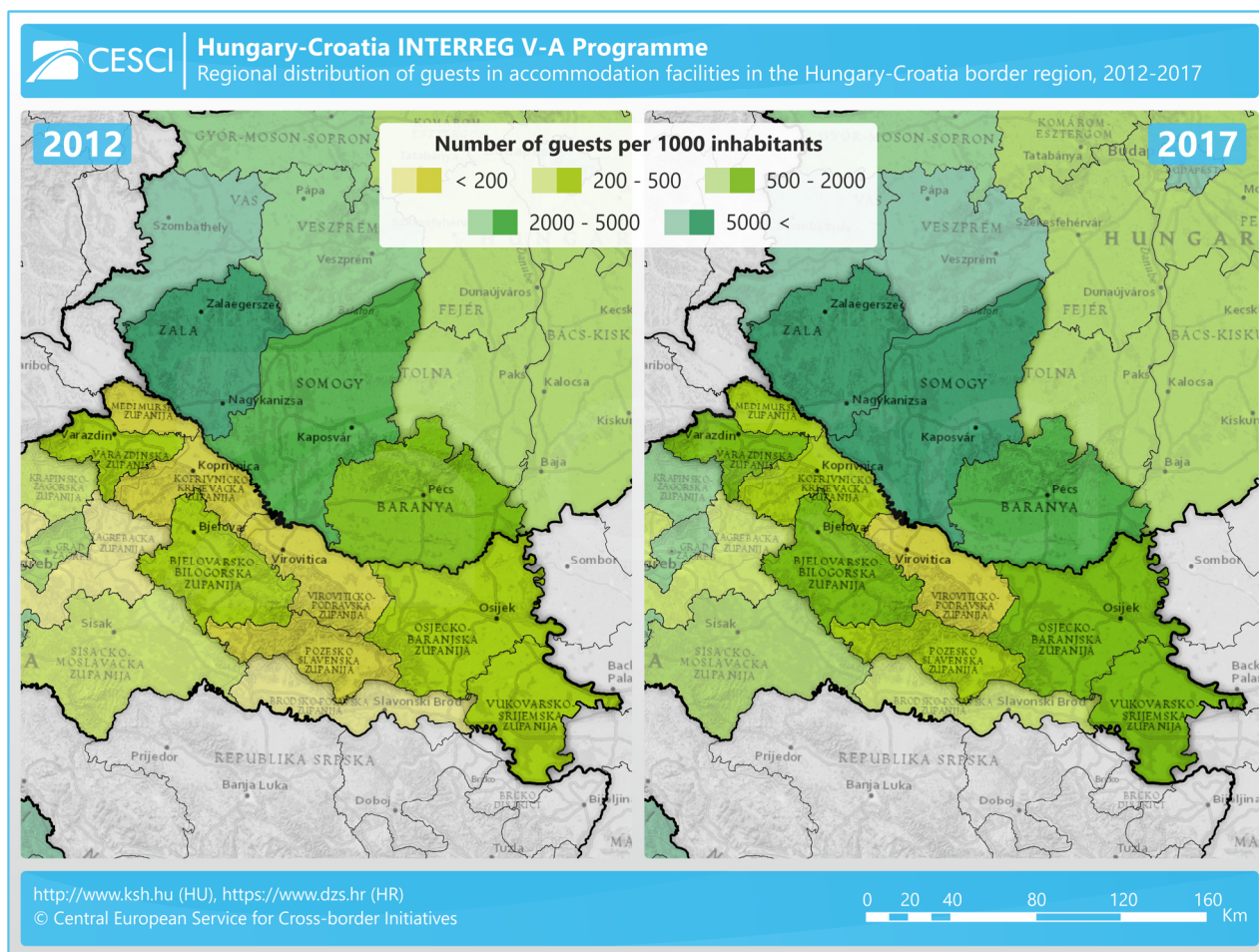
BORDER CROSSING POINTS	2012	2017	change
Berzence - Gola	32 120	47 815	+ 49%
Barcs - Terezino Polje	160 965	279 225	+ 73%
Drávaszabolcs - Donji Miholjac	197 465	232 870	+ 18%
Beremend - Baranjsko Petrovo Selo	62 050	93 805	+ 51%
Udvar - Duboševica	257 325	481 070	+ 87%
Total	1 372 400	2 300 595	+ 67%

Figure 13: Increase in border traffic between 2012 and 2017



Tourism nights, being important indicators for tourism development, increased significantly in the border region. Even though the change in the case of the most counties stayed below national averages and in two Croatian counties even a slight decrease was experienced, tourism was developing steadily, sometimes with an outstanding pace taking into account the rate of change in Bjelovar-Bilogora, Vukovar-Sirmium, Međimurje and Somogy counties.

Figure 14: Changes in overnights within the border region between 2012 and 2017



Therefore, the justification for selection of investment priority 6c seems to remain valid when it states that heritage could be the source of economic stability and prosperity, and to this end, infrastructure for nature and cultural heritage tourism needs to be improved. The justification of the priority is supported by long-lasting high potentials in further tourism developments in relation to tourism traffic.

Table 15: Tourism nights by counties

COUNTRY, COUNTY	TOURISM NIGHTS				
	NUMBER		PER 1000 INHABITANTS		
	2011	2017	2011	2017	CHANGE
Croatia	60 354 275	71 437 476	14 027	17 196	+ 23%
Zala County	2 449 670	3 227 463	8 534	11 831	+ 39%
Somogy County	2 030 765	3 019 839	6 387	9 884	+ 55%
Hungary	23 879 657	38 027 311	2 391	3 881	+ 62%
Baranya County	825 607	1 008 823	2 109	2 758	+ 28%
Međimurje County	78 856	127 190	693	1 139	+ 64%
Varaždin County	118 597	129 882	673	765	+ 14%
Vukovar-Sirmium County	62 394	94 519	346	579	+ 67%

COUNTRY, COUNTY	TOURISM NIGHTS				
	NUMBER		PER 1000 INHABITANTS		
	2011	2017	2011	2017	CHANGE
Bjelovar-Bilogora County	30 468	62 864	254	567	+ 124%
Osijek-Baranja County	173 892	158 226	569	551	- 3%
Virovitica-Podravina County	32 917	28 909	387	369	- 5%
Požega-Slavonia County	23 627	24 356	302	343	+ 14%
Koprivnica-Križevci County	25 351	28 017	219	254	+ 16%

Based on the table below environment protection measures in the field of waste were successful in the majority of the given border counties; the amount of generated municipal waste decreased along with the increase of submitted waste to landfill, incineration or, as a best solution, to recovery operations. Such developments seemed to have their positive effects on the nature and environment, thus the justification of investment priority 6d about the great interest in the region to further restore and protect natural heritage is still valid, however further significant development cannot be guaranteed in some fields of actions.

Table 16: Waste management by counties

COUNTRY, COUNTY	TOTAL AMOUNT OF GENERATED MUNICIPAL WASTE			SUBMITTED TO LANDFILL			SUBMITTED TO INCINERATION			SUBMITTED TO RECOVERY OPERATIONS			OTHER		
	2011	2015	CHANGE	2011	2015	CHANGE	2011	2015	CHANGE	2011	2015	CHANGE	2011	2015	CHANGE
	%														
Hungary	3 263 924	2 856 423	- 12,5%	90,9%	79,7%	- 11,2%	-	-	-	8,3%	18,0%	+ 9,7%	0,8%	2,2%	+ 1,5%
Croatia	1 645 295	1 653 918	+ 0,5%	69,3%	65,8%	- 3,5%	-	1,0%	+ 1,0%	22,2%	32,9%	+ 10,7%	8,5%	0,3%	- 8,2%
Somogy	112 680	108 549	- 3,7%	97,8%	93,5%	- 4,2%	-	-	-	2,2%	6,4%	+ 4,2%	-	-	-
Baranya	145 554	104 469	- 28,2%	81,2%	46,2%	- 35,0%	-	-	-	14,1%	17,5%	+ 3,5%	4,7%	36,2%	+ 31,5%
Zala	95 468	79 546	-16,7%	91,8%	82,3%	- 9,5%	-	-	-	4,5%	17,5%	+ 13,1%	3,7%	0,1%	- 3,6%
Osijek-Baranja	83 947	66 841	- 20,4%	98,0%	94,7%	- 3,3%	-	-	-	2,0%	5,2%	+ 3,2%	-	0,1%	+ 0,1%
Vukovar-Sirmium	43 142	44 744	+ 3,7%	96,4%	93,1%	- 3,3%	-	-	-	3,6%	6,9%	+ 3,3%	-	-	-
Varaždin	35 041	28 610	- 18,4%	96,4%	91,4%	- 5,0%	-	-	-	3,6%	8,6%	+ 5,0%	-	-	-
Bjelovar-Bilogora	31 871	25 601	- 19,7%	92,1%	85,5%	- 6,6%	-	-	-	7,9%	13,8%	+ 5,9%	-	0,6%	+ 0,6%
Međimurje	18 258	22 646	+ 24,0%	79,0%	64,3%	- 14,8%	12,1%	15,2%	+ 3,1%	8,9%	20,5%	+ 11,6%	-	-	-
Koprivnica-Križevci	20 406	21 525	+ 5,5%	88,1%	64,7%	- 23,4%	-	22,5%	+ 22,5%	11,9%	12,9%	+ 0,9%	-	-	-
Virovitica-Podravina	29 668	20 969	- 29,3%	85,2%	75,3%	- 9,9%	0,2%	2,5%	+ 2,3%	14,7%	22,2%	+ 7,5%	-	-	-
Požega-Slavonia	14 040	13 355	- 4,9%	79,4%	78,6%	-0,9%	1,4%	0,3%	- 1,2%	19,1%	21,2%	+ 2,0%	-	-	-

Priority Axis 3: Cooperation

Based on the table below life expectancy has increased throughout the region, more on the Croatian side. Furthermore, the expected years increased higher than national averages in the case of many counties.

Table 17: Life expectancy

COUNTRY, COUNTY	MEN			WOMEN		
	2008/2009	2016/2017	CHANGE	2008/2009	2016/2017	CHANGE
Croatia	72,6	74,9	+ 3,2%	79,4	81,3	+ 2,4%
Međimurje	72,1	74,8	+ 3,7%	79,8	81,5	+ 2,1%
Požega-Slavonia	71,2	73,3	+ 3,0%	78,9	79,4	+ 0,6%
Osijek-Baranja	71,7	73,3	+ 2,3%	78,2	80,0	+ 2,2%
Bjelovar-Bilogora	70,6	73,1	+ 3,6%	77,5	79,7	+ 2,8%
Zala	71,2	73,0	+ 2,5%	78,8	80,0	+ 1,6%
Vukovar-Sirmium	72,0	72,9	+ 1,2%	78,9	79,2	+ 0,4%
Baranya	71,3	72,8	+ 2,2%	78,0	78,6	+ 0,7%
Varaždin	70,9	72,6	+ 2,5%	79,0	80,9	+ 2,4%
Hungary	70,9	72,4	+ 2,1%	78,2	79,0	+ 1,0%
Koprivnica-Križevci	69,8	72,2	+ 3,4%	78,2	78,5	+ 0,4%
Virovitica-Podravina	69,3	71,9	+ 3,8%	77,7	78,9	+ 1,6%
Somogy	70,3	71,7	+ 2,0%	78,0	78,7	+ 0,9%

The number of doctors in the border region also experienced an increase. The Hungarian region performed worse, and Somogy was the only county which witnessed a decrease in the rate. It has to be mentioned that the seemingly positive change can be derived from population loss. But to sum up, priority investment 11b still has potentials in mutual improvement of health and social services in the border region, as the latter was stated in the justification.

Table 18: Number of doctors per 10 000 inhabitants

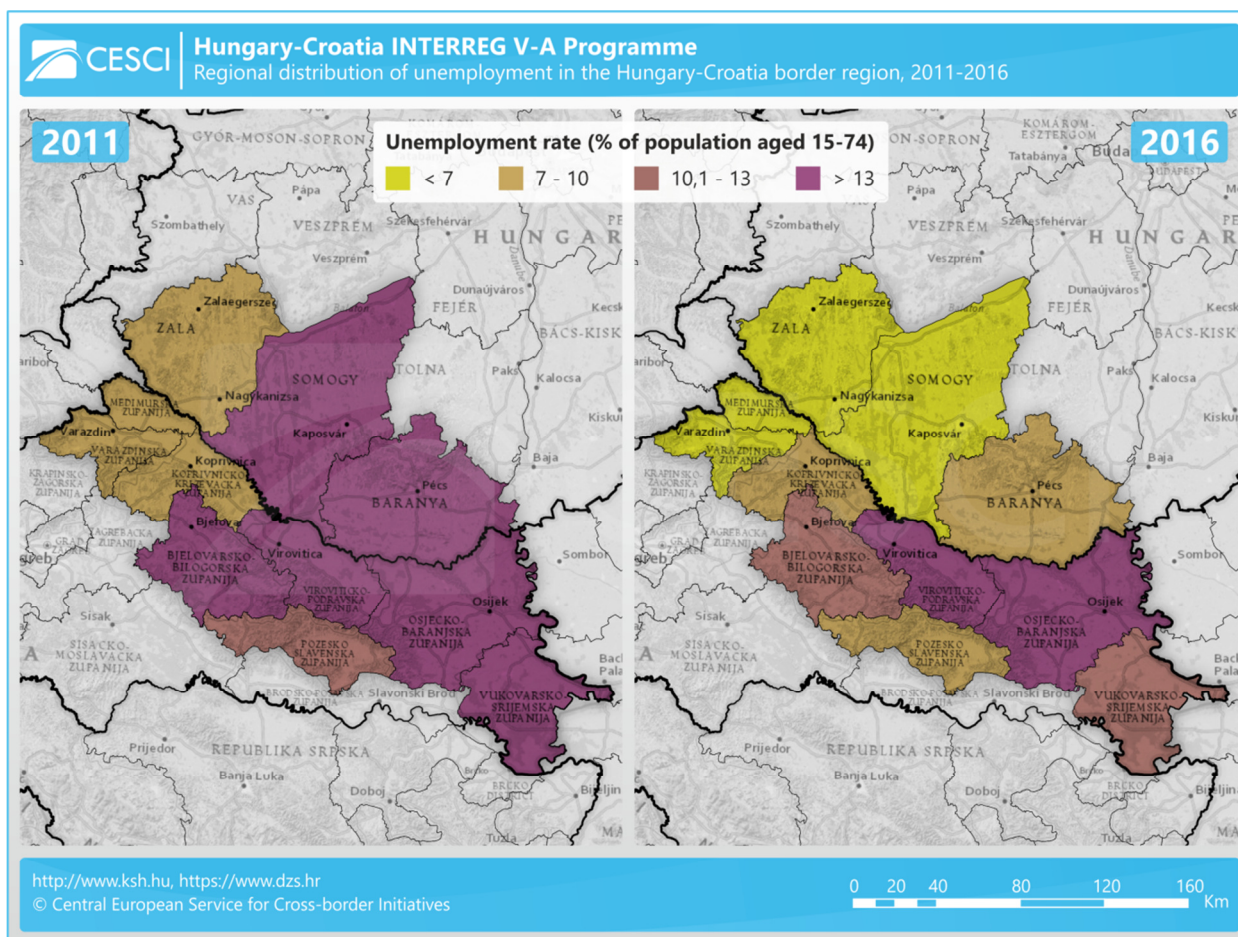
COUNTRY, COUNTY	2011	2015	CHANGE
Baranya County	46,2	49,3	+ 6,7%
Croatia	36,6	43,1	+ 17,5%
Osijek-Baranja County	31,9	39,3	+ 23,4%
Hungary	34,6	36,0	+ 4,3%
Požega-Slavonia County	31,8	35,6	+ 11,8%
Varaždin County	29,5	35,3	+ 19,7%
Zala County	32,0	33,5	+ 4,6%
Međimurje County	25,0	31,6	+ 26,5%
Vukovar-Sirmium County	25,0	30,9	+ 24%

COUNTRY, COUNTY	2011	2015	CHANGE
Bjelovar-Bilogora County	25,4	29,6	+ 16,7%
Koprivnica-Križevci County	24,5	29,3	+ 19,4%
Virovitica-Podravina County	22,8	27,4	+ 20,3%
Somogy County	27,3	27,0	- 0,9%

Priority Axis 4: Education

Unemployment, as a sign of low level of education in society, decreased significantly especially on the north-western part of border region.

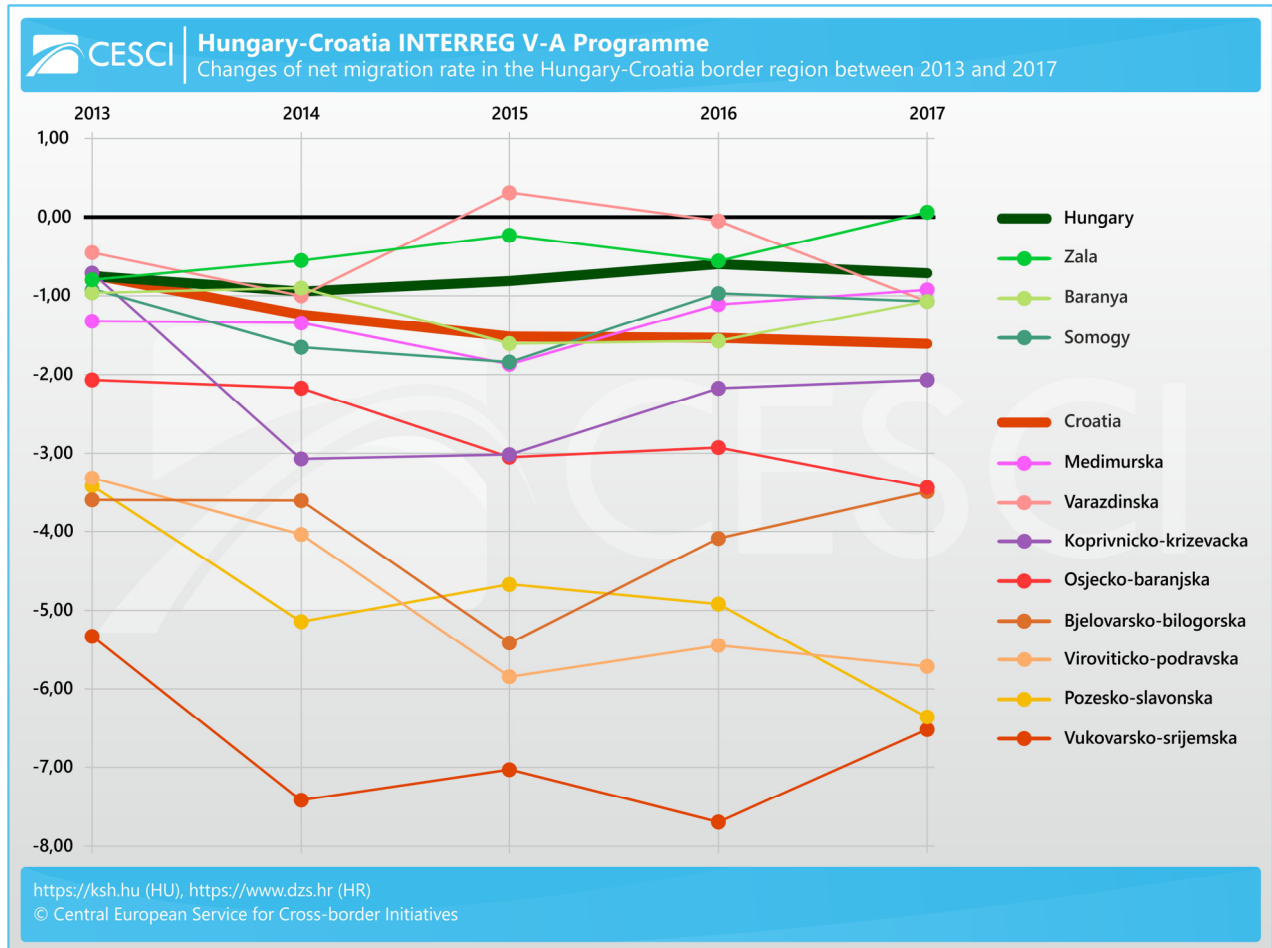
Figure 15: Regional distribution of unemployment in the Hungary-Croatia border region



However, decrease in the number of unemployed people also shows the outmigration of skilled labour force from the border regions to capital regions and to more developed European regions. Nevertheless, the majority of south-eastern counties, especially Virovitica-Podravina County and Osječko-baranjska County are characterised by still high level of unemployment. In order to increase the level of education and decrease

unemployment, as well as to strengthen working age population, retention force investment priority 10b can be justified present day, too.

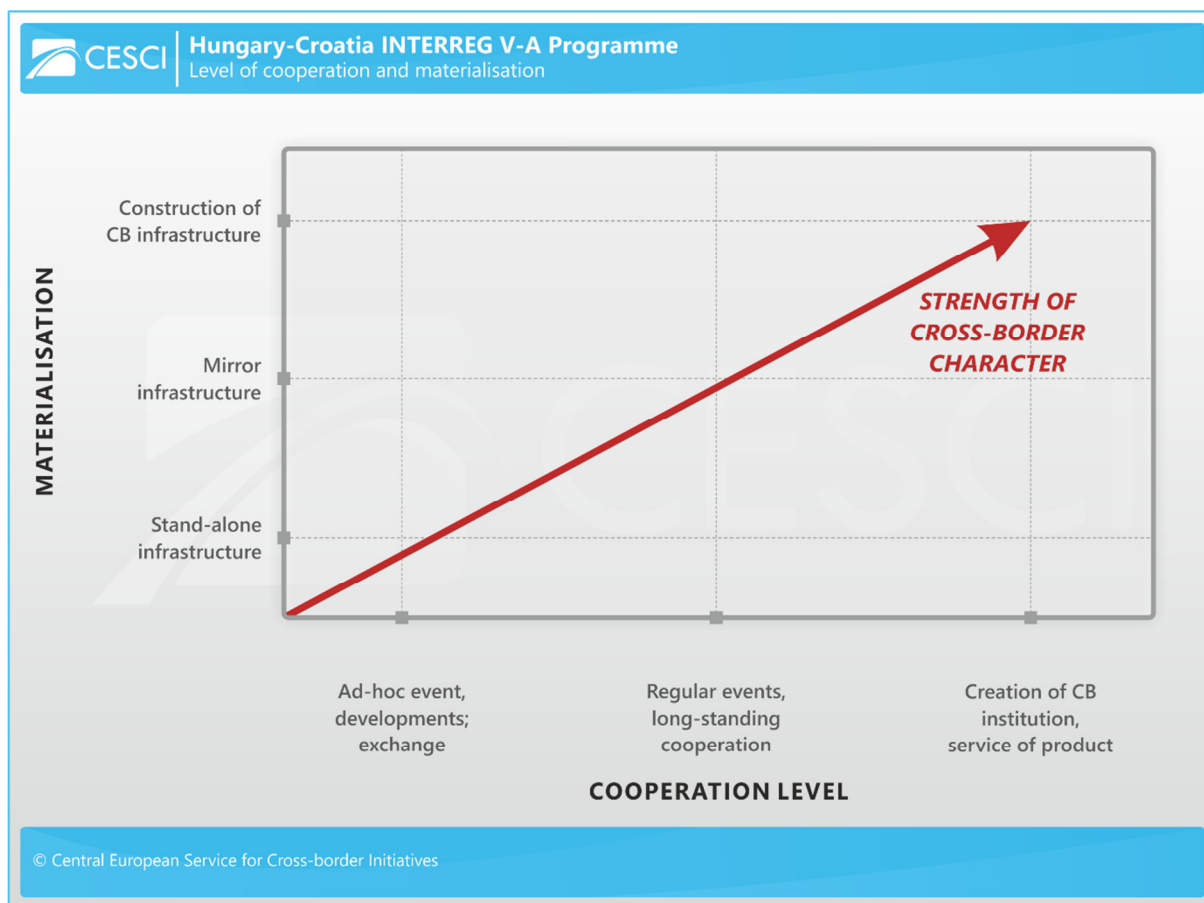
Figure 16: Impacts of outmigration on the demography of the border area



M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance

The second aspect of relevance targets the cross-border character of the programme. This character can be justified by the impacts having on cross-border territorial, economic and social cohesion and the intensity of cross-border cooperation. Obviously, these two factors can hardly be assessed: notwithstanding the definition problems of cohesion itself, it is not self-evident by which criteria can a programme be justified as more cross-border than the other. However, cross-border projects can be classified by a 3x3 cell matrix along by two vectors: the *level of cooperation* and *materialisation*.

