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Evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme – Lot 2

Final Report – Part II Main findings of the results evaluation

Prepared by EureConsult, Technopolis Group and Spatial Foresight



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Table of Contents

1	General introduction.....	5
2	The effectiveness of interregional cooperation projects.....	6
2.1	Brief introduction to the subject-matter and focus of the effectiveness evaluation.....	6
2.2	Current outputs and results of projects and their contribution to the six thematic SOs	7
2.2.1	Programme-wide and SO-level output achievement.....	7
2.2.2	Programme-wide and SO-level result achievement	10
2.3	Influence of new cooperation requirements and increased capacity on policy change	17
2.3.1	Survey-based evidence on the relevance of new project-level cooperation requirements	17
2.3.2	Survey-based evidence showing the role of increased capacities for policy improvements	22
2.3.3	Policy learning processes realised under the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1	30
3	The effectiveness of the Policy Learning Platform	33
3.1	Brief introduction to the subject-matter and focus of the effectiveness evaluation.....	33
3.2	Difficulties during the set-up phase and the early online operation of the PLP	34
3.3	Current output and result achievement of the PLP (June 2017 - end of July 2018).....	36
3.4	Participation of projects in services and activities offered by the PLP	39
4	Theory-based evaluation of first project impacts	45
4.1	Brief introduction to the subject-matter and focus of the impact evaluation	45
4.2	A “theory of change” for evaluating the impact of Interreg Europe projects	46
4.3	Exploring the likely overall impact of projects on regional or local policy change	53
4.4	Exploring the likely contribution to EU-wide and country-level development goals	57
5	ANNEXES	63
5.1	Annex I – Main features of the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls	64
5.2	Annex II – Output and result achievement of the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls.....	66
5.3	Annex III – Background information on the online survey realised for Lot 2	70
5.4	Annex IV – Policy improvement approaches adopted by respondents to the online survey	72
5.5	Annex V – Summary of learning processes under the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1	73
5.6	Annex VI – PLP monitoring data for output and result indicators	80
5.7	Annex VII – Participants’ feedback on organised PLP policy learning events.....	81
5.8	Annex VIII – Participation of projects in the four thematic PLP sections	82
5.9	Annex IX – Short introduction into theory of change thinking.....	87
5.10	Annex X – Figure representing the theory of change (for “black-and-white” printing).....	89
5.11	Annex XI – Classification of projects according to their outcomes achieved in regard to policy change 90	

Tables

Table 1 – Action plan approaches for achieving improvements of local / regional policy instruments	25
Table 2 – Importance of learning and capacity increase for realising envisaged policy improvements	28
Table 3 – Main features of learning processes and capacity increase under projects with a finalised phase 1	31
Table 4 – Section-specific and PLP-wide project participation degrees (end of June 2018)	43

Figures

Figure 1 - Relevance of the statement on regional / local stakeholder groups, by SO	18
Figure 2 - Relevance of the statement on action plan elaboration, by SO	19
Figure 3 - Relevance of the statement on phase 2 activities for monitoring action plan implementation, by SO	20
Figure 4 - Relevance of the statement on an optional implementation of pilot actions, by SO	21
Figure 5 - Types of policy improvements foreseen in actions plans of project lead partners and partners (all SOs, with possibility of multiple answers per respondent)	24
Figure 6 - Types of policy improvements foreseen in actions plans, by number of responses per SO	24
Figure 7 – Importance of each level of learning for influencing policy instruments (all SOs and number of respondents)	26
Figure 8 - Comprehensive “theory of change” for evaluating the impact of approved Interreg Europe projects (covering all SOs)	47

Boxes

Box 1 – Policy improvements from ERUDITE contributing to the SO 1.2 result	13
Box 2 – Policy improvements from SOCIAL SEEDS contributing to the SO 2.1 result	14
Box 3 – Policy improvement from LOCARBO contributing to the SO 3.1 result	15
Box 4 – Phase 1 policy improvement from BIRD-REX contributing to the SO 4.1 result	16
Box 5 – Policy improvement from BIOREGIO contributing to the SO 4.2 result	16
Box 6 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the setting up of stakeholder groups	18
Box 7 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the elaboration of action plans	19
Box 8 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on phase 2 action plan monitoring activities	20
Box 9 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the optional implementation of pilot actions	22

Box 10 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the importance of the 3 learning levels	27
Box 11 – Shortcomings regarding the quality and quantity of work performed during the PLP set-up phase	35
Box 12 – Criteria applied for assessing the PLP participation of projects	39
Box 13 – Assumptions for determining the nature of outcomes in relation to policy improvements	51
Box 14 – Sources for analysing the direct effect of projects within the influence outcomes on policy improvement	55
Box 15 – RIs3-related projects under SO 1.2 having achieved first policy improvements	60
Box 16 – Examples for policy improvements under SO 2.1 having job creation potentials	61
Box 17 – Policy improvement achieved by the project “OptiTrans”	62

1 General introduction

This is part II of the Final Report for lot 2 of the mid-term evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme 2014–2020. It presents the detailed findings of the results evaluation of Interreg Europe, on ground of which the general and specific evaluation questions of the terms of reference were answered in part I of this report. The report depicts the programme implementation status reached at end of September 2018. Evaluation activities were realised between early June 2018 and early November 2018.