Figure 17: Level of cooperation and materialisation



The different levels of cooperation can be characterised by the maturity of the relationship: is there any real cross-border component in the project; whether we are speaking about ad-hoc events (e.g. exchange of experiences); the creation of the conditions for regular and long-standing cooperation (set-up of permanent partnership, development of action plans, drafting educational curricula, establishment of long-standing cooperation between institutions); or the partners intend to create integrated cross-border services, products or joint institutions? Every partnership cannot be at the highest level of maturity; furthermore, even the highly developed cross-border institutions started with the first steps of exchanges. At the same time, the long-term objective of the cross-border programmes should be to support the development of partnerships being able to create cross-border institutions and services.

Along the vertical axis, the projects can be characterised by their materialisation (see tangible results and sustainability). At the „zero level”, we can find genuinely soft projects without constructing permanent infrastructure. Then, there are projects which contain infrastructure development but without direct cross-border impact. At third level, there are mirror-typed projects when the partners implement activities or carry out construction works in parallel - accompanied with some simple cross-border content and

only the long-term impacts can justify the support. The most advanced, real, integrated cross-border projects are those ones, where the implementation of the project-part on one side is impossible or ineffective without the realisation of the project-part on the other side.

The projects which contain the construction of joint cross-border infrastructure and create the relevant services or even the institutions as well, can be considered as the „most cross-border“ ones. The cross-border character of the programme can be justified by the high number of this type of projects.

In the current analysis, the evaluators analysed the information gained from the interviews, the questionnaires and (unlike the preliminary plans drafted in the IR) also the selected projects, in a qualitative way.

Results of the interviews

The improvement of the level of cooperation in the Hungary-Croatia border region is hindered mainly by the low density of border crossing points and the language barriers: this is the conclusion of the interviews. It is a shared opinion that there is a real need to increase the number of cross-border road infrastructure, but the financial frames of the programme do not make it possible to include such large projects. The fact that Croatia is out of the Schengen zone was mentioned as an additional problem, since it is not enough to construct a road across the border, also the infrastructure of border guarding shall be built. It is the reason why the relevant Croatian ministry does not support the idea of new crossing points. Hence, regardless of that the cooperation programme encourages the implementation of investments and activities closer to the border line, considering the weak permeability of the border, the cross-border character is mostly failed.

Concerning the language barriers, the needs for an institution of translators and for the support of bilingualism were raised several times.

In the western part of the region, there is another obstacle: while the Hungarian side is one of the less developed regions nation-wide, Međimurje is the most developed in Croatia; thus knowledge transfer from the older EU member state is not an option there.

As a consequence, it is a general opinion that in most cases the partners realise their own developments without real cross-border impact. It is even more true in the case of the SME call. At the same time, this opinion is accompanied by the viewpoint that the cross-border impact is not so important in this programme. Much more important is the long-term sustainability of the project results (see infrastructure) which can later have greater impact than the superficially built cross-border projects. The partners are not ready to implement real cross-border projects. It does not make any sense to force them to

develop proposals what they are not able and interested in to sustain. Patience is needed: the beneficiaries should gain skills and experiences as first, however this needs longer time.

By the way, compared to the previous programming period, the proposals are more cross-border, the applicants are more experienced and they can better explain the mission of the project. This perspective could be enhanced further if the cross-border character would be assessed with higher scores.

In the field of tourism, this factor is eased by the Regional Tourism Product Plan (RTPP) drafted during the previous programming period, covering the entire programme region and – based on the regional needs and characteristics – orientating the beneficiaries in designing their proposals. Finally, the leaders of the regional municipalities should be encouraged to cooperate more intensively.

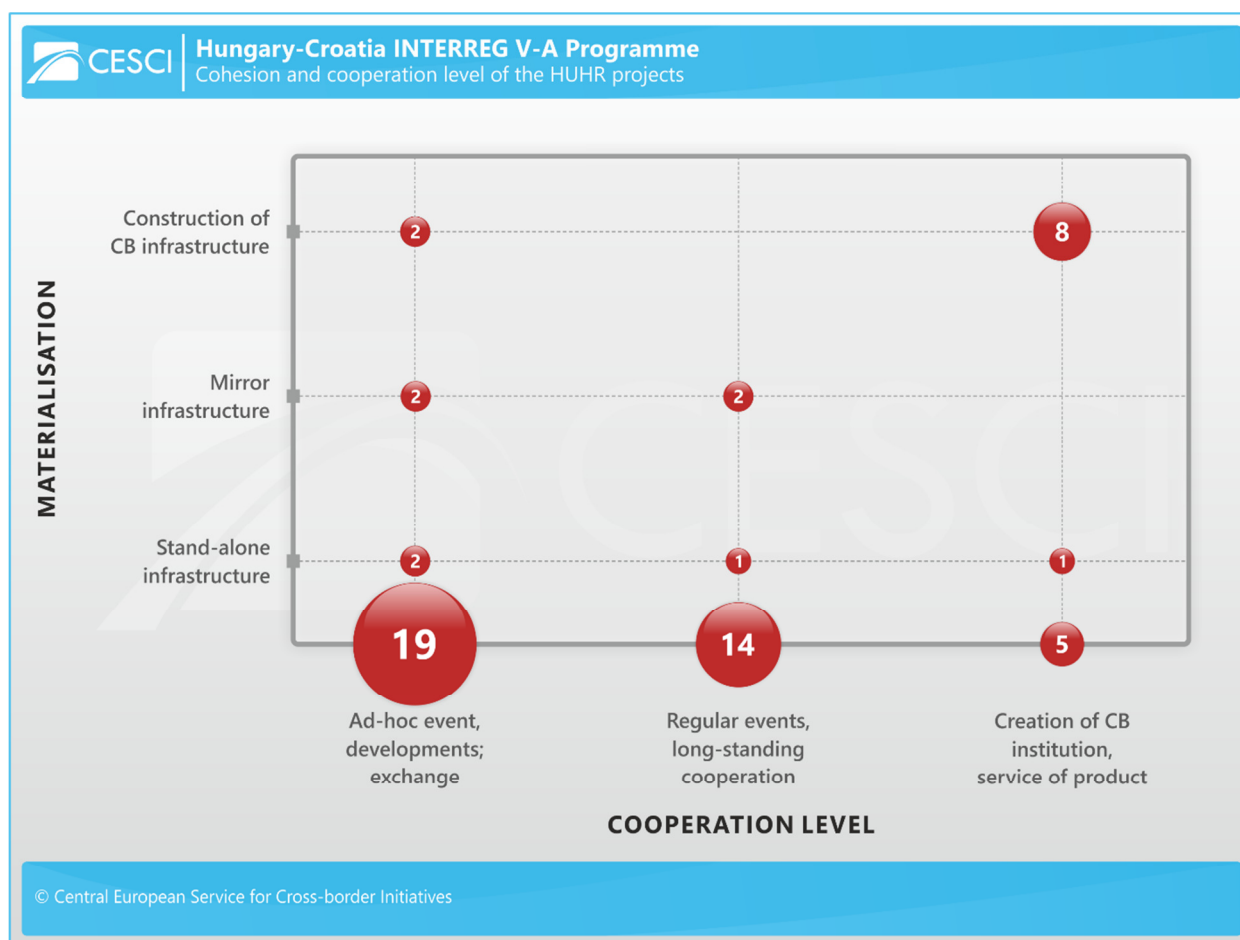
We can conclude that the level of cooperation within the programming region is considered not mature enough for more integrated cross-border developments but it is not a problem: mutual trust building is more important at the current phase.

Analysis of the selected projects and the questionnaires

The analysis of the project descriptions supports the results of the interviews. There is a clear rupture between the real cross-border projects (8 in total) and the many ad-hoc soft projects (38; rate: 68%) from among which 19 (34%) are of ad-hoc character, while further 14 (25%) create the conditions for more integrated soft cooperation – as a starting phase. At the same time, there is a series of projects of the same amount which launch cross-border services that means a higher level of integration.

By the way, still more than 71% of the projects can be classified out of the real cross-border scope. Instead, these projects have mainly transnational or interregional character with soft activities (knowledge transfer, exchange of experiences, workshops, trainings, etc.). The most integrated cross-border investments are expected to be realised in the tourism sector (cycle routes and relevant services).

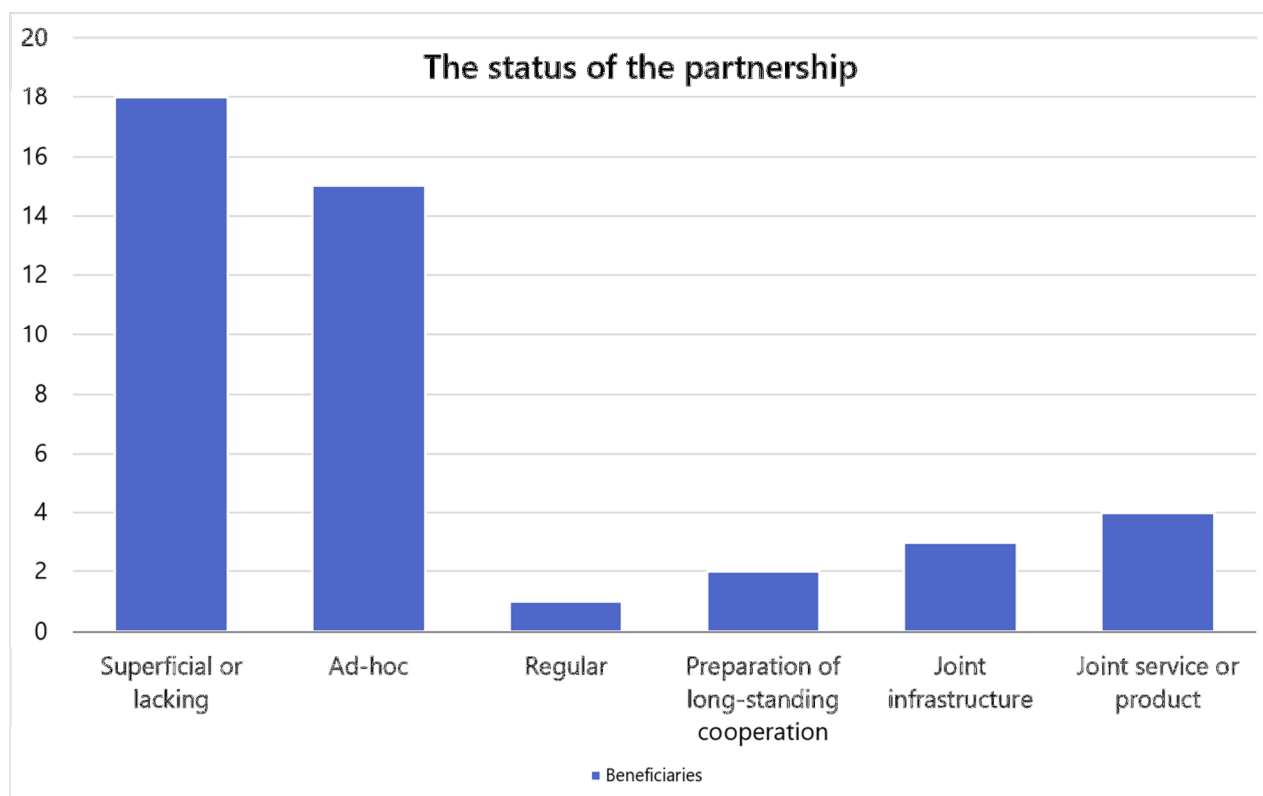
Figure 18: Cohesion and cooperation level of the HUHR projects



In case of the on-line questionnaires, we applied a slightly different approach. The lead beneficiaries were asked about the inevitable necessity of the cross-border programme for reaching their goals. The answer had to be justified by the cross-border activities included in the project. According to the answers, we gained a very similar picture to the former ones which means that it is not the failure of the quality assessors that so many projects with modest cross-border character are supported by the programme: numerous projects just do not have that (let us remind that the questionnaires were filled-in also by beneficiaries whose proposal has not been selected).

In this analysis, the level of integration was assessed by a six-step scale where the lowest level means that the respondents identified cross-border impact in a very superficial way (e.g. stating that 'nature does not respect borders') or even did not mention it; while the highest level means the creation of cross-border services (it is considered more important than cross-border infrastructure development).

Figure 19: Maturity of cross-border cooperation of the beneficiaries [Source: Questionnaire]



According to this assessment, the lack of cross-border dimension is even more striking. The vast majority of the beneficiaries cannot realise real cross-border partnerships. This phenomenon is tinged by the fact that the projects already have pre-history within the same partnership in many cases. This factor can be a good starting point for achieving longer-term cross-border impacts.

M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools

In the current programming period the programme launched a new tool (the B Light Scheme), in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and cohesion. In addition, as a follow-up of the first priority project, the de-mining continued as a strategic project. The two tools were assessed in terms of their contribution to stronger cohesion and wider citizens' involvement in cross-border activities. The B Light Scheme is interesting from the perspective of broadening the scope of beneficiaries involved in cross-border cooperation: here, the expected number of beneficiaries and projects can orientate the evaluation in comparison with the previous programmes. The strategic project will be assessed in terms of its impacts on cross-border cohesion with a qualitative approach. For the purposes of the analysis we used the interviews, the results of the on-line survey, the background documents related to the use of the tools, territorial statistics, and technical description of the strategic project.

Besides the projects (to be) selected via open CfP, the Programme contains also two operations which can be regarded as strategic projects. 'De-mine HU-HR II', a continuation of the earlier cooperation of the two Member States' authorities for the removal of landmines, managed its first, second and third implementation report in the year 2017. At the same time, the other co-operation planned outside the spectre of open CfP-s, the 'B Light Scheme' project of Priority Axis 1 (Economic Development), started on 1st February 2017 and the first phase of the two-round selection procedure was performed between June and December.

The strategic project „De-contamination of war-affected territories” (**De-mine HU-HR II**) is being supported under PA 2 – Sustainable use of natural and cultural assets, IP 6d, with an amount of 3 008 090.28 Euros of ERDF funding. The project started its activities (on the Croatian side removal of landmines and quality assurance of the operations, on the Hungarian side non-technical and technical survey of areas, removal of explosive remnants of war, environmental rehabilitation) on 1st June 2016 closed by 31st May 2018. The total EU funding requested in the first reports amounted to 1 740 525.76 EUR.

As a result of the homeland war that lasted from June 1991 until the end of 1995, some parts of the border is still contaminated by mines. Some of the minefields reached even the Hungarian territory at the border line between River Drava and River Danube causing direct life danger to the inhabitants. Mine contaminated areas were surveyed and cleared during the finished project De-mine HU-HR which served as a starting point to the strategic project of the current programme. In the already completed project not only the mine-suspected areas were defined, but also data were collected on UXO (unexploded ordnance, such as hand grenades, mortar shells, etc.) suspected areas at the Hungarian side of the border, which had not been fully abolished, yet. After the finished successful demining project it has become apparent that still there were mines and UXO suspected areas along the river Drava on Croatian territory and UXO suspected areas in Hungary close to the borderline due to the vicinity of the occupied Beli Manastir-Osijek corridor in the homeland war of Croatia and manoeuvres taken for recapturing it.

During the previous Project De-mine HU-HR I 118 pieces of mines were found and destroyed and 25 pieces of UXO's were found on the Hungarian territory close to the border line, in the 25 meters strip. The project area on Croatian side was the proximity of the previous project area and consisted of the Municipality Draž and minefields along the river Drava from the D1 border stone to the Town of Belišće ensuring additional information for the future CROMAC technical survey activities in this area.

Similarly to other projects to be supported from the Programme, strategic projects also have to be approved by the MC. Regarding the 'De-mine HU-HR II' project, the procedure

was managed with constant supervision by the TF and later by the MC in parallel with programming.

The full documentation, necessary for starting the contracting procedure, was received by the JS in February 2016, and the letter about funding was sent to the LB by the MA in March 2016. The strategic project has been an agenda point at all MC meetings where the members receive the latest information about project preparation and implementation.

This de-mining strategic project could be assessed as a crucial basis and pre-requisite for the strengthening of territorial cohesion in the border region because without this, significant share of joint territorial capital could not be exploited. This way, the project's impact on territorial cohesion is just indirect, but without this many further direct attempts would be impossible.

PA 1 – Economic development – The Priority represents 16.38% of the ERDF funding allocated to the Programme. The entire amount is dedicated to financing the so-called **B Light Scheme**, a special operation partly acting like a regular project and partly like a grant scheme. This model of providing de minimis support to SMEs in a cross-border context was taken by the planning experts (and endorsed by the Task Force) from the Euroregion Rhine-Waal at the border of Germany and the Netherlands. The main Beneficiaries are non-profit organisations dealing with enterprise support in each of the seven border counties, while the LB is HAMAG-BICRO, a Croatian enterprise promotion agency. The official starting date of the project was 1 February 2017. The opening of the mechanism for the SMEs from both sides was managed for the first time in June – thus the project partnership launched stage one of the two-step selection procedure with a three-month submission deadline.

The main characteristic of the scheme is that it consists of on the one hand of 'main' Project Partners (8 PP-s) and on the other hand small and medium sized enterprises (SME-s) which join the original project partnership as 'light' beneficiaries in a second round. (Beneficiary Lights are co-operating SMEs operating on both side of the border selected via open call for proposal.)

Special cross-border SME development scheme includes project development and management support to be provided for the SMEs in order to foster joint product and service development in the programme area and thus improving presently weak financial background and networking attitudes of local SMEs. The support is given for the development of projects in the following fields:

- cross-border joint product, technology or service development of cooperating SMEs operating on different sides of the border for increasing their value added production and broadening of their markets,
- joining of SMEs to supplier chains including cooperating SMEs being suppliers of other types of companies (only SMEs are supported),
- cross-border joint development of marketing, promotional and demonstration facilities and services of SMEs operating on different sides of the border,
- supporting cross-border cooperation of SMEs for participating in training courses gaining or reinforcing specialised management skills and competencies (e.g. language knowledge, cultural behaviour, technical competencies, challenge of succession) for improving their value added production,
- encouraging the support of the creation and the further development of the cross-border joint economic clusters.

The two tools contribute to a stronger cross-border cohesion in different ways. The strategic project is a must for any further forms of utilisation of the border area and the exploitation of its territorial capital. Without the de-mining process, the border will stay hardly permeable and construction of cross-border infrastructure and the realisation of integrated economic developments will be impossible. This way, the project is considered as a basic condition for stronger cross-border cohesion.

The B Light Scheme opens the way for cooperation in a new sector. There are some respondents thinking that the nature of a CBC programme is foreign for a SME functioning in line with the logic of the market; they cannot be "forced" for cooperation, if they cannot see rewarding it from the market, and if they see it, they don't need calls (and administrative, de minimis or timing burdens) to do it. At the same time, according to the results of the interviews, it seems to be a general opinion that (in spite of the low commitment) there are SMEs interested in the construction and also the MC supports the approach. However, the delay of implementation is mainly caused by the inefficiency of the IMIS system and the problems around the procurement of the external consultant (whose responsibility would be to support professionally the SMEs during and after the B Light project). Compared to the Dutch-German, the integration of the Hungarian-

Croatian border area is highly underdeveloped which makes the application of the B Light Scheme tool quite risky. At the same time, the tool itself can contribute to the trust building among the entrepreneurs providing the opportunity of the strengthening cross-border economic cohesion.

Taking into account the weak integration of the borderland, it has to be established that the lack of the tool of small projects is a shortage. A Small Project Fund could attract much more stakeholders and result in much more joint activities. As few interviewees underlined, the stronger integration of the region could not be expected without trust building. The best way to build trust is to spend more money to numerous small-scale activities involving as many people as possible.

As a summary, it can be stated, that the applied new tools and mechanisms are important for the sake of enhancing the cohesion of the region (the strategic project is a crucial factor, but is not sufficient to reach this goal). Further steps are to be taken in order to exploit the conditions created by the two tools.

M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

In this chapter the (Interreg V-A) Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme's contribution to the European goals is analysed. Firstly, the three main contributions that are identified in the programme document are presented. Then the macro-regional relevance of the programme is analysed in detail and finally, the contribution to the European horizontal principles is presented.

The programme should contribute to the achievement of the EU2020 targets, it should serve as a stronger cohesion at macro-regional level and it should take measures towards fulfilling the EU horizontal principles. We will shed light on how the achieved indicators met can contribute to the pan-European goals and how the project beneficiaries identified the relevance of their project on the horizontal principles.

The main methodologies of this chapter are benchmarking and document analysis. The relevance matrixes were drafted based on the programme's indicators in relation with the different European goals, and the project's application documents. Furthermore, this source of information was supplemented by the interviews conducted with the representatives of the programme bodies.

EUROPE 2020

The *EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (hereinafter referred to as EU2020) is the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for 2010-2020. The EU2020 strategy is used as a reference framework for activities at EU and at national and regional levels. The main aim of the strategy is to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

In general, the programme document identifies the following contributions to the EU2020 main goals:

- *Smart growth* is encouraged by supporting the cooperation and joint developments of the SMEs, creating the conditions of and encouraging their cooperation with local higher education institutions and also promoting the use of ICT technologies in the process of cooperation.
- *Sustainable growth* is promoted by supporting the preservation and sustainable exploitation of the region's rich natural heritage and to increase the stability of the existing valuable ecosystems. Environmental sustainability and resource efficiency will be applied as horizontal preferences in all measures of the programme.
- *Inclusive growth* is supported mainly by strengthening the institutional environment for future collaboration and by developing more positive attitudes to current and future cooperation by encouraging the implementation of joint educational and training programmes. In order to ensure the strategy's positive impact on territories lagging behind in development – mainly in terms of employment and equality of opportunities - geographical preferences and territory-specific selection criteria will be applied in all cases it lends itself appropriate.

According to the main aims of the EU2020 the following headline indicators at EU and at national level were established⁸:

Table 19: EU2020 headline indicators (EU-28, HR, HU)

EU/Member State	EU-28	Croatia	Hungary
Employment rate	Increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to at least 75%	62.9 %	75%
Gross domestic expenditure on research and	Increasing combined public and private investment in R&D to 3% of GDP	1.4 %	1.8%

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4411192/4411431/Europe_2020_Targets.pdf

EU/Member State	EU-28	Croatia	Hungary
development			
Greenhouse gas emissions	Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels	11%	10%
Share of renewable energy	Increasing the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption to 20%,	20%	13%
Energy efficiency	Moving towards a 20% increase in energy efficiency (equaling a reduction to 1 483 Mton of primary energy consumption)	11.5	24.1
Early leavers from education and training	Reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10% (of the population aged 18 to 24)	4%	10%
Tertiary educational attainment	Increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%	35%	34%
Poverty and social exclusion	Lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion (compared to 2008)*	Reduce to 1 220 000 the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion	- 450 000 persons

The targets of the two concerned member states (Hungary and Croatia) in many cases are more moderate than the targets on the EU level. In some cases the Hungarian, while in other cases the Croatian targets are closer to the common EU values.

Below, we analysed the programme's indicators in relation with the EU2020 topics. The "+" signs in the next table show the explicit contributions.

Table 20: The programme's potential contribution to the EU2020 targets

Programme indicators				EU 2020 Topics					
ID (Priority axis)	Indicator or key implementation step	Measurement unit	Final target for 2023 (Milestone for 2018)	Employment	R&D	GHG emissions	Energy consumption	Education	Poverty and social exclusion
1	Number of enterprises receiving grants	enterprises	80 (15)	+					
1	Number of enterprises receiving support	enterprises	80 (-)	+					
1	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	enterprises	80 (-)	+					
2	Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	60000 (9000)	+					
2	Total surface area of rehabilitated land	hectares	450 (-)						
2	Number of tourism facilities / service providers being certified by an environmental sustainability scheme	number	40	+					
2	Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	hectares	5400 (810)						
2	Number of participants in joint education training schemes and awareness raising programmes	number	1000 (-)	+				+	
2	Number of joint international studies	number	10 (-)						
3	Number of institutions participating in joint capacity building actions	number	33 (-)					+	
3	Number of harmonized processes, shared initiatives, coordinated policies and projects developed jointly	number	66 (-)						

Programme indicators				EU 2020 Topics					
ID (Priority axis)	Indicator or key implementation step	Measurement unit	Final target for 2023 (Milestone for 2018)	Employment	R&D	GHG emissions	Energy consumption	Education	Poverty and social exclusion
3	People participating in joint actions and events	number	810 (125)						
4	Training courses developed and delivered (formal and informal)	number	40 (-)	+				+	
4	Number of educational premises refurbished	number	15 (-)	+				+	
4	Number of educational premises upgraded with technical equipment	number	15 (-)	+				+	
4	Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	number	860 (150)	+				+	
4	Number of involved marginalised persons in training programmes	number	200 (-)						+

PA4 performs the strongest contribution to the EU2020 targets while PA3 has the smallest relevance in these terms. It is not surprising since the development of cooperation in itself is not a major objective of the EU2020 strategy. However, through the cooperation axis, the project owners can develop procedures and tools which have impact on different fields (GHG emission, poverty, etc.). Therefore, PA3 can have an indirect impact on the achievement of the targets.

The CP especially feeds into the employment and education targets.

Macro-regional relevance

From the EU's four adopted macro-regional strategies, the INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme is affected by the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)⁹. The strategy was launched in 2011 and it is built on 4 pillars, and divided into 11 priority areas (Priority Area, PA). The pillars are the following:

- Connecting the Danube Region with other regions
- Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region
- Building prosperity in the Danube Region
- Strengthening the Danube Region

As stated in the CP the INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme will ensure appropriate coordination with the Macro-regional Strategy for the Danube Region by:

- governance arrangements for ongoing mutual information exchange, coordination and joint planning in areas of joint interest;
- establishing an EUSDR specific category in the monitoring system;
- making use of the Budapest Danube Contact Point (BDCCP)¹⁰ for supporting coordination and joint planning actions in areas of mutual interest.

The following table shows the connections between the EUSDR's priority areas and actions and the INTERREG V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme' priority areas. The "+" signs represent explicit contributions.

Table 21: The connections between the EUSDR and the Interreg V-A HU-HR Programme

EUSDR Priority Areas and actions	Programme priorities			
	PA1 Economy	PA2 Environment	PA3 Cooperation	PA4 Education

⁹ Although, Croatia's territory is part of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) too, eligible areas of the Hungary – Croatia CP are not directly affected by this strategy.

¹⁰ Int he meanwhile, the BDCCP has ceased its operation.

EUSDR	Programme priorities			
1) Connecting the Danube Region				
To improve mobility and multimodality				
To encourage more sustainable energy				
To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts		+	+	
(2) Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region				
To restore and maintain the quality of waters		+		
To manage environmental risks		+		
To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils		+		
(3) Building Prosperity in the Danube Region				
To develop the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies				
To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development	+			
To invest in people and skills			+	+
(4) Strengthening the Danube Region				
To step up institutional capacity and cooperation			+	
To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime				

Certain relations between the Programme's PAs' and the EUSDR's actions can be observed. With regard to Priority Areas of the EUSDR the most supported areas are (2) Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region and (3) Building Prosperity in the Danube Region, where three actions of the EUSDR are supported by the Programme priorities. The weakest interconnection can be found in terms of (4) Strengthening the Danube Region, where only a single action is encouraged by a Programme priority. PA3 of the Programme has the biggest number of direct connections with the EUSDR, while both PA1 and PA4 have one link to the EUSDR.

Horizontal principles

In order to shed light on the way the projects approached the horizontal principles all the projects approved by the MC had been analysed based on their inputs for the horizontal principles criteria. The sources of this analysis were the project datasheets of the IMIS

2014-2020, menu item "Indicators". The findings are summarized in the table below. A project is marked with the "+" sign if the horizontal indicator chosen by the project explicitly and directly contributes to the given principle and it is marked as "(+)" if it only superficially linked to the given principle. The analysis is based on the following grouping of horizontal indicators:

Horizontal indicators linked to equality and non-discrimination:

- Number of project activities/events involving marginalized communities (minorities, Roma people, disadvantaged people, refugees, and/or people with disabilities);
- Number of project activities/events in connection with equal opportunities and gender equality.

Horizontal indicator linked to sustainable development:

- Number of awareness raising events (workshops, trainings, educational programmes etc.) targeting or promoting sustainable development, environmental education and natural assets.

Horizontal indicators linked to climate change:

- Number of Beneficiaries using renewable energy resources in the project;
- Number of locations where renewable energy resources are introduced by the project.

Horizontal indicator linked to social innovation:

- Number of awareness raising events (workshops, trainings, educational programmes etc.) targeting or promoting cultural values in the border region.

Sustainable development is supported by the most number of projects, 32 (58% of all projects). It is followed by equality and non-discrimination, supported by 30 projects (55% of all projects), while climate change (6 projects, 11% of the projects), and social innovation (zero direct link) are the least favoured principles. If the loose links are also taken into account social innovation is targeted by 20 projects (36% of all projects).

In the frames of the Programme the Lead Beneficiary/Beneficiaries can choose as many indicators as relevant to their project. However, they have to choose one horizontal indicator, at least. The indicators were chosen 99 times which means that the average number of chosen indicators is almost 2 (1.8) per projects. There is only one project which supports three principles at the same time, namely BYPATH. There are large number of projects (38) which are linked to one horizontal principle only, including those which have lost connection with social innovation.

Table 22: Summarizing table on the existence of specific actions the projects undertake for equality and non-discrimination, sustainable development, climate change and social innovation

Name of the project	Equality and non-discrimination	Sustainable development	Climate change	Social innovation
2REGIONS2SUSTAIN		+		
4E4K	+	+		(+)
AGRISHORT	+	+		
ALJMASKI RIT&BOROS DRAVA		+		
ATDS II	+	+		
ATTRACTOUR	+			(+)
B LIGHT SCHEME			+	
B.I.R.D.S.	+			
BEE2BE	+	+		(+)
BIKE&BOAT		+		
BYPATH	+	+	+	
CATCH	+			
CBC-ORIENT				(+)
CHEC				(+)
CULTUREVIVE TOUR	+			(+)
CYCLE IN A NETWORK 2.0		+		
CYCLO-NET	+	+		
DE-MINE HU-HR II				
DESCO		+		
DRAWA	+			
DUO PACK		+		
E.B.M.	+			(+)
EAT GREEN	+	+		(+)
ECOSMARTCITIES		+		
ECOTOP2	+			
EE SUN		+		
EE-EFF		+		
EV13 GAP	+			
EVCC		+		
GREEN BARANJA / BARANYA	+		+	(+)
HAPPY BIKE	+	+		
HU-CRO WINE STORIES II			+	(+)
HU-HR FRUIT TREES	+	+		
I-DARE	+			
IMPROVEMED	+			
ISD UNI				(+)
JOLLIZ!	+	+		(+)
LOCAL PRODUCTS FOR THE PEOPLE	+	+		
OAK PROTECTION		+		

Name of the project	Equality and non-discrimination	Sustainable development	Climate change	Social innovation
PHYS-ME	+			
PRERADOVIĆ & CSOKONAI				(+)
RE.M.I.S.E	+			
RED FAITH		+		
REFURBCULTURE		+		(+)
REVIVE	+			
ROBOTECH	+			
RURES		+	+	
SOKCI	+			(+)
SPORTOVERBORDERS	+	+		(+)
STILL	+	+		(+)
SUECH		+		
TOURISM 4 ALL		+	+	(+)
TWO RIVERS ONE GOAL		+		(+)
VEC SHARING	+	+		(+)
V-EDUCA 2		+		

After closely analysing the measures mentioned by the beneficiaries in their project material, it seems that most of the projects regarded the inclusion of horizontal issues as a forced requirement, a box that had to be ticked. Many interviewees also stated that in the projects the horizontal principles are not dealt with in a complex manner, but rather as an artificially included must that is left without considerable and measurable impact. At the same time, most of the interviewees emphasized that it is a positive idea to include the horizontal principles in the application materials and in some cases – where they organically fit with the nature of the project – it is definitely a good requirement, however, it should not be a strict requirement, only a suggestion.

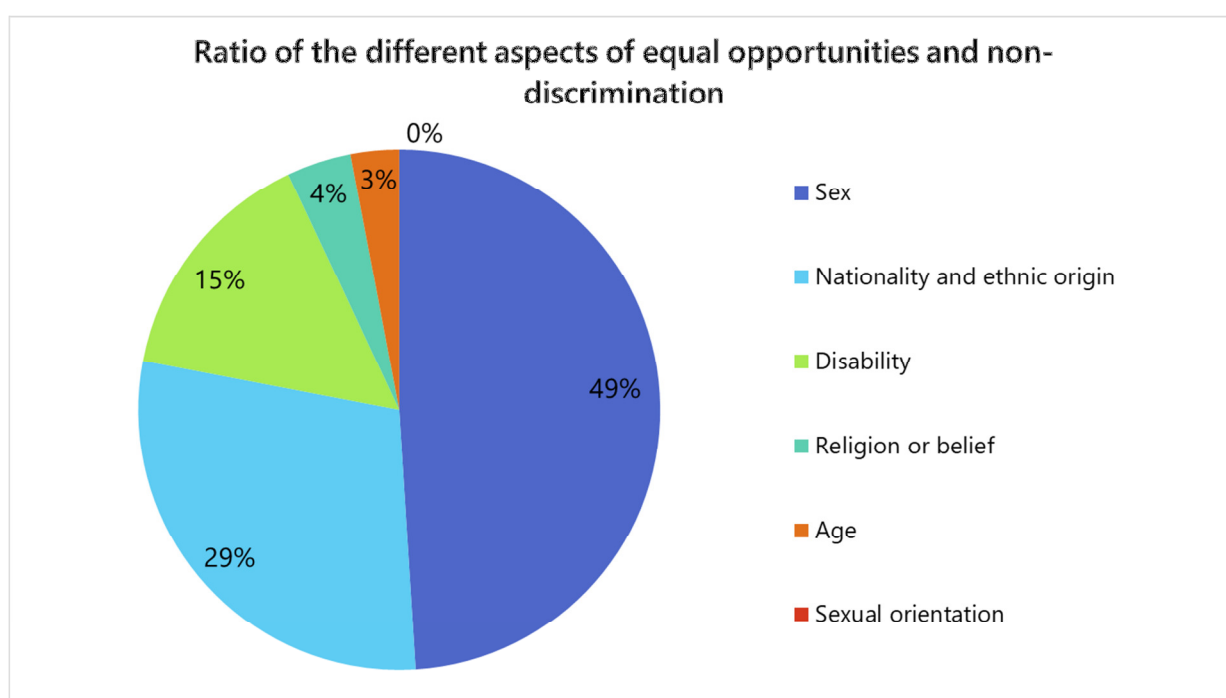
According to the European legislations, there are three horizontal principles that the Hungary-Croatia cross-border operational programme 2014-2020 takes into consideration: equal opportunities and non-discrimination, sustainable development and equality between men and women.

The equal opportunities and non-discrimination horizontal principle is quite versatile as it deals with providing the same opportunities and protecting everyone from any form of discrimination regardless of the person's nationality, ethnic origin, sex, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Depending on the projects' profile, there are distinct interventions and measures that are mentioned to be taken in order to tackle these issues.

The next figure represents the ratio between the above mentioned different aspects of the equal opportunities and non-discrimination as they appear in the project materials.

The aspect that is mostly dealt with is the sexes, which is explained in detail under the section dedicated for equality between men and women. The second most explored aspect is the nationality and ethnic origin, nearly one third of the partners intend to eradicate any discrimination based on nationality or ethnicity. The third largest group consists of initiatives dealing with providing equal opportunities for people living with any type of disabilities. The other three aspects are considerably less dealt with, only a mere 4% is dedicated to religious, 3% to age-based non-discrimination and no project mentioned any steps to be taken to counteract discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Figure 20: The ratio of the different aspects dealt with by the projects



Nationality and ethnic origin

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the projects used only general statements relating to national and ethnic discrimination, such as *'All minorities are welcomed to participate in the project events and they won't be excluded or discriminated during the project implementation'* and *'This project results knows no genders, minorities or races'* or: *'In terms of direct and indirect target groups non-discrimination is applied, enabling participation irrespective of ethnic colour'*.

Furthermore, there are cases where the measure proposed to bring the project and the horizontal principles closer together are linguistic. According to some of the projects the key to providing equal opportunities for everybody regardless of their nationality lies within language-accessibility. Thus, for instance one project states that *'[e]vents will be*

bilingual HU-HR and minorities (Croatian in HU and Hungarian in HR) will be involved to actively participate.'

Finally, there are also projects that exactly describe the removal of different potential barriers which minorities face, hence they can actively take part in the projects. For example through inviting representatives into the decision making processes like in the following case: *'the project will be implemented with the tight contribution of Sokci minority, 2 associations are defined in the project as supporting stakeholders. Their representatives will be invited to the project meetings and will be involved into promotional activities. Measurement: list of participants.'*

Another measure to be taken to reach this goal is to involve people from no-matter background in the projects not only as passive viewers, but also as active performers, such as in the case of this project: *'National minorities will be directly involved in the public events by providing them space for cultural & gastronomic performances. They will be informed and invited to take actively part in project events.'*

Disability

Disability is the third most widely discussed aspect of the first horizontal principle. However, the vast majority of the answers are so general that no actual planned measure can be identified. Most of the projects deal with the issue in a superficial way: *'[t]he project will contribute to respect horizontal principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. That is why project plans participation of women and disabled people.'*

The second most popular approach was to commit to organize the different project activities in a venue that is easily accessible. Thus, most of the input submitted through the application forms are along the lines of the following ones: *'[t]his project will enable participation of all marginal groups. Access to the bike trail will be built without barriers that prevent access for disabled persons' and '[w]e will certainly continue these efforts on the proposed project. In regards to disabled, events will be organized preferably in venues where accessibility for disabled is ensured.'*

On the other hand there are also initiatives which intend to involve people living with disabilities to participate in different activities. For instance: *'One of the festivals, the Purslane Picnic integrates an awareness walk into its programme of events, when able bodied and disabled people climb together up to Jakabhegy.'* or *'Disabled people will also be involved through ensuring them the opportunity to meet some sports (i.e. wheelchair basketball, wheelchair dance sport, etc.) & try them. They can meet civil organizations working in the field of sport, which can help them to choose which sport they can exercise regularly. This "expo" gives the possibility to disabled people to support their social inclusion through sport.'*

Furthermore, there are measures to be taken in order to ensure the participation of disabled people both in the events ('[w]e will monitor the number of women, disabled and disadvantaged people during the activities especially during the workshops, training and dissemination events.') and in the public discourse ('[g]reat project output that will significantly help disadvantaged groups is a computer program and mobile application that will enable much easier and efficient communication of disabled people (citizens) with responsible people at local authorities on waste management and communal topics.')

Religion or belief

Even though the discrimination based on religion and belief can be considered as a somewhat acute problem and the territory of the programme houses people from different religious backgrounds, this aspect is not very much elaborated in the projects. Even the very few which do mention this issue formulates its commitments in a highly general and non-accountable way. Projects talk about this issue along the lines of the following two examples: *'This project provides equal opportunities and possibilities for all people regardless of their religion, ethnic background or education'* and *'Call is defined to contribute equal and active opportunities regardless of nationality, gender, age, religion or political opinion, and therefore the project activities are planned in accordance with the rules of the Call.'*

Age

Age is another attribute that can give space for discrimination what additional attention has to be given in order to avoid and provide equal opportunities for everyone regardless of their age. The negative result of the analysis is that very few projects dealt with this aspect but on the positive side it has to be pointed out that those of which actually mentioned it usually gave a less generic answer than in the first three categories. Some of the projects approached the issue from the point of view of reduced physical abilities caused by old age and tried to compensate this through different technical solutions. For instance *'[t]he website will be edited in easily readable format in order to ensure its accessibility for elderly and handicapped persons'* or *'Csokonai Museum & Cultural Center will be accessible also for disabled people using wheelchair and elderly people (ramp and elevator to be built).'* Others tried to approach the question from the side of changed motivations and abilities such as this project: *'E-bike rental possibilities motivate the participation of elderly, less active users to explore the region on a healthy way (instead of cars).'*

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is the last personal characteristics based on which groups of people could be discriminated. Usually, the EU documents dealing with the horizontal principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination also tackles this issue. However, among the analysed projects none of them saw fit to mention this aspect.

The second horizontal principle that the programme takes into consideration is about sustainable development. This principle has been tackled with a considerable sensitivity and depth in almost all project materials. Even compared with the previous horizontal principle it is clear that the projects invested a great amount of energy and thought into finding good angles and measures to represent the sustainable development principle in their initiatives. This is why it is not representative to find generic answers among the submitted materials.

The approaches mentioned in the project materials can be classified into four different groups: measures applying renewable energy solutions, initiatives regarding sustainable tourism, measures for disseminating knowledge and other, diverse means.

Renewable energy resources

Measures to be taken in connection with renewable energy resources are mentioned in the case of almost one quarter of the projects. Solar energy is a suitable and sustainable solution that has been mentioned in a number of projects for instance through *'using products run on solar energy and electricity (smart product such as a "smart tree", electric bicycles and cars, solar benches)'*. Another project states that *'[t]his project will contribute to the horizontal indicators principal in a way that we will use renewable energy resources. Renewable energy sources (solar panels) will be used by the both side of the border. On Croatian side we will use solar lamps along the newly constructed bicycle path and on Hungarian side they will use solar panels for lighting in covered bicycle stands.'* Subsequently, the need for sustainability had been integrated in the project goals in a complex and organic way.

Sustainable tourism

Some of the projects saw an opportunity to grasp sustainability through sustainable tourism, since a lot of projects are geared towards tourism, this type of solution can be regarded as a logical method. A number of projects stated that they wish to promote sustainable tourism through developing bicycle route infrastructure and offering pleasure boat services as environmentally friendly means of transportation. They point out that the *'attraction of cycling tourists acts towards the more sustainable environment: reduces CO2 emission but generates income in the region. Promoting cycling does not only target*

tourists but local population as well. The established sections provide access to existing elements of routes that make urban centres connected to magisterial routes. This fosters environment friendly leisure activities of tourists and locals alike. The routes also provide access to heritage sites (memorial park, museums etc.) that are important part of the target area's identity.'

Furthermore, one project points out the importance of knowledge sharing in the means of sustainable tourism among the different projects and partners: *'The project partner will be implementing principles and examples of good practice taken from other project partner's activities in order to develop a sustainable tourism offer.'*

Disseminating knowledge

The above mentioned point is somewhat connected to the idea of the importance of dissemination of information and knowledge when it comes to sustainability. Several projects realized this and reflected upon including appropriate measures in their respective projects. Some projects aimed to offer a positive contribution towards the sustainable development goals by not only considering existing sustainability policies but also through *'equipping both visitors and local citizens participating in project-related events with skills and knowledge necessary for being able to take informed decisions when opting for the most environment-friendly means of transportation.'* This is a quite important point and it is very fortunate that other projects also showed similar ideas.

One such strain of measures to be taken is tailored towards schoolchildren. For instance in the framework of one project *'in every location school-children will be part of "GREEN SPORT" events to gain a compelling understanding on how environmental-conscious behaviour makes a difference to their life and this experience will hopefully increase the weight of environmental protection amongst their priorities, and will be a strong factor in making their choices in the future.'* Another project puts a very similar idea in this way: *'all partners have the obligation to take care of the environment by teaching children about natural and cultural values and environmental protection, which includes a Study trip through the workshop "Ethnographical characteristics on the left side of the river Drava" in organization of B1, where children will have an opportunity to observe natural heritage and traditional crafts and learn about the influence of ethnic groups in the traditions, music, gastronomy - generally the culture and the environment of each other.'*

Other measures

It seems that sustainable development is a principle that truly inspired the beneficiaries as they come up with a wide variety of measures to be taken in order to put this principle in practice. Some projects mentioned that they envisage to realize this principle by the way

they manage the project, for instance using public transportation when going to project meetings, using online communication tools, avoiding printing as much as possible or at least using recycled paper when printing is absolutely necessary (for example: *'Croatian project partner will give priority to using recycled paper in relation to the bleached paper'*). One project collected these ideas outstandingly well the following way: *'project partners will reduce their environmental and carbon foot-print by using public transport or sharing car when they go to project meetings, minimizing the number of personal meetings and opting for online meetings, organizing back-to-back meetings to save time, cost and to increase sustainability and looking for local/regional products/services as much as possible. During the whole project partners will pay attention to resource efficiency and sustainability in a way that they will organize environment-friendly events due to the following factors: organizing events at venues with good public transport links or facilitating the access to public transport and creating a clear re-use and recycling policy in order to implement energy-efficient events, including power, light, heat and cooling.'*

Other projects are by definition geared towards sustainable development, such as the one dealing with bees. Here additional measures are not so necessary as the idea of sustainability is already represented as the project materials formulates it as well: *'[t]he whole theme of the project is connected to sustainable development. Many studies show the decrease of bees and bee habitat in the last 15 years. If this decreasing trend continues, it could in time lead to decreasing of plants, than animals and in the end - humans. Project acronym shows the importance of developing beekeeping not only for economic reasons but for the protection of the whole food chain.'* Another similar case is the one where sustainability is reflected in speeding up bureaucratic procedures in order to save time and energy as the project explains: *'since our pilot project is focussed on the development of public administration services, sustainability is interpreted in a special way. Overall, we must take into account the time and energy saved, once a number of procedures become more accessible and simpler, preventing citizens from having to travel to the neighbouring country or spend too much precious time with bureaucratic procedures. On the other hand, cutting "red tape" will make the operation of our offices more efficient and contribute to saving energy by a reduced amount of time spent processing citizens' claims. Speeding up procedures thus saves time and energy for both citizens and administrations, thereby contributing to EU horizontal principles on sustainable development.'*

Furthermore, a great number of projects pointed out their commitment to sustainability by mentioning that they planned their infrastructural modifications in a way that they would not result in any negative environmental effects. For example project Attractour states that the *'planned investments in tourism attractions-visitor centres in Čakovec and Letenye have no significant impact on the Environment since the planned interventions are*

mere reconstructions of the existing buildings with no modifications of the building outlines.' Others have provided even more details stating that the *'reconstruction of the building will be designed to meet the health and hygiene conditions, does not endanger human health, does not distort the natural environment, and its reconstruction will be no release of hazardous gases, vapours and other harmful substances in terms of air pollution.'* Even better are those solutions which ensure to improve the given environmental solutions such as this project's: *'architectural solutions that will be constructed are enriching the flora that surrounds the area of Tourism-education centre and its facilities. The thematic resting area will be a butterfly garden with flower types that attract butterflies. Also, to parking line will not be asphalted, it will have the grass that will improve the nature friendly image.'*

Finally, it also needs to be mentioned that the projects also receive support in order to be able to attain their climate change objectives. In principle all the selected projects of the programme need to (1) contribute to the requirements of environmental protection, (2) focus on resource efficiency and climate change mitigation, (3) provide ways to adapt to climate change (4) promote resistance towards disasters, (5) avoid risks and at the same time (6) enable shift towards the quality prevention of environmental resources. Since the whole programme strategy is designed according to the concept of sustainable development, some objectives, priorities and individual interventions are directly focused on the promotion of technology development and infrastructural developments for the low carbon economy, resource efficient and environment friendly developments.

Equality between men and women

The third horizontal principle is about equality between men and women. Even though this aspect was compulsory to touch upon, this does not necessarily mean that all the projects which approached the issue actually provided a content-rich solution or idea for the implementation of this horizontal principle. The most often repeated inputs provided are fairly general and express more a broad ideological commitment than actual measures to be taken in accordance with the horizontal issues. For instance: *'This project results knows no genders, minorities or races'*.

A similarly popular type of answers was to link the gender aspect of equal opportunities with the composition of the project staff. A considerable number of projects cited that their project management offers opportunities for women as well, for example: *'The project management team will be composed predominantly by women. This function will be maintained until the end of the project and in the sustainability period as well. Measurement: list of contact persons and staff involved.'* Others also quantified this participation in this way: *'Project team will have at least 50% women in the team.'* Another

aspect of this point is the question of equal pay. Some projects emphasized that *'salaries of women and men doing similar tasks will be similar and not gender-dependent'* which is also an important aspect of this horizontal principle.

Others, in a smaller number, tried to approach the subject from a different angle. One such perspective was of the communication, where the discussed horizontal principle was made evident through the communication of the openness of the project (*'Communication of the project will convey the message of non-discrimination by fostering the participation of women and other disadvantaged groups in project events, initiatives.'*). Another quite rare attempt was to approach the subject in a more integrated and complex way. For instance one project mentioned three different initiatives with which they try to realize this horizontal principle: *'75% of the project team members are women, the principle of equal payment for equal work is guaranteed, gender perspective is ensured by the design of service portfolio (e.g. women bikes for rent, organisation of women cycling day event).'* As it can be seen from this example it is not impossible to try to depart from the most evident and basic answers and try to tailor the specific project to the given horizontal principle.

5.2.2 Territorial impact

M 4.1 Mapping of the territorial coverage

For the sake of analysing the territorial coverage of the cooperation programme two maps were plotted based on the information available in the IMIS. The first map includes two (sometimes converging) types of information:

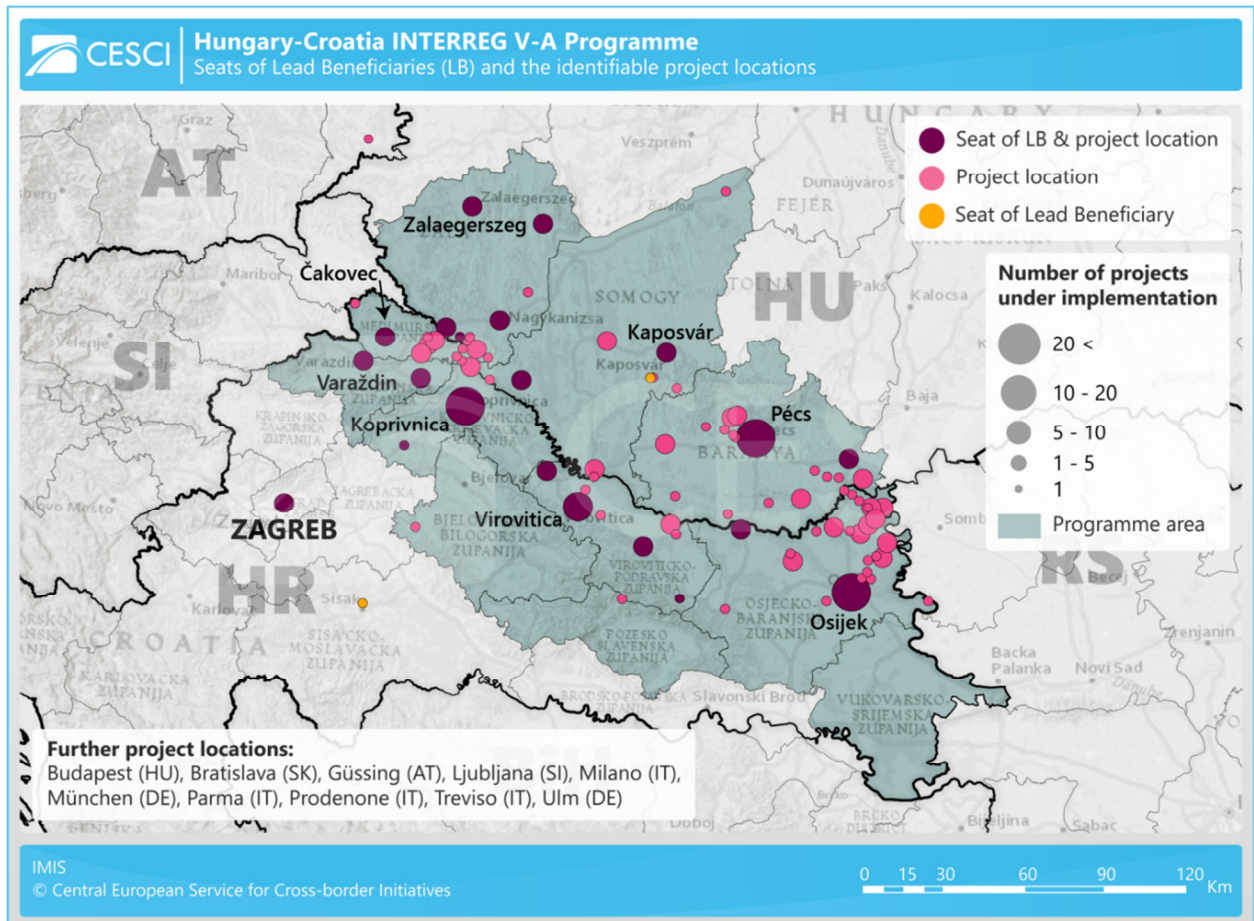
- the locations of lead beneficiaries' seats and
- the locations of project implementation.

The next map shows the cases when the two locations are identical.

It is striking, how the permeability of the border affects the territorial coverage of the projects: the most active territories of the programme area are situated on its westernmost and easternmost edges where the density of border crossings is the highest along this very hardly permeable border. Further sub-region characterised with a higher intensity is located in the area of Virovitica and Barcs (in the proximity of another crossing point). This observation is backed by the fact that (regardless of few exceptions) the most active beneficiaries are coming from border areas situated less than 50 kilometres from the state border. These areas contain the urban centres of Varaždin, Koprivnica, Nagykanizsa, Čakovec, Pécs, Osijek and their surroundings, municipalities right next to

the state border included. Strong connection can be detected between Pécs and Osijek, furthermore regarding the confluence of the Mura and the Drava and the triangle area of the Drava, the Danube and the south of Mohács have also higher density of project locations.

Figure 21: Seats of Lead Beneficiaries and the identifiable project locations [Source: IMIS]



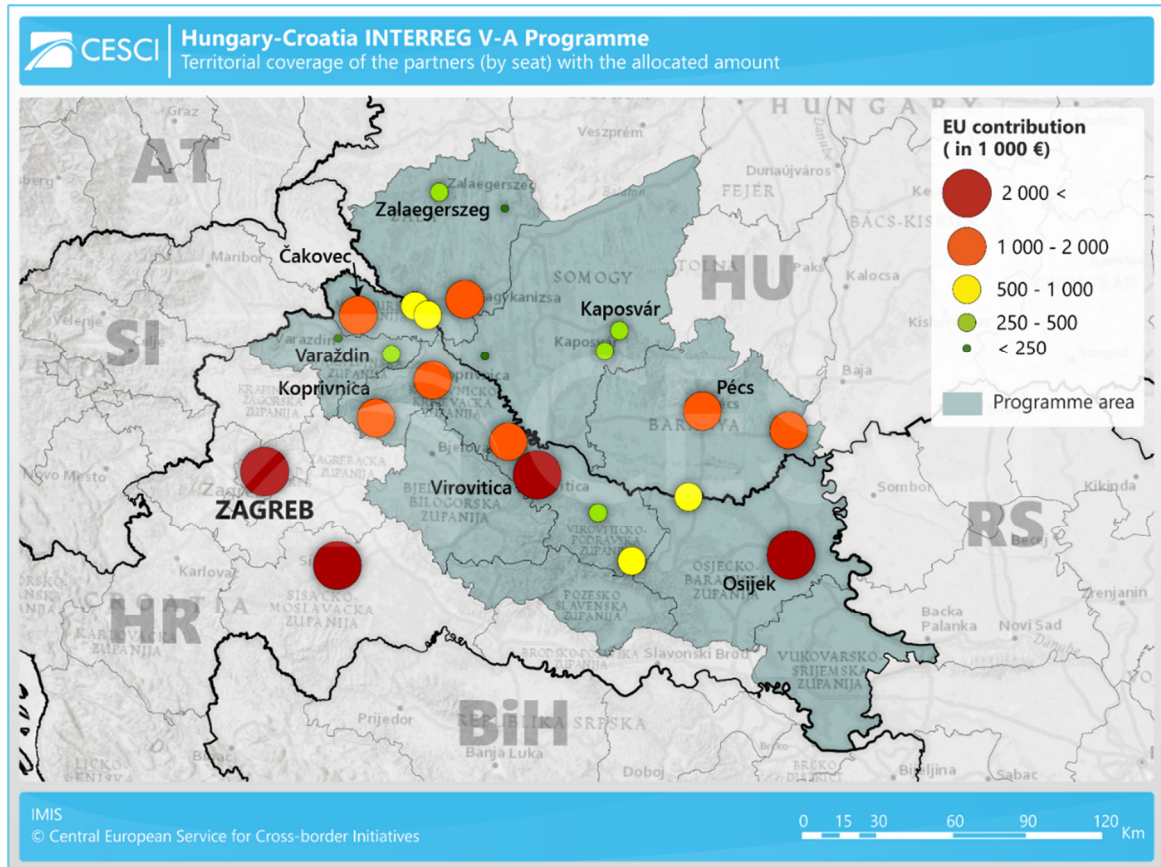
At county level southern South Baranya County from Hungary while Međimurje, Varaždin, Koprivnica-Križevci, Virovitica-Podravina and Osijek-Baranja counties from Croatia are represented by higher number of projects and LBs.

However, almost totally inactive areas - namely the majority of Somogy, Zala, Bjelovar-Bilogora, Požega-Slavonia and Vukovar-Srijem counties - are very present within the programme area. These shortages appoint the geographic scope of the visibility activities to be carried out by the programme bodies. The large number of project locations outside of the programme area is a unique characteristic of the Cooperation Programme: several projects include study trips to territories outside the eligible area.

The second map describes the territorial coverage of the partners (by seat) together with the allocated amount. It can be detected that there is a dominance of the Croatian partners. On the Hungarian side there are many areas with no or low allocated amount of

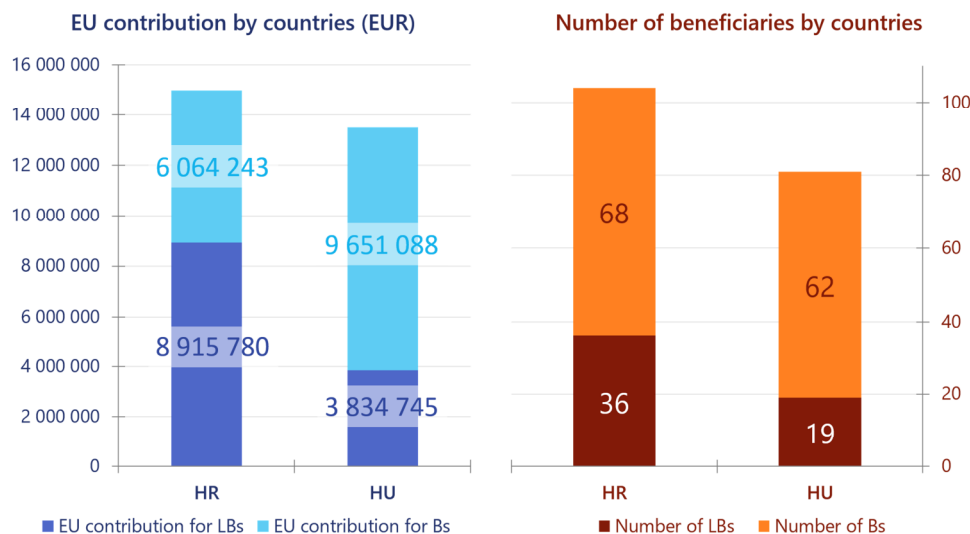
EU contribution. Latter, it is confirmed by the MC member from Zala County based on in-site experience.

Figure 22: Territorial coverage of the partners (by seat) with the allocated amount [Source: IMIS]



However, territorial coverage may be further modulated by the analysis of distribution of beneficiaries by countries. As it can be seen on the figure below, the amounts of contribution are almost identical to each other. Compared to the 14.9 million EUR of Croatia, the amount is 13.5 million in the case of Hungary. However, it is apparent that organisations from the Croatian side dominate among the LBs.

Figure 23: EU contribution and number of beneficiaries by countries [Source: IMIS]



M 4.2 Assessment of strategic approach

Within the framework of this chapter the wider impacts of the approved projects are analysed. For this purpose we are evaluating the average project size by financing and the number of involved beneficiaries in comparison with the previous programming period. In addition we are analysing the specific value of indicators with the aim of reflecting on potentials of the cooperation programme. We also analyse how (much) the applicants tried to fit their project descriptions to planning documents, strategies of higher territorial levels.

The following table summarizes the average size of the (already) approved projects in the 2007-2013 and in the current project period.

Table 23: Average size of projects by financing and the number of project partners¹¹

	2007-2013	2014- 2018 September
Number of approved projects ¹²	169	54
Amount of EU contribution (€)	54 385 294.79	26 155 558.63
Average project size in €	321 806.48	484 362.20
Average project size by number of partners	3.09	3.24¹³

However, there is a strategic project among the approved ones ('De-mine HU-HR II' with 3 million € ERDF funding); it is obvious that the size of the projects in financial terms has

¹¹ Data source: IMIS, Final Implementation Report of the Hungary - Croatia Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013

¹² without B-Light Scheme

¹³ There was no Associated Beneficiaries involved

decreased in the current period in comparison with the previous one. The average project size in € is the 66% of the value of the 2007-2013 period.

Regarding the average number of beneficiaries involved in a CBC project, there are information shortages in case of the previous programming period.

Table 24: Specific indicator values based on the approved projects¹⁴

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value by approved projects	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Specific value of indicator (indicator/thousand €)
Total surface area of rehabilitated land	hectares	459.12	4 990 689.52	0.092
Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	27 557.00	15 473 140.42	1.781
Number of joint international studies	number	6.00	2 094 545.45	0.003
Number of participants in joint education training schemes and awareness raising programmes	number	581.00	2 094 545.45	0.277
Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	hectares	165.37	2 094 545.45	0.079
Number of tourism facilities / service providers being certified by an environmental sustainability scheme	number	23.00	2 776 161.29	0.008
People participating in joint actions and events	number	1 212.00	2 434 050.96	0.498
Number of harmonized processes, shared initiatives, coordinated policies and projects developed jointly	number	37.00	2 488 230.55	0.015
Number of institutions participating in joint capacity building actions	number	117.00	2 434 050.96	0.048
Number of involved marginalised persons in training programmes	number	475.00	1 903 313.42	0.250
Number of participants in joint education and training schemes to support youth employment, educational opportunities and higher and vocational education across borders	number	1 842.00	2 429 471.91	0.758
Number of educational premises upgraded with technical equipment	number	38.00	1 990 900.05	0.019
Number of educational premises refurbished	number	7.00	382 456.75	0.018
Training courses developed and delivered (formal and informal)	number	86.00	2 729 886.65	0.032

The table above aims to indicate what can be achieved by the programme support in terms of the programme output indicators. Regarding the methodology of the analysis,

¹⁴ Data source: IMIS

based on the already approved projects' data, we calculated how many measurement units of the particular indicators can be performed by one thousand euros. In line with these, the first value of the ratio means that 0,092 hectare of surface area can be rehabilitated from an amount of 1000 € ERDF Fund.

The results should be treated with reserves since there is some distortion because of the fact that a particular project may contribute to the achievement of more indicator target value than one. However, in case of these projects, we were not able to identify exact amount to the concerned indicators, therefore we took into consideration the whole amount in case of each relevant indicator.

Another aspect of analysing the strategic approach is to assess how the project owners embedded their visions and plans into their strategic environment. Based on the application forms, a number of marks of connection with previous programmes, current strategies and other points of reference had been found which can be classified into three groups:

- those cited strategies, policies, programmes and projects that define the legal, societal and economic context of the given project;
- those that establish a certain continuity of the project;
- those that define a certain relationship with other projects that the given project is in accordance with.

The first group contains those strategies, policies, programmes and projects that are mentioned by the given project in order to set the scene for its aims and interventions. These referenced documents are not necessarily strongly linked to the project and often are not used in order to implement its specific points but rather to convey a certain mission or ideology along the lines which the given project wishes to represent its own activity. For instance one project mentions that the '*[p]roject is in line with Croatian Tourism Development Strategy until 2020 and contributing to its main vision*'. Another points out the contextual synergy between their project and other entities this way: '*Our thematic route, road of tradition "CultuREvive Tour", will be in synergy with existing bicycle routes (South-Zala Bicycle Route, Drava Route, Tour de Mur), wine roads (e.g Wine Road of Zala), spa tourism (Lenti, Varasdinske Toplice) and other destinations in the project region*'.

The second group includes those documents that are referenced in order to establish a certain continuity for the given project. These form a temporal synergy as in most of these cases the referenced strategy or policy has already been concluded, however, together with the given project they create a continuity, a continuous synergy. A prime example for this could be the project that positions itself as the direct continuation of an

already finished action: *'It is the continuation of the CIN project financed and implemented within the framework of the previous (2007-2013) HU-HR IPA CBC Programme ensuring the next steps (according to the available resources) towards an attractive and competitive cross-border cycling region'*.

The third group, which is probably the most frequented, consists of those macro-regional strategies, other policies, programmes and projects that are mentioned because they are in a certain relationship with the given project. This relationship can be of:

- inspirational (for example: *'Europe 2020 strategy defines measures for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Project fits to priority related to sustainable growth which aim is to promote a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy'*),
- supporting (for example: *'The project main and specific objectives are complementary to and coherent with the objectives set out under the Thematic objective 06 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency, Investment priority 6c - Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage of the EU 2020 strategy, as they are supporting the use of the region's rich natural and cultural assets as the source of economic growth in line with sustainable development principles.'*),
- contributing to (for example: *'By focusing on development of water-based tourism product and creating an attractive tourism destination image in the cross-border area along Mura&Drava, project activities are directly contributing to existing development strategies on County level – Regional Development Plan for 2014-2020 Zala County, Međimurje County Development Strategy & County Development Strategy of Koprivnica-Križevci County'*) or simply
- being in accordance with (for example: *'Several of the project's objectives are in harmony with the Rural Development Programme, which supports the development of basic services in rural areas, the development of the producing, processing and storage capacities of local products, facilitates the cooperation of small operators (VP6- 16.9.1-16) and the cooperations for the establishment and promotion of short supply chains and local markets (VP3-16.4.1-16)'*).

However, the above deduced categorization is not the only existing way to analyse the synergies of the projects with the macro-regional strategies, policies, programmes and projects. Another approach is to assess which strategy or policy has been mentioned the most and thus has the greatest synergies with these given projects. The HU-HR IPA CBC is definitely the one that had been cited the most (35 occasions). The EU 2020 Strategy has been mentioned 32 times, showing that the currently valid strategy has an emphatic traction among the project creators as they make a considerable effort to tailor their

projects in a way that it would be in synergy with the Europe 2020 Strategy. The third most referenced such document is the EU Strategy for the Danube Region which has been mentioned 14 times as a strategy that the given project is in synergy with. However, there are also other macro-regional strategies, policies, programmes and projects that had been mentioned in considerable times, for example the EU Natura 2000.

Finally, it also has to be mentioned that not every project gave the same depth to their answers relating to the macro-regional synergies. Even though the vast majority of the projects mentioned at least three points of reference and linked them coherently to their own vision, there were cases where either a mere list of strategies and policies were given without any contextual explanation (*'Related projects among others: - Development of the Danube Cycle Route financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005-08). - Three rivers bicycle route: Barcs—Mohács section traced (INTERREG IIIA Slo-Hu-Cro, 2006-07). - Drava Bike Tour: tracing of the section Donji Miholjac-Belišće-Baranjsko Petrovo Selo (INTERREG IIIA Slo-Hu-Cro, 2007-08). - Via Pacis Pannonie (Pannon Route of Peace): tracing of cycle route between Osijek and Sombor through Baranja and Kopački rit (USAID). - Development of bicycle routes in the Northern part of Mohács (DDOP-5.1.1-11, 2011). - Cycling Danube: Improving the international Danube Bicycle Route (HR-SRB IPA CBC, 2011-12).'*) or where the answer has not entirely reflected the question of macro-regional synergies (*'Primary school Vladimir Nazor has already implemented CBC project DENACO where the school was a Lead Beneficiary. The project was based on joint cooperation with cross-border school from Barcs. The implementation was very successful and in one part, was a motivation to continue cross-border cooperation but on a different topic and therefore with different partners in order to expand cooperation. Besides that, children from Vladimir Nazor School participated in CBC project VIBA YOUTH where the LB was the City of Virovitica, the founder of school. This project was also very successful and children enjoyed its implementation'*).

5.2.3 Permanency

M 5.1 Sustainability analysis – project results

The Cooperation Programme puts great emphasis on ensuring the sustainability of the project results. In order to evaluate this aspect, a contextual analysis was carried out: with the help of the word cloud method the most frequent solutions was identified and analysed. This had been done through collecting all the application forms available in the IMIS and reviewing the methods and tools the selected projects planned to use in order to ensure the sustainability of their results.

In the case of the HU-HR programme the different methods ensuring the sustainability of the project results can be categorised into three different groups:

1. those that aim to ensure institutional sustainability;
2. those that intend to protect financial sustainability and
3. those that were proposed in order to help keep social sustainability.

The analysis will follow the logic of this categorisation.

Institutional sustainability

The analysis of the project inputs on institutional sustainability showed a fairly balanced distribution among the projects. While there was a relatively low number of cases where only a generic answer had been provided (such as: *'The project partners are committed to sustain the results institutionally.'*), the majority of the projects made a real effort to come up with proper methods and tools for ensuring institutional sustainability. As it is also visible from the word cloud generated, from the relevant sections of the application forms, these solutions mostly fall into one of the following categories:

1. methods based on the cooperation of the project partners;
2. methods based on a certain document (such as contracts, strategies, monitoring reports, agreements);
3. methods based on actual ownership and
4. methods based on merging the responsibilities of a given entity with the supervision of the sustainability of the project's results.

Figure 24: Word cloud method visualization of the institutional sustainability aspect



The first category is about those methods that ensure the institutional sustainability by trusting in the participating project partners that their cooperation creates such a firm foundation in the cross-border area that will continue in such a high intensity and efficiency that will extend both the programme's timeframe and thematic framework. One project for instance states that *'project partners will continue partnerships in new projects'* thus expressing that the continuity and sustainability lie within the good cooperation of the given stakeholders, related organizations and institutions.

The second category contains those popular methods that aim to ensure institutional sustainability of the projects' results through the use of certain documents. The most evident example is when one entity contracts another to continue the given activity, thus providing a legal guarantee for the sustainability of the project. For example, in one of the projects of Municipality of Mohács is expected to sign a contract with the Mohácsi Városgazdálkodási és Révhajózási Kft. for managing those pleasure-boats that are set into operation during the implementation of the project.

Another type of similar solutions (though in some cases without the legal guarantee) is the use of different strategies. Some of the projects contain the production of joint strategies which tackle the question of institutional sustainability as well. For example one project explains that *'future cooperation will be defined in the joint Strategy for Beekeeping Development of the project area'*. Similar to this is the project that secures institutional sustainability *'with the guidelines which will be developed through the analysis of the current waste management system in the cross border area'*.

Furthermore, to some degree the accreditation of different national and international conventions, memoranda and curricula is also able to guarantee the institutional sustainability. Such examples from the project application forms are: *'[t]he maintenance of the shipping lanes are ordered by International Conventions which ensure the future maintenance'* or *'[t]he previously signed Memorandum of Cooperation ensures the continuation of the cooperation.'*

Finally, there are beneficiaries which aim at guaranteeing the sustainability by monitoring activities (*'regular monitoring will take place beyond the closure of the scheme until 2023'*); and in a more intangible but not less important way through the *'knowledge and experience gained through the project [which] will ensure professional and institutional sustainability'*.

The third category includes those methods that approach the task of ensuring the institutional sustainability of the project results based on existing institutions. By openly designating the owners to the different outcomes (be that of infrastructural or immaterial nature) the preservation and continuation of the project results immediately become

more transparent and accountable. For example one project states that the institutional sustainability *'will be provided by City of Donji Miholjac and Tourist Board: City of Donji Miholjac will be the owner of the built infrastructure, Tourist Board will conduct all marketing and promotion related activities.'* Similarly another states that *'The wrestling clubs will be responsible for the maintenance of the equipment for 5 years after the project completion'*. From the many similar examples one more is worth mentioning, the one that links this category with the above mentioned one by suggesting to ensure the institutional sustainability this way: *'Hrvatske vode will take care of the maintenance through the management plan of the area Aljmaski rit'*.

The fourth group can be characterised by identification of a method based on merging the responsibilities of a given entity with the supervision of the sustainability of the project's results. In practice this means that a certain institution (most likely one or more of the project partners) will incorporate the management of the project's results in their daily operation tasks. Examples for this are the following: *'the partners have the appropriate organizational structures to integrate the results into their day-to-day activities'* or *'the maintenance of the newly established infrastructure will be part of the municipalities' daily agenda'*.

Financial sustainability

Similarly to the institutional sustainability in the case of the solutions proposed for ensuring financial sustainability also a high level of homogeneity was observable. In this section almost no general answer was provided which shows a considerable level of commitment from the side of the selected beneficiaries in terms of ensuring financial sustainability. As it can be seen at the tag cloud below, the solutions proposed can be categorised into four different groups:

1. ensuring separately, by each beneficiary;
2. outsourcing the financial burdens;
3. excluding the possibility of appearance of new expenses;
4. methods will be designed in the framework of project implementation.

Figure 25: Word cloud method visualization of the financial sustainability aspect



The means cited the most often were to dedicate this task to the responsibilities of each beneficiary and their financial plans. Since the project partners have a shared interest in being committed to sustain the results financially, they can in fact be expected to be responsible for the financial sustainability and implementation of the activities after the project's end.

The second most popular method was to find a way to somehow 'outsource' the financial burdens of the project to an institution or organisation that is able to take up the role of the financier. This institution can be a city council (*'the maintenance of the newly built bicycle path will be financed by City of Donji Miholjac budget, Municipality of Siklos also has financial capacity to sustain the project results'*), a civil association (*'The human resources and the costs of maintenance of the purchased equipment will be provided from the wrestling clubs' budgets'*), a directorate (*'The finances for the waterway monitoring will be covered by the Directorate'*), a local government (*'Funds for the maintenance will be allocated in local governments' budgets'*), private operator (*'It is based on the results of the project, i.e. realization of the planned investments. One solution can be to hand over ready-made attractions to private operators and the benefits would come from increased tax incomes, more tourists and work places.'*) or other public entity (*'Financial background will be ensured by sharing expenses among the Croatian government, Croatian Chamber and employers.'*).

The third type of handling is to make sure that no additional expenses will appear during and after the realization of the project. For instance, one project states that *'all promotional materials and purchased equipment will be available after the project's end so*

there will be no new expenses', meaning that the financial sustainability of the project is by definition not endangered by the possibility that the project beneficiaries will not be able to fund their activities after the closure of the project.

Finally, there were also cases where exact measures have not been drawn up yet, however, the beneficiary was conscious about this and included the design of the framework of securing the financial sustainability of the project within the project implementation phase itself. For example one such beneficiary explains that the financial stability of the project is *'secured with the guidelines which will be developed through the analysis of the current waste management system in the cross border area'*.

Social sustainability

Social sustainability was probably the aspect of ensuring the sustainability of the project results that grasped the beneficiaries' imagination the most. Several creative and interesting proposals had been mentioned in the application forms. The word cloud below intends to represent these colourful solutions that – for the sake of a clear analysis – had been grouped into three categories:

1. events;
2. personal contacts and established collaborations and
3. methods based on collected know-how.

Figure 26: Word cloud method visualization of the social sustainability aspect



Firstly, several ones of the projects regard the organisation of different events, festivals, competitions and expos as prime opportunities for maintaining those social bonds

created during the project implementation period and considered as outcomes of the project. This is the reason why one project states that *'the partnership is committed to organize commemoration events for Hungarian and Croatian literature'* or another points out that *'the partnership may create new activities and increase the number of the wrestling clubs which helps to strengthen the sport activities between the two nations'*. Subsequently, it can be said that annual, cross-border community building events and awareness raising campaigns are an efficient way of ensuring that the social sustainability of the projects' results are longer than the project itself.

Secondly, those personal contacts and working collaboration formed during the project will undoubtedly serve as a strong base for further applications. For instance one project says that *'the developed 'Bee-safari' Honey Tour' will work after the end of the project [because] the market relationships and collaborations between the beekeepers will last in the long run'*. Thus, the cooperation through joint actions between the stakeholders will strengthen the links between other relevant stakeholders using both online platforms (such as those Facebook groups that have been created by the partners of a given project) and offline venues (for instance the built visitor centres that will be used as networking places for tourism related professionals / organisations).

Finally, a large proportion of proposed solutions approach the task from the angle of the legacy of the collected know-how like project outputs such as databases, pilots, demos, best practices are good guardians of the social aspect of the projects' results. For example one project claims that *'the created database will be updated and will be available for all related stakeholders'* which nicely fits to another's idea saying that *'based on the demo the course can be implemented for other groups like architects, urban planners and civil engineers'* or with this project's claim: *'the established systems and innovative methods will be promoted to the public and will be used as demo/pilot for other locations'*.

M 5.2 Sustainability analysis – project partnership

One of the key components of long-lasting success of the programme lies in the sustainability of the project partnerships. Previous empirical cases prove that if a partnership is formed on an ad-hoc, hurried way lacking a proper foundation then that will have an adverse effect on the sustainability of the partnership. Consequently, when it comes to the evaluation of the programme it is essential to shed light on how permanent the current partnerships are, what kind of historic background do they have and what future prospects do they claim to envisage for themselves. In order to be able to provide a detailed picture about these issues, first we analysed the partnerships registered in the IMIS according to aspects as follows: legal status of beneficiaries, and sociogram of the

partnerships. In parallel to that applicants were asked to fill-out an on-line questionnaire where the following questions were raised:

- What was the reason of selecting the partner?
- How long is the partnership with the beneficiary (in years)?
- Give examples of previous joint projects or project proposals together with the beneficiary.
- Give examples of joint events held with the beneficiary.
- What kind of joint prospects for the future do you foster with the beneficiary?
- How do/did you want to guarantee the sustainability of the partnership after the completion of the project?

The answers to these open-ended questions resulted in a detailed rich qualitative database that is analysed below as well as completed with some statistical statements deducted from those answers that were quantifiable. All in all, 43 respondents answered the relevant questions.

Analysis of the partnerships based on the IMIS

The number of beneficiaries registered in the IMIS is 185 of whom 56% are Croatian and 44% are Hungarian. With regard to the type of beneficial institutions the local governments as well as the different public organisations are very active in the partnerships. The participation of the development agencies is outstanding on the Croatian side, though it is due to development policy and organisational reasons. Church, foundation and EGTC can be found only from the Hungarian side.

Table 25: Summarizing table of the types of institutions

Type of institution	Croatian	Hungarian	Total
Local government	28	21	49
Budgetary organisation of the central state budget	14	23	37
Development agency	20	3	23
Public body	11	9	20
Public non-profit company	14	4	18
Non-governmental organisation	6	8	14
Budgetary organisation of a local government	9	3	12
Church		4	4
Foundation		4	4
For-profit organisation of state or local government	2	1	3

Type of institution	Croatian	Hungarian	Total
EGTC		1	1
Total	104	81	185

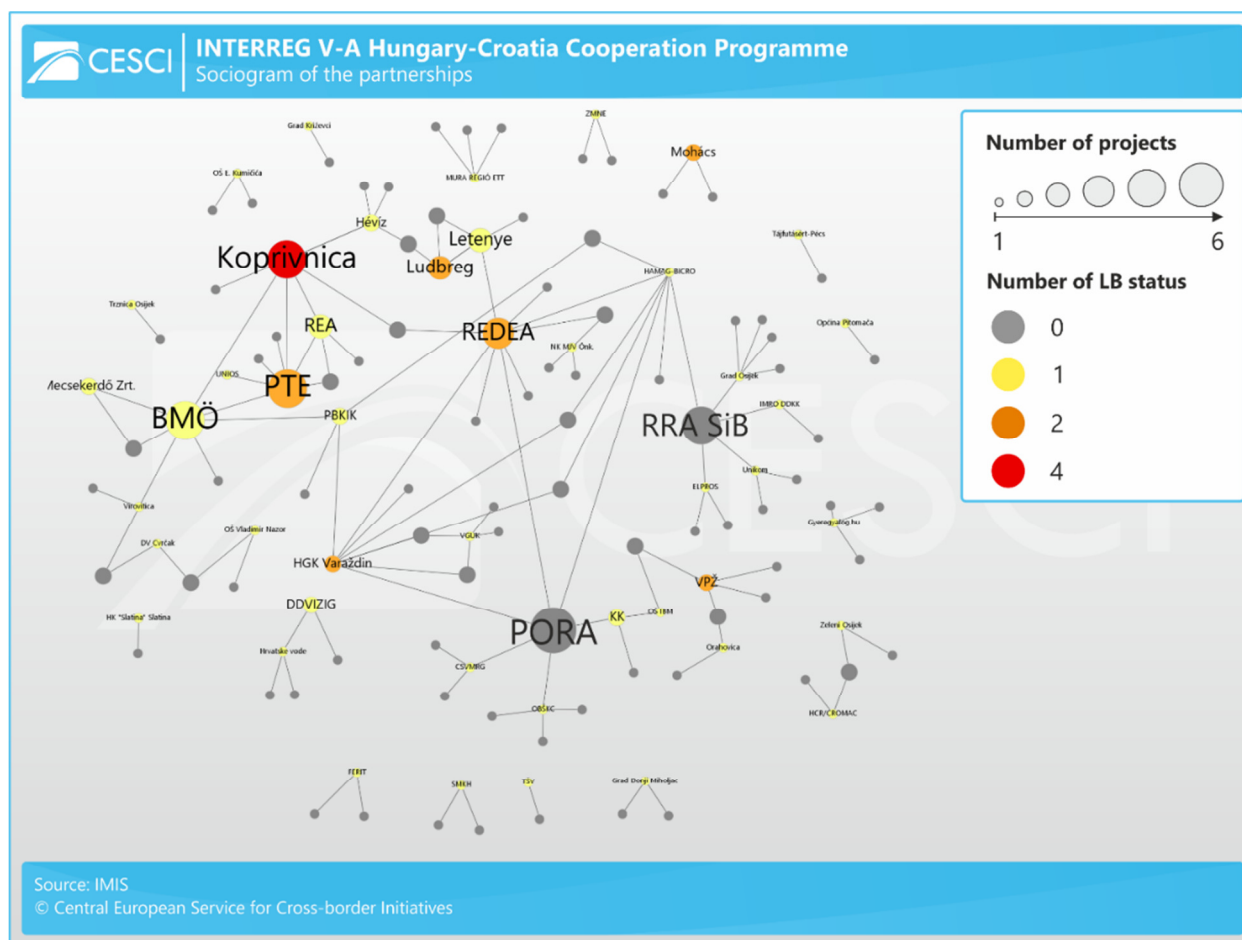
Analysing the legal status of the beneficiaries of the Programme it can be concluded that public sector is in overwhelming majority among all beneficiaries in both countries. However, it is worth noting that the presence of the private sector on the Hungarian side is significantly higher. While in Croatia only 7% of the beneficiaries are from public sector, in Hungary this value almost reaches 30%.

Table 26: Summarizing table of the legal status

Legal status	Croatian	Hungarian	Total
Public	97	63	160
Private	7	18	25
Total	104	81	185

We get an overall picture on the complexity of partnerships in case we draw up a sociogram of the given partnerships. On the figure below quite complex partnership network can be observed. The majority of beneficiaries (100) take part in a single project. In parallel with that the most active project partners of the border region can also be seen quite clearly; they function almost as hubs. There are a total number of 9 organisations which take part in 3 or more projects. In comparison, the latter it is also worth detecting that there are 6 organisations which are LBs in the case of two projects, and also one which leads 4 projects.

Figure 27: Sociogram of the partnerships [Source: IMIS]



Reasons for selecting the partner (on-line questionnaire)

The first aspect is the reason of selecting the given partner. The respondents were asked to answer this question in relation to their each project partner they are working with which meant that 84 different answers arrived relating to the first, second, third and fourth partners. According to these answers, three distinct reasons are identified that play an important role in the selection of the project partners, these being:

1. previous good experiences;
2. proven expertise and
3. recommendations.

Previous good experiences definitely play an important role in selecting the project partner. A high number of beneficiaries reported that they selected the given project partner because they have had a successful cooperation for years (for example: *'Good previous experience with implementing EU projects'*). Another example supporting this argument: *'previous collaboration, partner's experience in cross-border projects, cyclotourism and environment protection.'*

The second considered aspect seems to be the level of expertise of the project partner. From the answers it can be seen that the beneficiaries made an effort to select partners

that had the capacity to add real value to the project. For instance one respondent identifies as the reason for selecting the given partner being its *'good reputation in project's preparation and implementation'*. Others referenced in their answers the long-term fruitful collaboration and compatibility as well as the previous experiences and knowledge the chosen partner had in project preparation and implementation.

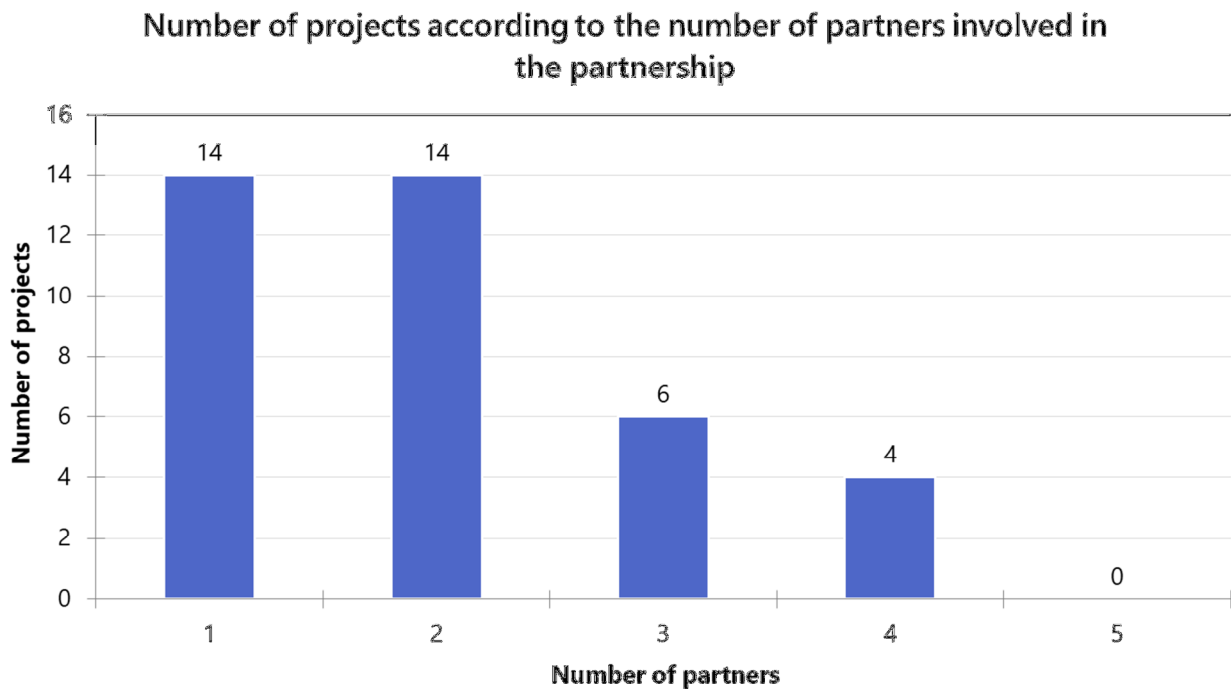
Finally, some of the decisions were made based on the recommendations received. For example one beneficiary reported that they *'established the partnership with a certain partner because the other partner already taking part in the project suggested the other party to be a real added value to the programme'*.

Historic background (on-line questionnaire)

In order to assess the sustainability of the partnerships, it is important to know the prehistory of the partnership. Even though the results might be to some degree biased as the respondents might not have regarded the on-line questionnaire an official document thus might have taken less care in providing absolutely exact data, it is a reasonable expectation that they know fairly well the answer to this question. Consequently, the results can be informative on the general trends of the length of the partnerships.

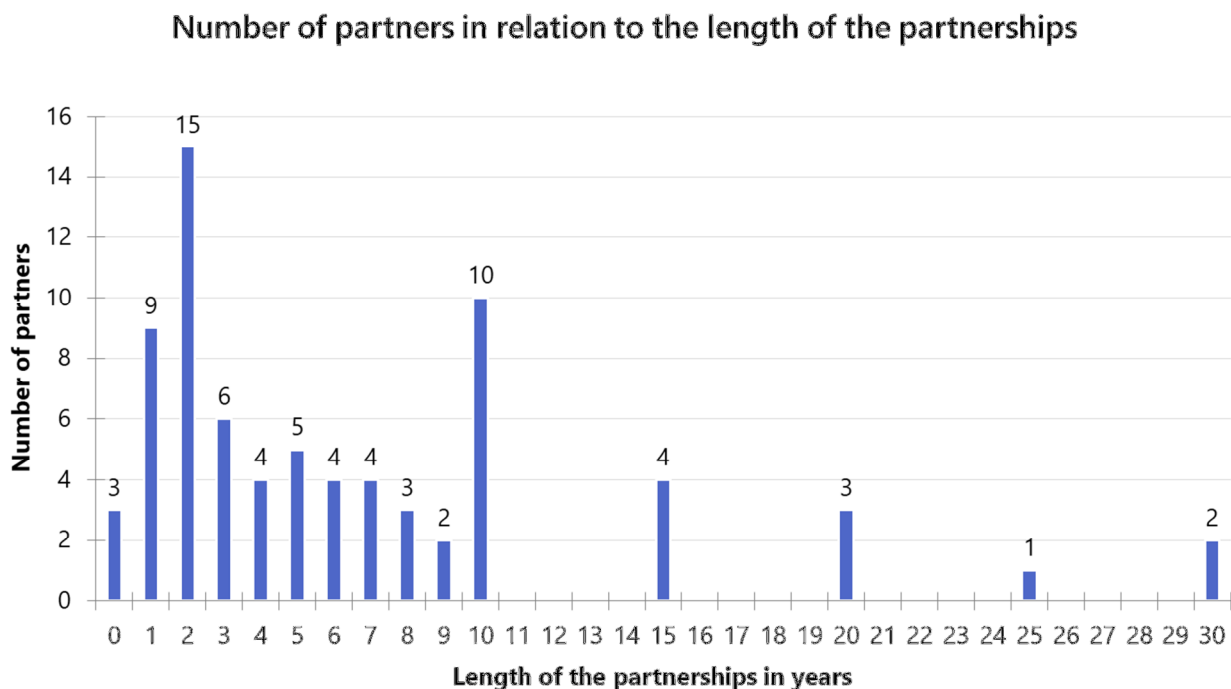
The first diagram illustrates the number of projects according to the scope of partnership, i.e. how many beneficiaries have one, two, three or four partners in the currently implemented projects. According to this, more than one third of the projects has only one partner, one third has two and almost the same proportion of projects are divided between three or four project partners.

Figure 28: Number of projects according to the number of partners involved in the partnership [Source: Questionnaire]



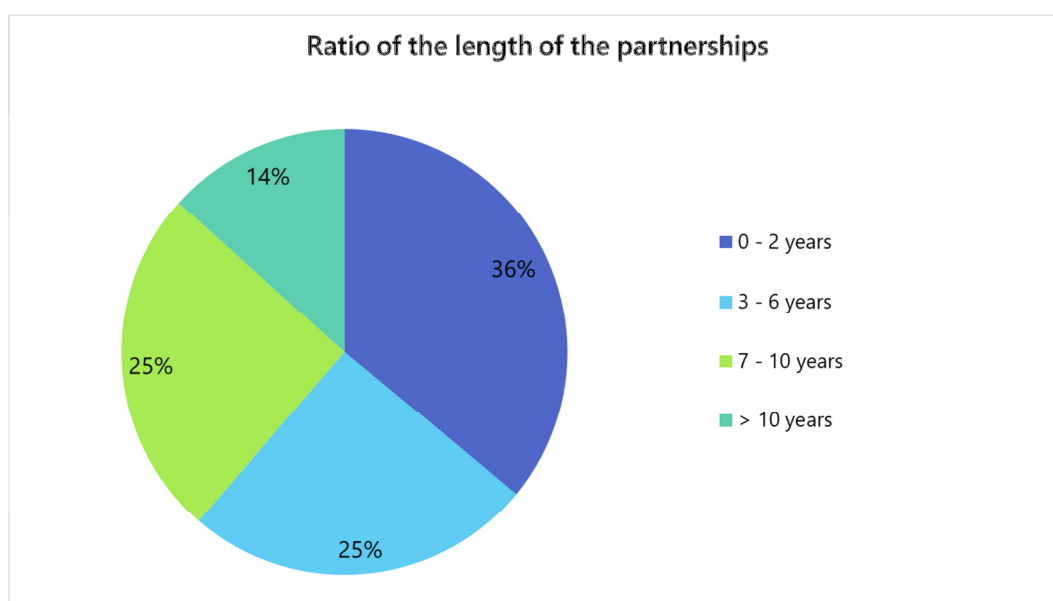
The number of partners was assessed also in relation to the length of the partnership. As it can be seen from the diagram below, there are two peaks in the distribution. The biggest one is at two years, which option was chosen by 15 respondents. The other is at 10 years, marked by 10 respondents.

Figure 29: Number of partners in relation to the length of the partnerships [Source: Questionnaire]



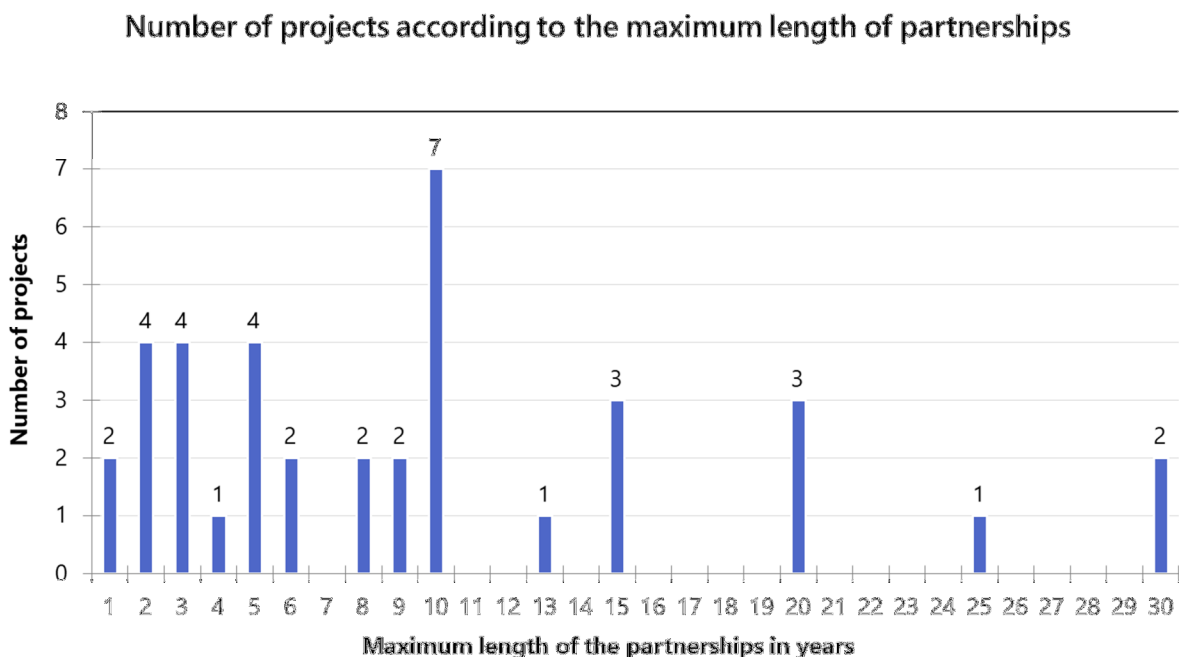
The majority (61%) of the partnerships is younger than 6 years. As it can be seen from the diagram below, 36% is 0-2 years old, 25% is 3-6 years old and 25% is 7-10 years old. Those partnerships that are reported to be functional for more than 10 years represent 13% of the partnerships assessed what is still a remarkable rate. 10 year old partnerships justify very strong commitment and make sustainability self-evident.

Figure 30: Ratio of the length of the partnerships [Source: Questionnaire]



Finally, it also can be informative to analyse the maximal length of partnership within a given project. Since more than half of the projects have more than one partner, for each project the most permanent partnership was selected and assessed in order to see how the trends are affected if – in this way – the totally new and the less permanent partnerships are eliminated. As it is clear from the diagram below, even though the distribution of the project lengths are more even, no real change can be detected, meaning that the trend-setters are not the oldest, lengthiest partnerships.

Figure 31: Number of projects according to the maximum length of partnerships [Source: Questionnaire]



In the pursuit of assessing the sustainability of the project partnerships and to shed light on the history of their previous cooperation, the beneficiaries were requested to give examples of previous joint projects or project proposals. Out of the 63 valid answers received, 16 stated that they did not have any project or project proposal before. The others enlisted a wide variety of different relevant experiences, these were collected in the table below:

Figure 32: Examples of previous joint projects or project proposals together with the beneficiary

B Light, Leonardo da Vinci Innovation Transfer, INNOINVEST
Similar projects in the area of nature conservation.
The jointly implemented project in the last call ended very successfully.
Development of Pécs-Osijek-Antunovac-Ivanovac biking route (Acronym Cross - Border Bike Project) Hungary-Croatia IPA Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013
BICBC (HU-HR IPA CBC 2007-2013)
Town of Donji Miholjac and Siklos town are twinning towns
CultuREvive I and II
CultuREvive I, II
Culturevive, Culturevive II
De-mine HU-HR.
Ecotop: Understanding and educating of ECOTOURISM through cross-border cooperation
Pre Mu Dra (CBC HU HR))
HAMURA

Lingua, Danube, Two rivers one hill.
1. IPA CBC HU-CRO Wine Stories - first project, LB Orahovica, Villany P1 - the predecessor of the current wine project in Interreg (2013/2014), 2. IPA CBC "EOP" project on mediaeval culture, LB Villany, P1 Orahovica (2014/2015)
TEMPUS project- STEAMED; IPA HUHR- Cabcos, Health Impulse, Work and Health, Health Management
Medgen Borza, OP SLO-HR 2007.-2014.
We have cooperate on previous projects: REGPHOSYS and UNIREG IMPULSE
3 previous joint programmes in education and strengthening competences of pupils and teachers
Similar projects
mutual cultural joint projects and investments in the Drava region
meetings, sharing best practices
Beneficiary 1 cooperated with other Beneficiary organizations in our county; through the implementation of other projects of cross-border cooperation. In this way, the Lead Beneficiary connected with Beneficiary 1 and established a permanent link on which joint project preparation was initiated.
We cooperated on implementation of the project Micro-regional business partnership development for founding self-sustainable production systems in the Drava Eco-Region and project "Co-Operate" - labour market model program along the Drava.
IPA CBC Hr - Srb, Together we stand, IPA CBC Hu - HR, Regions2sustain
NP
Mutual project implementation in the area of nature conservation.
Collaboration in all cultural events in the city, work on the development of cultural tourism.
Sustainable Heritage (INTERREG Europe)
All projects held in Donji Miholjac
Research projects, guest lectures, publications
Partners has previously, but in national projects.
Ecotop, InnoCropFood
EU Compass, Tourism4C,.. (CBC HU HR)
The first official partner in the project, but since 2013, continued cooperation through the county development agency VIDRA, which in the previous two projects (IPA CBC) was a partner in front of the County
„Muraside Bridge Fair“, PRO-MUR,
some previous project e.g. ERASMUS +
Project UNIREG IMPULSE
BiCoa
EE and RES projects
The Lead Beneficiary monitors and supports the implementation of projects that Beneficiary 2 prepares in co-operation with other institutions from the County that are founded by Virovitica-Podravina County.
We cooperated on few EU projects proposals and on local projects of Municipality.

Other CBC projects
Joint Planning CODE
Pre Mu Dra, EU Compass, EU Compass 2, Tourism4C
Energy projects
Energy

Similarly, the respondents were requested to give examples of the joint events that they held with their partners. Even though – as it was pointed out above at the numerical analysis – the majority of the partnerships are relatively new and thus did not have plenty of time to have a vast amount of jointly organized events, numerous respondents were able to enlist a wide range of joint events such as conferences, workshops, promotional events, study tours, fairs, cultural activities, press conferences etc. The table below shows these events in details.

Table 27: Examples of joint events held with the beneficiary

Conferences, forums
National Strategy for Croatia 2030 (workshop)
Opening and closing events of the projects.
Common exhibitions, such as canned and film workshops, fairs.
Project closing conference, maintenance of already existing web site, TV coverage,
Several events during the BICBC project, project preparatory meeting for the current project.
We have participated in joint manifestations during the years
joint competitions
Folk dance camp
Guest lectures, postdoctoral research visit, exchange of students and teachers, attending conferences together
Opening and closing event, workshops
communication events (opening and closing conf., press conf., dissemination events), study tours, joint workshops
Organization of joint dissemination events, workshop, study tours
Renaissance Festival, Motives of Podravina, Potter Festival, Eco-culture and bagpipe maker camp, Eco - etno festival
Conferences, workshops, check on the spot, meetings...
Only jointly events during implementation of EBM projects was held.
workshops, project meetings
Study tours, Fairs, conferences, meetings and other type of events
Final and kick-off meeting of the project HAMURA

Events in joint project - conferences, round tables.
Traditional Wine and Culinary Fair (Orahovica), Rose Festival (Villany), If on Fridays there is Villany, Wine Marathon (two-way), Wine Queen Choir (Both), EU Music Festival (Villany)
Several congresses and educations
setting up of monuments to industrial heritage, joint exhibitions, joint conference on industrial heritage
opening and closing conferences, workshops, seminars
Market parades
workshops, public forums, events, association of civil associations, association of tourism
project workshops and other professional meetings
Teacher workshops, study tour to Germany, 10 day Science summer camp, kick off/final conference, creating Pilot curriculum and Manual of exercise
Kick Off event, closing conference, workshops,
We participate at different events of interest for Bayash people in both the countries.
Final conferences and other project events.
No joint events before the project. However, local artist groups have participated at each other's' events.
apart from project event, there wasn't any
joint workshops, joint elaboration of curricula etc.
All types of events
researches, exhibitions, cultural programmes
researches, exhibitions, cultural programmes
professional conference
Organized public events focused on the promotion of projects that were carried out in the area of neighboring counties. Organization of other events aimed at promoting the natural values of neighboring counties.
Final conferences of projects were joint events.
Promotional and educational events
Workshops, conferences
Only in the previous year and within the AgriShort project (few workshops and trainings)
Ecological awareness events.
Film Festival, Open Air Cinema, Fairs, Winter Cinema, Slatina Cultural Summer
Cultural manifestations, workshops, press conferences
All projects held in Donji Miholjac
guest lectures, conferences
Dissemination events, workshops, study tour
Motives of Podravina, Potter Festival, Eco-culture and bagpipe maker camp, Eco - etno festival
Meetings.
Jointly concerts.

conference, workshop
Study tours, Fairs, conferences, meetings and other type of events
Etno meetings
Wine and Culinary Fair, Regional Selection of the Wine Queen, Training of Hungarian Wineries in Orahovic
joint conferences on industrial heritage, joint exhibitions, sport events
manifestations, cooperation of civil societies, tourist connections
Kick off meeting/final conference, workshops for teacher, study tour in Germany, Joint summer Science camp, information and publicity
Kick-Off event, Closing conference, workshops
joint project activities and events
apart from project events, there isn't any
NA
All kinds of events
Joint organization of activities for visitors, tourists and County residents related to work Beneficiary 2. Monitoring of work Beneficiary 2. Promotion of protected natural values in the county with joint cooperation.
Together we held final conference of the project and local fairs in Municipality. Also, three Panona fests were successfully organized continuing and further developing the urban getaway and land art festival.
Promotional and educational events
Conferences, forums
conferences, workshops, trainings
Fairs, B2B, Conferences, seminars, meetings and other types of events
Workshops for teacher, study tour in Germany, kick of meeting/final conference, making a new Pilot curriculum and Manual of exercises, Joint summer Science camp
twin city delegations visited the other city
All type of events
Promotional events
a lot of events are organized jointly by the municipality and the association
All types of events

Future prospects (on-line questionnaire)

When asked about the future prospects with the given partners, the beneficiaries did not engage in lengthy explanations. The answers were mostly along the lines of expressing their desire and commitment to continue the given partnership. For instance: *'collaboration is continually continuing independently of the project. Csurgo and Slatina cooperate through joint fairs and cultural events'* or *'future projects of bike routes and cyclotourism development and environment protection etc.'*

Furthermore, the respondents were asked about how they planned to guarantee the sustainability of the partnership after the completion of the project. Here the most frequent answer was that the project's motivation was the guarantee of the sustainability of the partnership; since the partners joined their resources in order to attain a goal that was important for them for a number of reasons, they would not cease to be interested in the issue after the conclusion of the project period. For instance, one project beneficiary stated that *'The professional past and expertise in project implementation of Green Osijek and Municipality of Antunovac created strong partnership which is the guarantee of the sustainability of the new partnerships, developed through this project. Also, innovative character of the project is putting together the two EuroVelos by new capillary routes, which opens up a new horizon in the region's active tourism, and provokes new tourism possibilities, which creates the basis for further partnership and collaboration at further future projects, joint events and activities.'*

As about the exact way how they planned to maintain these connections, some said that through sharing news and circulating relevant information among each other would result in a strong and lively network that would have a value and resilience in itself, independent from the project and its time restrictions. Others committed themselves to continue to organize a wide variety of events, meetings, festivals in order to facilitate the process of nurturing these personal and professional relationships that are necessary for keeping the partnerships functional in the future too. For example: *'Certainly by visiting traditional events on both sides of the border, exchanging experiences and cooperation of our winemakers and small agricultural producers, visiting the Lake Excursion at Orahovica and the sights near Villany, the exchange of gastro products'*.

M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

Integrated approach is assessed considering the obligations of Regulation No 1303/2013 and Regulation No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.¹⁵ The analysis is based partly on the programme documents where the tools are designed and the calls where the tools are implemented (technical description); partly on the information gathered from the programme management (interviews) and the lead beneficiaries (on-line survey). The assessment focuses on the impact of the designated

¹⁵ REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006; REGULATION (EU) No 1299/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal

tools on territorial integrated approach. First the integrated approach in the given cooperation programme then the main findings are treated.

Integrated approach in the cooperation programme

The programme document discusses the integrated approach in section 4. According to this part, tools of integrated approach are not planned to be used. Community-led local development, integrated actions for sustainable urban development and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) are not applicable.

There are two fields where integrated approach can be detected indirectly: in B Light Scheme and in strategic project of De-contamination of war-affected territories (De-mine HU-HR II), however neither of them are good examples of real integrated approach.

B Light Scheme as part of PA1 *Economic development* is integrated from the point of view of partnership (PPs) and activities. The whole amount of financial support of PA1 is dedicated to B Light Scheme, and a cross-border SME development partnership has been entitled with the overall management of the SME development scheme. Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments (HAMAG-BICRO), as Lead Beneficiary of the project named "Fostering value added business cooperation between SMEs operating on different sides of the Hungary-Croatia border" managed the relevant Call. Beneficiary should fall into the category of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) stipulated in 651/2014/EU Regulation, Annex 1.

In terms of activities, the following types of cooperation are supported in a synergic way: joint product, technology and service development, supplier chains, common marketing, future establishment of a joint venture. By the assistance of this special development scheme SMEs are expected to develop joint projects aiming at establishing business cooperation. The integrative part of this scheme is the involvement of SME sector in cross-border cooperation.

De-mine HU-HR II can be seen as a (partly) integrated action because it was focusing on a specific area where landmines and other objects (UXOs: hand grenades, mortar shells etc.) were deployed or left on the field after the Yugoslav wars in the 90s. The project is focused on a well-targeted border line between River Drava and River Danube contaminated by mines and UXOs. The project integrates mainly nature protection goals mixed with tourism ones. With demining of this territory local population and tourists will be able to use land for their activities, e.g. hunting and fishing tourism that is very developed in this area. It will also create safe environment for the development of rural tourism and small farms based on the description of the project. Activities include demining of minefields on the Croatian side, quality assurance and quality control, non-

technical survey for UXO's, technical survey and abolition of the UXO contamination, environmental rehabilitation, furthermore geodetic measurement, renovation and maintenance of border marker stones.

Main findings of the integrated approach

Based on the programme documents, the calls of B Light Scheme and De-mine HU-HR II, furthermore interviews and experiences of the applicants, the main findings can be summarised as follows:

- B Light Scheme and De-mine HU-HR II do not exactly represent the genuine integrated approach, these tools has just indirect elements of integrated methodology. Although, it is important to have this first step to the direction of a more integrated approach of a next programme.
- Integrated approach does need a little bit more time to be applied in the border region, thus more time and knowledge should be given to the potential applicants (e.g. by dissemination of integrated CBC projects);
- Integrated approach needs to be better learnt by the locals, small steps would be worth taking towards a higher level of use of the approach;
- B Light Scheme has been a scheme that actively helps Hungarian and Croatian SMEs in meeting and planning joint project concepts;
- De-mine HU-HR II could have incorporated other aims and activities reaching a higher level of complexity and territorial impact such as promotion of natural heritage, enhance of cross-border mobility, support of low-carbon economy etc. within the cross-border project area;
- The concept of strategic projects should be kept for the future;
- Local Action Groups might be potential applicants for integrated projects and calls;
- Even though the involvement of SMEs are welcomed by many interviewees, it is difficult to involve SMEs in cross-border activities; they represent a heterogeneous target group;
- Integrated approach should mean higher level of sustainability of project results and higher level of integration of partners even after the closure of the projects;
- The territorial impacts of the interventions cannot detected yet.

5.3 Efficiency

5.3.1 Performance management

M 6.1 Institution assessment

Management structure

In the Cooperation Program the following authorities and bodies were determined:

Table 28: Authorities and bodies of the programme

Authority/body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
Managing Authority	MA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade/ Budapest, Hungary Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes ¹⁶	... the overall management and implementation of the Programme towards the European Commission. Although the MA bears overall responsibility for the Programme, certain horizontal tasks are delegated to the JS.
National Authority	NA	Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of the Republic of Croatia Service for Cross-border Cooperation, Sector for European Territorial Cooperation Directorate for Regional Development	... the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the Programme on national level in Croatia.
Certifying Authority	CA	Hungarian State Treasury, Financial Control and Central Irregularity Department, Compliance Department	... certifying declarations of expenditure and applications for payment before they are sent to the EC
Audit Authority	AA	Directorate General for Audit of European funds	... verifying the effective functioning of the management and control system
Control Bodies (First Level Control)	FLC HR	Agency for Regional Development of the Republic of Croatia	... carrying out verifications in relation to beneficiaries on its territory.
	FLC HU	Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit Ltd. (SZPO) SZPO Central Control Department, SZPO West Hungarian Control Department in Pécs and Zalaegerszeg	

¹⁶ In 2018 this department transferred from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Authority/body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
Joint Secretariat	JS	Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit Ltd.	<p>... assisting the MA and the MC in carrying out their respective duties.</p> <p>Topics of JS's tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General programme coordination • Secretariat tasks for the Monitoring Committee • Administrative activities • Programme monitoring and information system • Programme evaluation • Coordinating project development (generation) and selection • Implementation • Information and publicity
JS Contact Points	JS CPs	JS Contact Point in Čakovec, JS Contact Point in Osijek	... providing information at regional level and for supporting project development and programme communication in Croatia.
Monitoring Committee	MC	<i>See the list of MC members at the end of the chapter</i>	... supervising and monitoring the programme implementation; selecting operations.

The different authorities/bodies have their own procedure manuals.

Procedures for programme's implementation (from Cfp to payment)

The cooperation programme is implemented through calls (CfP), subsequently, the selected beneficiaries implement projects. The main steps and the responsible subjects of this process within the programme are the following ones:

- The MA, with the support of the NA and the JS, launches official CfPs via relevant information channels.
- MC approves Guide for Applicants and the evaluation manual, determining the project selection model and further details of the CfP.
- Applications submitted are evaluated against a pre-defined set of criteria. Final decision about selection of projects is the responsibility of the MC. In overall, the programme supports projects having a clear focus on the implementation of joint cross-border actions and demonstrating the value added of the cross-border approach versus regional, national, interregional or transnational approaches.
- After the approval of a project proposal by the MC, the ERDF contract is signed between the Managing Authority and the Lead Beneficiary.

- During the implementation of the project, the beneficiaries periodically report about their timely progress. On the basis of the approved reports, the MA receives the ERDF support from the European Commission that is further referred to the Lead Beneficiary, who is then responsible for transferring the ERDF financing, with no delay, to the project partners.
- Closing of the project takes place on the basis of the Joint Procedures Manual.

List of MC members

Participating voting members

- Representative delegated by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes (NA)
- Baranya County
- Somogy County
- Zala County
- Ministry of Regional Development and EU funds of the Republic of Croatia (NA)
- Međimurska County
- Koprivničko-križevačka County
- Virovitičko-podravska County
- Osječko-baranjska County
- Varaždinska County/ Permanent deputy of Međimurska County
- Bjelovarsko-bilogorska County/ Permanent deputy of Koprivničko-križevačka County
- Požeško-slavonska County/ Permanent deputy of Virovitičko-podravska County
- Vukovarsko-srijemska County/ Permanent deputy of Osječko-baranjska County

Observers and members in advisory capacity:

- European Commission DG Regional and Urban Policy Competence Centre for Macro-regions and European Territorial Cooperation
- Ministry of Innovation and Technology, Hungary
- Ministry of Finance, Hungary
- Ministry of Human Capacities, Hungary
- Ministry of Agriculture, Hungary
- Hungarian State Treasury, Certifying Authority
- Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (DGAEF), Hungary
- Agency for Audit of European Union Programmes Implementation System, Croatia
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary
- Ministry of Environment and Energy, Croatia

- Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts, Croatia
- Ministry of Science and Education, Croatia
- Ministry of Tourism, Croatia
- Danube Region Strategy National Co-ordinator, Croatia (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs)
- Danube Region Strategy National Co-ordinator, Hungary (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade)
- Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit LLC. (hosting institution of HU-HR JS)

NGO-s and other stakeholders

- Croatian Chamber of Economy
- Association of Municipalities; Association of Cities
- ACT-Autonomous Centre
- Directorate General of Social Affairs and Child Protection Sub-Office in Zala County
- Equal Treatment Authority
- Drava Federation

M 6.2 Capacity assessment

Within the framework of the chapter we are analysing one of the main factors of efficiency, namely the use and design of capacities. The capacity assessment has two dimensions: one is about the description of the available capacities and their needs in terms of skills, professional experiences and development needs; while the other focuses on the way of utilisation of these capacities.

The Managing Authority operates as a separate department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary. The department has been replaced from the Prime Minister's Office according to a decision made on 22 May 2018. It continues its operation as a separate department with 3 units. There are total of 17 persons employed who are responsible for the management of 7 cooperation programmes. In general, the involvement of 5 more people would be necessary for legal, monitoring and evaluator positions. The Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme is managed by a junior programme manager.

The role of the National Authority on the Croatian side is undertaken by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds which has separate departments for cross-border cooperation for EU and non-EU Member States. Within the first one, a 5-membered team works for the implementation of 3 CBC programmes. In addition, it is important to note,

that there is no budget allocated to staff costs of the National Authority in Croatia, which means that only the travel, accommodation and equipment costs are eligible within the TA. That is the reason why they are not able to employ more staff members, however at least one further person would be needed.

In terms of the skills and knowledge necessary for the job, the language issue is very important, the high level of education is mandatory while the type of qualification varies. In addition, there is a need for professional knowledge by priority axes, because there are several tasks such as the selection of indicators, where getting familiar with the CBC programmes in general and the border region is not sufficient.

At the bodies linked to the Joint Secretariat in Budapest, Pécs, Osijek and Čakovec 8 people are employed: the head of Joint Secretariat, 2 programme managers and 2 financial managers in Budapest, 2 programme and communication managers in the regional Contact Points in Osijek and Čakovec and 1 programme manager in JS Pécs office. It is difficult to employ competent persons from both sides of the border; however, it seems that the composition and the number of staff members became appropriate by now.

Regarding the profile of the staff members, the problems are similar in terms of the shortages in sectorial knowledge (e.g. lack of water management expert). To address this issue would be very important because they are involved in the quality assessment procedure. Another solution can be to re-structure the quality assessment procedures in a way that the JS staff is not in charge of evaluating professional or technical parts of the projects. The alternative way means a three-level evaluation model where the JS assesses the cross-border character of the projects (what should have a much bigger role in scoring that it has now); external experts are in charge of professional quality assessment (since they have the appropriate knowledge for this job); and also the counties could be involved in the process by checking the territorial relevance of the proposals. This way, the capacities of the JS would be released and the staff could rather concentrate on factors where they have the broadest knowledge and experiences. In addition, the representatives of the counties would gain a broader overview on the projects planned to be realised on their own territory; they could better orientate the activities of the applicants through recommendations; and those county representatives who are at the same time members of the MC could be better involved in the selection procedure – what was a demand met during the interviews.

M 6.3 Lead time assessment

The lead time assessment aims to analyse the efficiency of programme management in terms of the procedures applied and the model of timing of these procedures. We are examining the operation of the particular management bodies and the relevant consequences of their cooperation as well.

The Managing Authority of the programme is operating in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary together with the MAs of other CBC programmes. Since the concerned department in the Ministry is responsible for 7 programmes in total and the implementation of each programme is at a different progress level, the workload is constantly high. In line with the closure of the 2007-2013 programmes, the situation is getting better, but after the allocation of the actual budget the process will turn back because of the accounting process and the planning for the next period happening at the same time.

In terms of the programme implementation in general, there is a huge delay because of the problems during the establishment of the IMIS. The submission of the first reports happened 7-8 month later than it should have but it seems that the verification will go faster which may mean time saving.

The workload of the JS staff have been higher until the closure of the 2007-2013 programme, but there are peak periods in line with the preparation of the new call for proposals, around the MC meetings and during the quality assessment procedures. They would outsource more evaluation tasks which is hindered by the low budget allocated to Technical Assistance in the current programme.

From this point of view, the use of continuously open calls would be beneficial – as it was planned earlier since this solution makes the implementation and the workload more predictable, the human resource management more manageable. Due to the problems of the IMIS, this solution cannot be applied anymore.

M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures

A further point to be considered when evaluating the efficiency of the HU-HR programme is the assessment of the programme's performance procedures especially from the point of view of the level of fine-tuning the procedures. Subsequently, the analysis attempts to shed light on the clear share of responsibilities; management of procedures; handling of disputes; quality assurance of the procedures: handling of feedback, self-monitoring methods; transparency of the evaluation and selection processes. The main sources of

information for this sub-chapter are the interviews and the relevant sections of the online survey.

The most important outcome of the interviews was that the vast majority of the procedures are delivered in a high quality due to the extended experiences of the participating entities. Especially it seems from the interviews that frequent and efficient communication among the interested parties is a reality to which many respondents attribute the smooth operation. However, there are still some problem points which leave room for improvement. The most often mentioned difficulties are connected to the human resource capacities and to the IMIS system.

The problem with the human capacities lies in the low number of employees working on the different aspects of the programme procedures. More additional employees would render more manageable the distribution of workload.

The other problem point mentioned very often by the interviewees is the IMIS system which is a complex electronic platform designed to facilitate the different procedures. The problem is that the start of its operation was fairly belated causing several troubles resulting in significant delays (in some cases up to 2 years). This delay is viewed as a real risk factor in the timely completion of the whole programme. According to the interviewees the IMIS system should have been functional already before the first round of call for applications. Even more, the Croatian NA blocked the publication of the 2nd call until the IMIS is ready to operation.

Another important resource of the evaluation is the information how project partners consider the level of transparency of the evaluation and selection procedures of the programme. In order to gain insight into this issue, the beneficiaries have been asked about it in an online survey. The results show a high level of satisfaction since nearly three quarters of the respondents answered that they found the procedures to be transparent and the information on the evaluation criteria and the selection procedures provided to be correct and available. 22% of the respondents were a bit more critical and stated that the procedures have not been transparent enough but the information was provided in due time (as forecasted) and the lack of transparency have not harmed the fair process. There were about 6% of the respondents who considered either that the procedures have hardly been transparent (the evaluation criteria have been fairly published and easy to find but the applicants have not been informed on the steps taken and the progress of the evaluation) or the procedures were unfair and the decisions were made in an ad-hoc and not transparent way.

The respondents were further prompted to give more detailed explanations on their evaluation of transparency. Here, most of them reiterated that they were satisfied with

the level of transparency of the procedures and the quality of information they received. It has to be underlined that transparency is implemented outstandingly in the programme; 83% of the respondents think the information on the evaluation criteria and the selection procedures provided are correct and available. Only a small minority of 16% voted for answers which state minor problems in the current system. There was one related suggestion that the applicant should receive a summary of evaluation and not just a yes or no answer as that could help the applicant in future applications. Contrary to this suggestion coming from the questionnaire the applicant does receive a detailed description. Even if the answer is yes from the assessors, there can be conditions formulated by the MC, which imply possible weaknesses of a project. In case of no due to week quality, the notification letter contains the list of substantial deficiencies found the quality assessors. The beneficiaries of the rejected projects receive the summary of evaluation. Furthermore, all beneficiaries can have a personal insight into the quality assessment grids if they enquire, however not many have lived with this opportunity so far.

M 6.5 Assessment of assistance provided

Technical assistance (TA) is the fifth priority axis of the Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Cooperation Programme and its attributes are defined in line with the Article 17 of Regulation (EU) no 1299/2013 which limits the Technical Assistance (TA) at a maximum of 6% of the total ERDF amount allocated to the programme with a 45% co-financing rate.

The TA's main aim is to help the implementation of the programme, to involve all the relevant partners and to increase the capacity of the stakeholders dedicated to cross-border actions. Subsequently, the TA sets out two specific objectives: (1) to assist with the core management for the realization of the programme and (2) to design and put in place auxiliary activities in supporting the generation and implementation of high-quality, result-oriented cross-border projects and partnerships.

In practice the above means six different actions:

- the continuous administration and management of the CBC Programme;
- the presence of the Programme in the programme area;
- the improvement of the capacity of applicants and beneficiaries to apply for and to use the programme;
- the improvement of the administrative procedures and the mitigation of the administrative burden of the Beneficiaries;
- the transfer of knowledge between the two programming periods;

- the capitalisation of the programme’s results through studies, reports, on-going evaluations, workshops and integrated databases.

The table below shows the output indicators expected to contribute to results within PA5:

Table 29: TA relevant output indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data
5.1	Projects selected for financing	Number	100.00	Monitoring system
5.2	Electronic monitoring system established	Number	1.0	MA
5.3	Programme evaluation plan prepared (and approved by the MC)	Number	1.0	MA
5.4	Programme communication plan prepared (and approved by the MC)	Number	1.0	MA
5.5	Guiding documents addressed to applicants and beneficiaries	Number	3.0	JS
5.6	Publicity events	Number of events	10.00	JS
5.7	Number of employees (FTEs) whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	Number of FTEs	9.00	MA

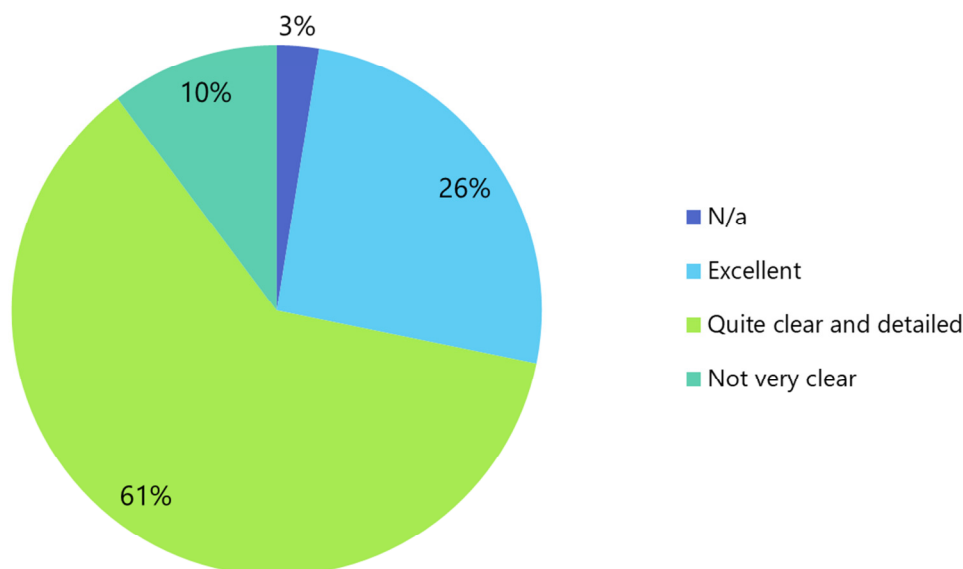
In order to authentically assess the efficiency of technical assistance, the project beneficiaries were asked about their experiences related to the quality of assistance provided by the relevant programme implementation bodies. The main aspects of the inquiry were the following: clarity, availability and user friendliness of the provided information; assistance offered to project and partnership development, project implementation and monitoring.

The assessment of the project beneficiaries’ experiences had been carried out through a complex online questionnaire where 11 questions were closely related to the technical assistance priority axis. In the case of the Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia programme 43 valid answers were collected.

Clarity

Figure 33: The respondents' view on the clarity of the information on the calls [Source: Questionnaire]

The respondents' view on the clarity of the information on the calls



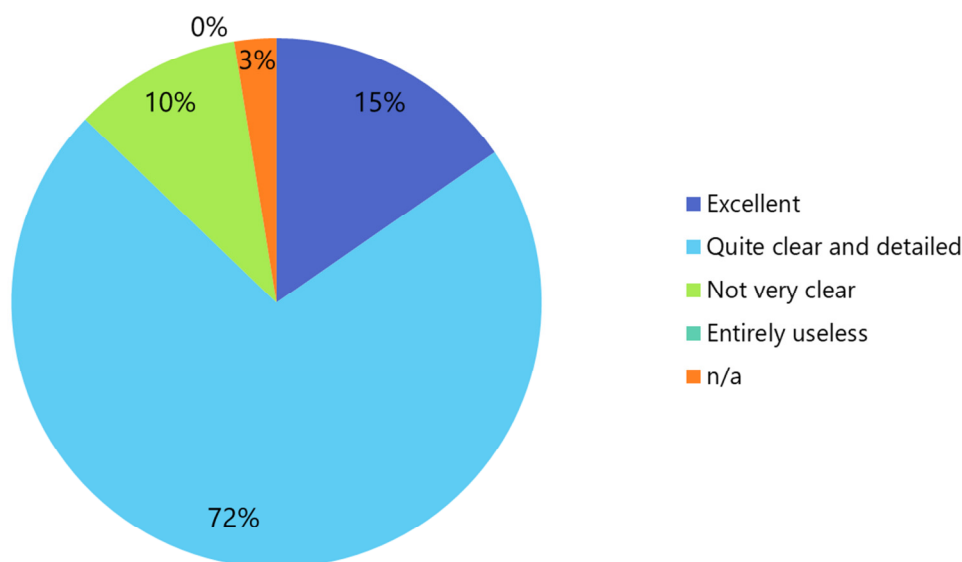
The participants of the questionnaire were asked about their view on the clarity of the information on the call which had been available at the programme website. The vast majority of the respondents voiced their satisfaction in relation to the clarity of the information. 26% said it had been excellent and 61% opted for the *'quite clear and detailed'* response meaning that all in all 87% of the respondents chose an answer more positive than negative. It is also a palpable detail that while according to 10% of the respondents the clarity of the information was not very clear, nobody rated it entirely useless (3% did not provide an answer).

Availability

The respondents were asked also about the availability of the information on the rules of application. Here 15% said it had been excellent and 72% opted for the *'quite clear and detailed'* option which again shows a high level of general satisfaction. It was less than 10% of the respondents who said that the available information had not been very clear while again there was no respondent who rated the available information as entirely useless (3% did not provide an answer).

Figure 34: The respondents' view on the availability of the information [Source: Questionnaire]

The respondents' view on the availability of the information



The respondents were also asked to give a reason why they selected the answer to the previous question. Obviously the general satisfaction was also represented in these answers. Most of them stated something along the lines of *'the rules are clear and distinct'*, *'detailed'* and *'the rules were clearly described in the guidelines'*. Some respondents pointed out that for them it had been relatively easy to understand the rules and attributed this to their previous experiences in the preparation of applications in the given programme. However, there were also a considerable number of answers which pointed out that the *'instructions on filling in the partner statement and other supporting documents was unclear i.e. parts of it were not explained in detail'*. Others also considered that there had been some logical inconsistencies that had been unclear how should be handled (for instance regarding the original founding documents that had not been possible to be completed or the contradictions between the different sections of the call). There were also respondents who considered that the explanations had been quite well elaborated but alluded to the fact that the site had not always been working. One respondent said that they had difficulties because at the time of the start of their project *'there were no available rules and guidelines as well as the IMIS system, which during the implementation was not working for our project.'*

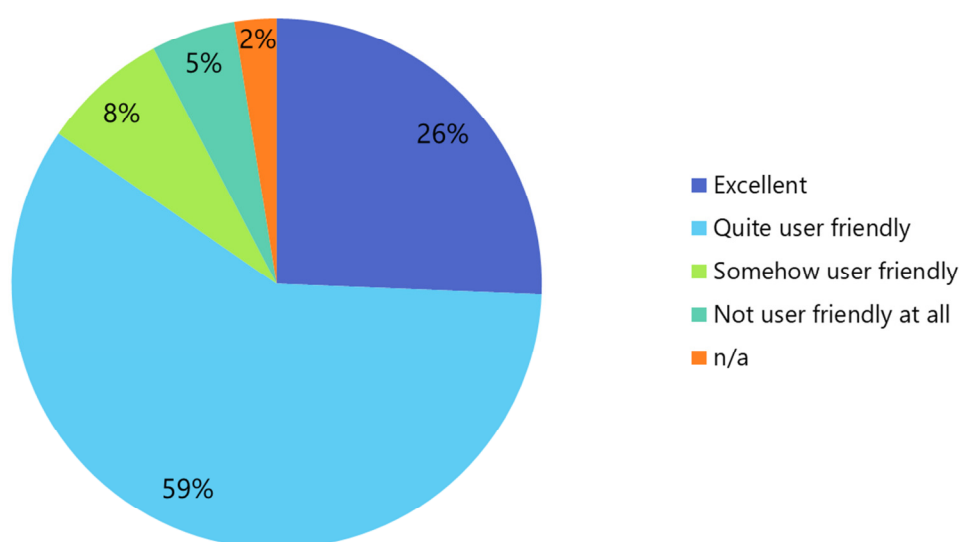
User friendliness

When asked about the user friendliness of the information on the call available at the programme website the respondents still expressed a high level of general satisfaction,

though here the answers were a bit more balanced. 26% said it was excellent, while 59% opted for a more moderate *'quite user friendly'* option, all in all making it 85% of the respondents who rated the user friendliness more positive than negative. On the other hand, 8% of the respondents opted for the *'somehow user friendly'* option while 5% deemed the website as to be not user friendly at all, reaching the highest level of dissatisfaction.

Figure 35: The respondents' view on the user friendliness of the information [Source: Questionnaire]

The respondents' view on the user friendliness of the information



Support

The respondents also were asked whether they had got any support on behalf of the programme implementation bodies (Joint Secretariat, Information Point) during the *project development*. Among the respondents who gave an answer to this question only one respondent said 'no' expressing that they had not got any support during the implementation of the project. Then those who said that they received support were asked to evaluate the quality of the received support.

Here vast majority considered the quality of the support to be excellent, while only 4% said unsatisfactory. This result shows that the support offered for the beneficiaries is mostly adequate but there is still a bit of room for improvements.

The respondents were requested to justify their answers. Those who considered the quality of the received support excellent usually felt that the availability and the communication had been of a high standard and the programme implementation bodies had been approachable enough to get *'great support and concrete recommendations'*

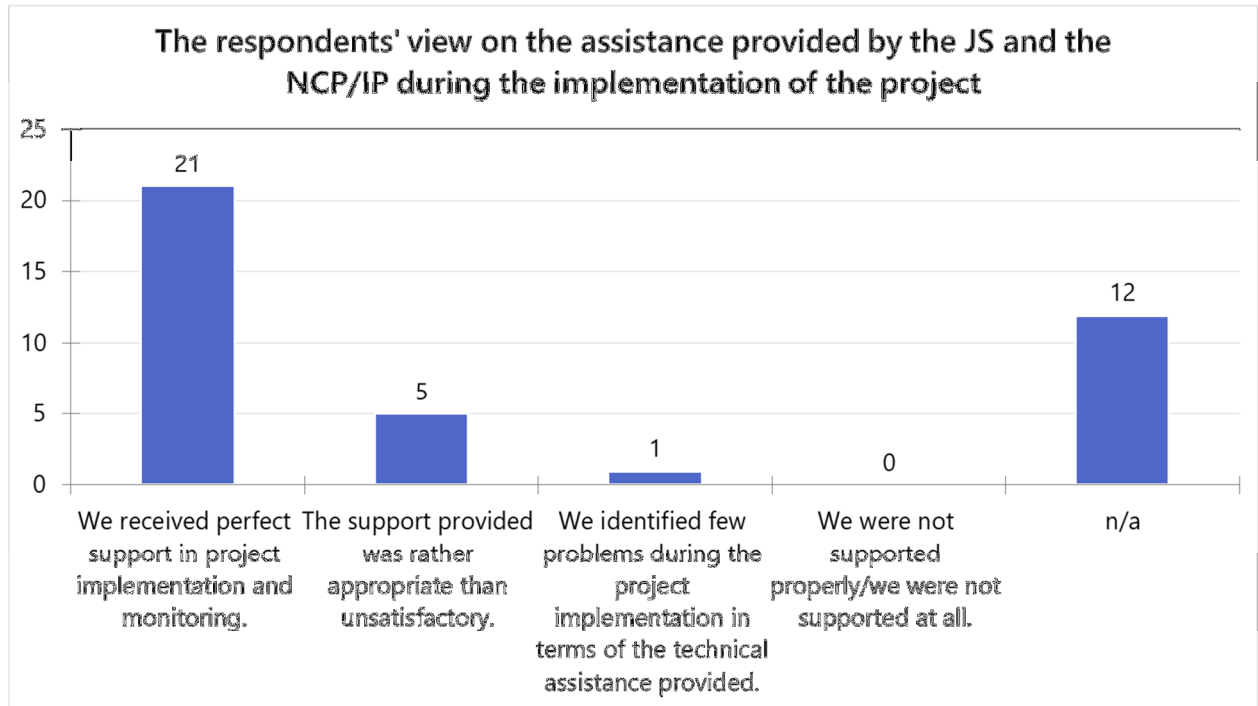
during the project idea development which helps us to prepare a quality application.' Others also supported this opinion by stating that all their questions had been handled professionally and the answers provided had been prompt and helpful.

Those who rated the quality of the support as quite good had some important feedback that could be taken into consideration in the future. One such observation is that the operational elaboration of the project proposal started relatively late, therefore no in-depth and detailed consultation could take place with the JS in advance. The other useful feedback is that sometimes it was difficult to find answers and solutions to the specific elements of the project (e.g.: groundwater monitoring wells, special bird protection areas as indicator etc.).

The two respondents, who evaluated the support as unsatisfactory, explained their views by citing concrete examples where the information that they had received later proved to be inaccurate causing severe problems. In one of these cases, a partner NGO were deemed to be eligible, but afterwards the project was rejected due to the same partner being in incompliance with the rules. The second case also resulted in rejection as even though it had been checked by the responsible person, it still got rejected at the end due to being incomplete – a fact that have not been communicated to the applicant after the supervision. However, it is known by all the involved actors that support that the JS provides by pre-checking the projects is not a guarantee for approval.

The following question inquired the assistance provided by the JS and the JS CP during the *implementation* of the project. 54% of the respondents stated that they had received perfect support in project implementation and monitoring. 13% said that the support that they were provided with had been more appropriate than unsatisfactory. 3% reported that they identified a few problems during the project implementation in terms of the assistance. 30% of the respondents left this question blank.

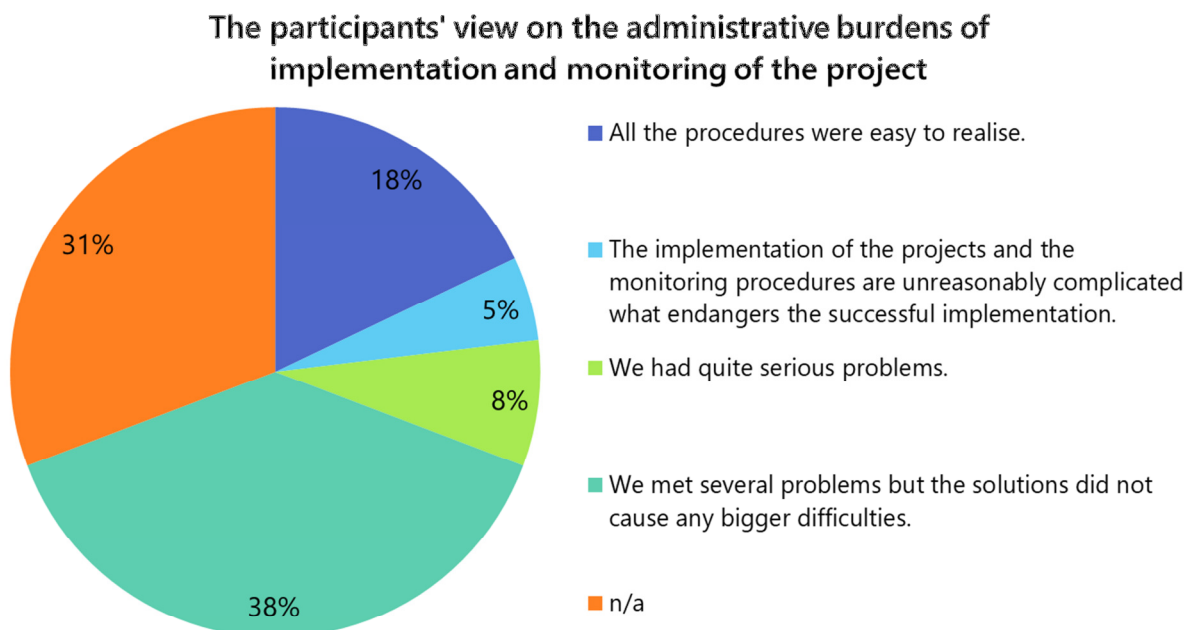
Figure 36: The respondents' view on the assistance provided by the JS and the JS CP during the implementation of the project [Source: Questionnaire]



Most of the identified problems concern the IMIS system, which was set up *'extremely late, way after the beginning of project implementation'*. Two respondents stated that the delays in decision making caused a serious problem. A project leader explained in detail that they were satisfied with the speed and depth of the information and support received from the JS during the implementation of the project but the problem point was in regard to receiving information on the selection of the project and contracting. This is problematic because the leader and the partners cannot properly plan the financial constructions as they do not know when they are going to be able to send their reports and claim back their own funds.

The final question regarding the assistance aimed to explore the beneficiaries' opinions on the administrative burdens of the *implementation and monitoring* of the project. 19% of the respondents had exclusively good experiences and considered that all the procedures had been easy to realize. However, the vast majority of the respondents, 63%, said that they had encountered several problems, though they had managed to find a solution without bigger difficulties. 11% reported that they had had serious problems, while 7% assessed the administrative burden as too extensive, stating that *'the implementation of the projects and the monitoring procedures are unreasonably complicated what endangers the successful implementation.'*

Figure 37: The participants' view on the administrative burdens of implementation and monitoring of the project [Source: Questionnaire]



The vast majority of the detailed serious problems are related to the IMIS system '*not working properly*'. Others said that the IMIS have been launched with delay; it was still half-developed and not logical in some terms. Access to the system is overcomplicated and not user friendly requiring a lot of time from the users to learn how to use it. Furthermore, the IMIS system is also causing problems with the deadlines and the financial audits – for instance one respondent reported that '*we do not have authenticated in the original copies of the reports and the approved costs (signature and stamp as it was sent by mail), so the IMIS asked us for proof that this is valid, also with demanding changes - they ask us to confirm that the JTS approved it.*'

Others criticized the whole reporting procedure saying that it does not take into account the operation and administrative procedures of a municipality. Contradictory information and the difficulty with IMIS '*at certain points totally endangers the professional implementation of the project.*'

Another respondent stated that they faced several problems with the Hungarian FLC. They considered that the financial monitoring procedure was complicated and there were many unnecessary documents during the validation of costs. They also reported that they felt unreasonable and unfair that the two control bodies (HU FLC, HR FLC) had not been working on the same basis, there had been differences in rules which were not stemming from the national legislations. Moreover, they also found it problematic that with the

merge of their two periods the reporting procedure had been too long and they had not received the ERDF amount in due time.

Taking into account the above remarks and critics the vast majority of which are not known by the JS, the online survey proved to be very beneficial in the perspective of the current evaluation work. However, the procedures should be regularly revised and for this purpose, the application of similar surveys seems to be useful. The JS should address the beneficiaries by online questionnaires through which, they can indicate the difficulties they meet during project development and implementation. Based on the reactions, the JS could improve the quality of their operation.

M 6.6 Simplification test

Within the framework of the chapter we are analysing how the recommendations on simplification of the previous programme period have been taken into account, then we are evaluating the actual implementation rules, including the eligible expenditures, simplified cost options, procurement and state aid rules, reporting and e-application processes, from the perspective of administrative burdens.

In the On-going Programme Evaluation of the Hungary - Croatia Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013, the following recommendations were drafted:

1. to shift toward an electronic submission system
2. to ease burdens concerning the supporting documents
3. to simplify and speed up cost accounting, reporting procedures and payments
4. to apply different application and selection procedures such as two-step and multi-phase application or automatic selection
5. to extend the circle of eligible applicants by involving SMEs
6. to provide more technical assistance, knowledge transfer, guidance for the beneficiaries in the implementation phase.

In the following table we are examining the responses given by the current programme to the recommendations listed above. Regarding the colour coding, green means that the action is fully implemented, yellow indicates that it is in progress or partially addressed, while the red coloured matters have not been addressed yet or will not be addressed at programme level.

Table 30: Recommendations and responses in terms of simplification

Recommendation	Response
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Recommendation	Response
Electronic submission system	The IMIS as on-line application and reporting tool are going to be launched in line with the publication of the 2 nd Call for proposals. In addition, the projects selected in 2017 are performing their reporting activities already in the integrated electronic monitoring system.
Less/easier submission of supporting documents	The list of mandatory supporting documents is the same as it was in the last programming period. However, thanks to the IMIS, only scanned version must be uploaded, instead of sending hard copies.
Simplified cost	Beside the establishment of the IMIS, the application of simplified cost options also enhances the simpler and faster procedures: lump sum for preparation costs, flat-rate opportunity in case of staff costs: 10% or 20% of direct costs other than staff cost, mandatory flat-rate in case of administrative costs: 15% of staff cost, lump sum for general (office) equipment. There is no need for justifying documentation in either case.
Simplified reporting conditions	With the integrated (reporting) system, the preparation of the project report for the LB is much easier and faster than in the previous programming period because basically all data are coming up from the validated Beneficiary Reports. The burden on the LB is much less in this respect. Also, novelty of this period is that Beneficiary Reports are to be submitted on both sides through the system. In the previous period the electronic beneficiary reporting was only available on the Hungarian side but in the current period it has been introduced in Croatia as well.
Tailor-made application and selection procedures similarly to B Light Scheme and strategic projects	Within the B Light Scheme the whole amount dedicated to PA1 is allocated to business support organizations as Beneficiaries. They open call for proposals for SMEs in form of a two-step application procedure. Besides B Light Scheme, the introduction of so called strategic projects is also a new type of automatic selection procedure which should be taken into account in the programme.
Involving SMEs	SMEs are eligible within the B Light Scheme.
More technical assistance	The concerned management bodies provide guidelines and organize focused info days (B Light Scheme, FLC, LB) for supporting the project application and implementation. 3 JS Contact Points have been set up providing direct personal consultation for local stakeholders, potential applicants, and project beneficiaries.

As it seems, all of the challenges of the previous programming period were partly or fully addressed when planning the current programme. However it is worth analysing how the

results of these programming intentions are perceived from the ground/in practice. To this end we have examined the implementation rules from administrative perspective by an on-line survey among the beneficiaries and personal interviews in the programme management bodies.

Eligible expenditures

In terms of the eligible expenditures it seems that the Beneficiaries are satisfied with the current system, only 6% of them made any remarks on the issue. These were about the difficulties of accounting the staff costs for municipality employees in Hungary, the ineligibility of travel and accommodation costs in case of external staff costs. In addition, the cost of some actions such as study tours to Western European border regions should be considered as eligible. (The last remark misses the goal since there is an opportunity to report this type of costs.)

Simplified cost option

According to both the results of the on-line survey and the experiences of the programme management staff, the flat-rate cost options are welcomed, however it seems that it is barely exploited in the case of the staff costs. It is possible for any organisation to apply for flat rate staff cost option but the number of applicants could be increased.

On the other hand, flat-rate for administration and lump-sums work well, there are proposals for introducing similar options for travel and accommodation costs, communication and publicity events and elements as well - from both beneficiary and management sides.

Advance payments

The majority of the respondents indicated that the lack of pre-financing in Croatia means a major problem. Several proposals were made for addressing this issue as soon as possible.

Public procurement

Regarding the public procurement processes, it seems that there are difficulties concerning the interpretation of the rules which may root in related specific terminology (there is a need for clear explanation).

State aid rules

According to the representatives of the programme management, the application of state aid rules means a huge administrative burden which requires experts; however, the

quantity and financial value of the cases do not reason this step. In case of the B Light Scheme, the task is subcontracted to an expert company.

E-application and reporting

There was a delay in the development of the IMIS. It is expected that the integrated system launched in 2018 will make the administrative procedures easier, quicker and paperless, however technical failures must be eliminated first. The flow of supporting documents between the various programme management bodies and the different steps of project application and implementation should be solved as well in order to save time and resources.

Language

The programme management staff on Croatian side has faced language problems caused by the weak language skills of several Hungarian partners and the incorrectly translated project outputs to Croatian. They proposed to use the Technical Assistance budget for financing better translations.

M 6.7 Assessment of ownership

One of the main aims of the European Commission in respect of cross-border programmes is to strengthen their ownership principle. It means that the programmes should not be only the tools of cross-border integration and cohesion but also those of democratisation. Although direct target group of the programming and decision making are the NUTS III level municipalities (and the relevant ministries) creating the frames for regional ownership, there is a clear effort to open the gate for further stakeholders. In harmony with this tendency, different stakeholders (local municipalities, regional development agents, professional bodies, CSOs, etc.) used to be invited to take part in the programming as it was the case with the current CBC programme as well. At the same time, when speaking about programme implementation, the situation is different.

Different social partners are represented at the MC meetings with an observer status (even more, the MC meetings can be attended by any stakeholder of the programming region) but the voting rights are exercised by the traditional members, i.e. national authorities, the county representatives, ministries and the national level representatives of the municipalities. It seems that there is an interest among local stakeholders to take ownership but this has to be supported through various institutional devices and procedures as well as making sure that the introduction of these changes would not affect adversely the efficiency of the monitoring committee. As it was said by the Desk

Officer, responsible for the supervision of the Programme in the first MC meeting: It is very important that the work of the MC is transparent which is partly assured by the *'inclusion and presence of both the voting and the non-voting Members'*.

Besides, some interviewees mentioned that the local stakeholders were not interested in participating in the programming. Another argument was that social partners did not have the necessarily wide overview on issues of the cross-border programme since they were experts of a certain industry thus their knowledge and experience should have been channelled through specific working groups or to each county's own industry-specific council.

The question of ownership was raised in the on-line questionnaire, too. From among the 29 respondents two were members of the MC, nobody used to participate in the meetings with an observer status, and one beneficiary was involved in the programming but not in the work of the MC. Especially the low representation in the programming is worth thinking about since 52% of the selected projects' beneficiaries filled-in the questionnaire. It means that they are the real owners of the programme but they did not take part in its shaping what is an important lesson to learn for the next programming period. The selected beneficiaries should be addressed directly during the designing procedure in order to strengthen the ownership of the programme.

Apart from the above mentioned ongoing discourses two other ideas had been formulated by the interviewees on how to improve the ownership level. First through a more even share of the rights and responsibilities of the programme management, an improved involvement and commitment might be reached from the part of the local stakeholders as well. Second, the number of Contact Points should be increased as currently it is very low. By being more present and more approachable, the local stakeholder's sense of ownership is expected to be increase as well.

5.3.2 Costs of operation

M 7.1 Cost efficiency assessment

Within the framework of the cost efficiency assessment, costs related to the Technical Assistance priority axis of the programme of the previous and current period (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) are analysed along by two aspects.

In general, the TA priority axis aims to support the implementation and audit of the cooperation programme itself, to ensure its visibility and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the involved partners from the border regions.

Both in the previous and current programming periods, the Technical Assistance priority axis was managed according to a project-based approach. All programme management activities reimbursed by TA had to be prepared in the form of "TA project proposals" to be approved by the Monitoring Committee. The TA budget covers the operational costs of all programme management bodies including the Joint Secretariat, the National, the Management and the Certifying Authorities; and the first level control system.

For the assessment of cost efficiency, two indicators are applied: the staff cost/budget ratio gives the rate in terms of staff cost in relationship with the total budget of the programme, while the specific administrative cost ratio indicates the unit cost of the programme level administration of the implementation of one project. It was planned that both indices would be compared with those of the previous programme, however, in case of the staff cost for both periods, we faced lack of appropriate data.

1. Staff cost/budget ratio

Regarding the staff cost/budget ratio, there is no available data on the amount of planned staff costs. In the Annual Implementation Report 2017, it is found that all 8 TA projects were approved by the MC at its first meeting on 8 December 2015. In addition, *"following the electronic monitoring system's becoming fully operational in 2018, the TA Beneficiaries will start reporting their costs, and after the necessary validation and payment steps there will be more data available regarding TA projects' spending in the annual report to be submitted in 2019"*¹⁷. In the document, it was also reported, that due to the n+3 rule and the tasks connected to the programme of the 2007-2013 period, 2017 was the first year when the JS members' personal costs (9 altogether) had entirely been financed from the TA sources of the current programme.

¹⁷ Annual Implementation Report 2017, p.33

2. Specific administrative cost ratio

The specific administrative cost ratio can be calculated and evaluated by using the proportional TA cost for the first 4 years of the programme implementation (considering the n+3 rule) and the actual number of supported projects according to the Annual Implementation Report of 2017 including those of the TA. As a result, the TA cost per project is 42 129.45 € which is almost two times higher than it was in the last programming period (23 545.49). This result can be justified by the relatively low number of supported projects what stems from the delay in the programme kick-off and the publication of the calls for proposals. In case, we expect a similar ratio in terms of the total programme budget and the supported projects as it was in the previous programming period, the specific administrative cost ratio would be similar as well.

Table 31: Specific administrative cost ratio in the previous and the current programme¹⁸

	2007-2013	2014-2020	Estimated values for 2014-2017
TA budget (€)	3 861 460	6 635 389.00	2 654 155.60
Number of projects	169	n.d.	63
Specific administrative cost ratio (€/project)	23 545.49	-	42 129.45

As a conclusion, the assessment of the cost efficiency can hardly be performed because of major shortages in appropriate data. In case of the staff cost/budget ratio the amount of staff cost is missing for both periods, while the value of the specific administrative cost ratio is distorted by the estimation.

¹⁸ Sources: On-going Programme Evaluation of the Hungary - Croatia Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013, Summary of results and recommendations; Annual Implementation Report 2017; IMIS

5.4 Prognosis and risk assessment

In this chapter we summarised and assessed the major risks, the programme management is facing and we drafted a prognosis in line with the steps recommended to be taken.

5.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

Delayed installation of the IMIS system

The electronic monitoring system of the programme was developed very slowly (it was launched in 2018 instead of the planned date of November, 2015).

There were several problems occurring during the starting phase of the programme implementation stemming from the lack of the IMIS, for instance:

- the TA module started in 2018, until that time, the financing of the TA activities had to be ensured by the parties themselves;
- the beneficiaries should have uploaded the first reports from September, 2017; instead, they could make it with 7 to 8 months delay what resulted in blocking of the implementation and financing of some projects;
- similarly, the partners of the B Light Scheme call were not able to report their activities for long time; in the time of making the interview, the report was already submitted but the reimbursement had not happened;
- the projects could not be modified before the start of the IMIS;
- the strategic project ended in May, 2018 realised in a paper format, without being registered in the IMIS, what makes problems regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the project results;
- there are modules (e.g. irregularities) which are still not available through the system;
- the second call should have been published at the beginning of 2017 but the Croatian authorities blocked the launch of the procedure until the IMIS is fully operating;
- the late publication of the calls will result in an overlap between the subsequent programmes (2014-2020 and 2021-2027) causing capacity difficulties for the programme management bodies.

By some interviewees, the constraints caused by the lack of the monitoring system, negatively affected even the bilateral relations.

Based on the interviewees' views, the problems with the IMIS stemmed mainly from the incompetence of the developers. Besides, the solutions developed are not always in harmony with the needs of the users.

Table 32: The risk of IMIS and its management

The impact of the risk	Clarification	Handling
Low	While the progress of the programme implementation was fundamentally hindered by the lack of the IMIS system, thanks to the high allocation rate reached during the first call and by the two strategic projects, the completion of the programme is not in danger.	By the launch of the IMIS system, the access of all users has been ensured and thus the procedures will be accelerated. Major interventions are not needed but fine-tuning of the system functionalities is still necessary.

Risks related to the B Light Scheme

The programme applies a very innovative tool, the B Light Scheme aiming at developing cross-border business cooperation. The tool was applied for the first time along the Dutch-German border and it makes possible to finance the separate investments of the SMEs without forcing them to create risky bilateral projects. However, the solution itself bears serious risks that the management is already facing.

1. Question of adequacy: there are fundamental differences between the level of integration of the Dutch-German and the Hungarian-Croatian borders. While the Dutch-German border area is highly integrated in many aspects, the Croatian-Hungarian border is hardly permeable and the level of cooperation is very low and elementary. It increases the risk level of implementation. However, the interviewees agree on that the B Light Scheme is much better solution than the way how the SMEs were supported during the previous programming period – indirectly.
2. Lack of previous experiences: direct support addressing the SMEs is an innovation within the programme. The management has no previous experiences how to involve and handle SMEs. The B Light Scheme decreases this risk by involving more experienced partners in the implementation as a kind of mediators. However, the

implementation and the monitoring processes bear further problems and risks what can be detected in the slow and complicated implementation of the call.

3. Risks related to slow implementation: partly because of the late delivery of the IMIS system, partly because of difficulties in the selection procedures, the B Light Scheme is implemented with serious delays. This factor is crucial since the entrepreneurs plan their activities with very short time horizons, business cannot wait for years while the programme administration is created. From this perspective, the delays can result in loss of confidence on behalf of the SMEs.

Table 33: The risk of B Light Scheme and its management

The impact of the risk	Clarification	Handling
Medium	Considering the progress of the application of the tool and the set of the partnership, no damaging risks can be detected. The launch of the IMIS system will accelerate the procedures what is very important for the SMEs. Once the consultant is selected, also the professional services can be provided. However, the risks listed above conceal dangers regarding the sound implementation of the call what influences the absorption of 10 million euros (15% of the total programme budget).	Taking into consideration that the B Light Scheme is a brand new instrument the heavy beneficiaries have to cooperate more, the management bodies are called to follow the progress cautiously, ready to intervene. In addition, after the first round, the JS should support the awareness raising activities of the partners in order to reach a higher number of potential beneficiaries (trust building). The higher number can ensure the fulfilment of the indicators.

5.4.2 Prognosis

Regardless of the risks mentioned above, the programme is safe. There are no further obstacles hindering the publication of the 2nd call. It is true that the call was launched in January 2019, no projects can start before the beginning of 2020 but – based on the achieved results – it will not endanger the completion of the programme.

6 Annexes

6.1 Acronyms

The table does not contain the project acronyms.

AA	Audit Authority
ACT	Autonomous Centre
AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
BDCP	Budapest Danube Contact Point
CA	Certifying Authority
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CESCI	Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives
CP	Cooperation programme
DG	Directorate-General
DGAEF	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (currency)
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FB	Facebook
FLC	First Level Control
GDP	Gross domestic product
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GIS	Geographic information system
GVA	Gross value added
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ID	Identification Data
IMIS	IMIS 2014-2020 (Common) Monitoring and Information System
IP	Investment priority
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IR	Inception Report

ITI	integrated territorial investment
JS	Joint Secretariat
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
LB	Lead beneficiary
LEADER	LEADER programme (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale / Links between actions for the development of the rural economy)
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NA	National Authority
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PA	Priority area
PP	Project Partner
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards
RDI	Research, Development and Innovation
RTPP	Regional Tourism Product Plan
SKHU	INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2014-2020
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SZPO	Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit Ltd.
TA	Technical Assistance
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UXO	Unexploded ordnance

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