Establishing an evidence base for this evaluation proved in parts to be really challenging. A database with coherently aligned quantitative information on the examined projects had to be established in the course of an ongoing validation of the projects' progress reports. This led to changes of achievement values for some output / result indicators and also required that parts of already accomplished evaluation work had to be revised. Also qualitative monitoring information was a very important source for answering the evaluation questions, but this implied that substantial work had to be invested in consulting and analysing a large number of progress reports submitted by the projects. The most relevant aspects of this evidence base are presented in the Annex of this report.

Chapter 2 evaluates the effectiveness of the 130 Interreg Europe projects from the 1st and 2nd calls. First, the projects' current output and result achievement and the contribution they are making to the six specific objectives of Interreg Europe are examined. Then, the relevance of new project-level cooperation requirements as well as of learning processes and individual organisational capacity increases in the context of policy improvements is analysed more in-depth. **Chapter 3 evaluates the effectiveness of the Policy Learning Platform (PLP) established under Interreg Europe.** It first presents the overall PLP performance on ground of available monitoring data (outputs and results) and then explores, on ground of an in-depth analysis of qualitative reporting evidence, the level of participation of projects under the four thematic sections of the PLP. **Chapter 4 presents a theory-based evaluation of first project impacts under Interreg Europe.** First, a “theory of change” is presented that explains how projects are achieving impacts on policy change. This theory is then empirically tested on ground of data available from the current Interreg Europe projects. This test explores the likely impact of projects on regional or local policy changes and also the contribution to EU-wide or country level development goals.

The author of the present report would like to thank all staff members of the JS involved in this evaluation for their always active and helpful support. Special thanks also go to the colleagues from Spatial Foresight and Technopolis who realised background analyses and conceptualised / implemented the online survey as well as a database for the project-level effectiveness evaluation.

2 The effectiveness of interregional cooperation projects

2.1 Brief introduction to the subject-matter and focus of the effectiveness evaluation

Interreg Europe supports and funds interregional cooperation projects (hereinafter: “projects”) that are undertaken by relevant partnerships of regional players with a view to foster exchange of experience and sharing of practices as well as to prepare action plans for integrating and deploying good practices within policy instruments for regional development. The latter can be mainstream regional or local policies, but in particular ESIF programmes of the period 2014-2020 (i.e. Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes)¹.

The current project portfolio of Interreg Europe consists of a total of 184 projects that were approved after the closure of 3 realised calls for project proposals (2015/2016; 2017; 2017/2018)². Moreover, proposals submitted under a recently closed 4th call are currently assessed by the JS and still have to be approved in the Monitoring Committee. This graded sequence of project calls implies different project starts and also different levels of advancement in project implementation. Information on actual outputs and first contributions to programme results exists only for the 130 projects of the 1st and 2nd calls, as the 54 projects of the 3rd call can just refer to “intended” outputs / results that are stated in their application forms.

The effectiveness evaluation at the level of the six thematic specific objectives (SOs)³ of Interreg Europe examines therefore only the 130 projects that emerged from the 1st and 2nd calls. Information about the spread of these 130 projects across the SOs and the various sub-topics they address within each SO is provided in an overview at the end of this report (see: Annex I).

The focus of the effectiveness evaluation of projects is defined by four general questions that were set out by the terms of reference⁴. For answering these questions, the following two main aspects are analysed in more detail: the projects’ current outputs and results and their contribution to achieving the six thematic SOs of Interreg Europe (see: section 2.2) as well as the relevance of new project-level cooperation requirements and learning processes leading to a capacity increase of people and organisations that is required for achieving the planned policy improvements (see: section 2.3).

¹ Interreg Europe Programme Manual, pp.14,15

² The first call closed on 30 July 2015 and led to the approval of 64 projects (in February 2016). The second call closed on 13 May 2016 and led to the approval of 66 projects (in October 2016). The third call for project proposals closed on 30 June 2017 and led to the approval of 54 projects (in March 2018).

³ Specific objectives on improving innovation infrastructures policies (SO 1.1), innovation delivery policies (SO 1.2), SME competitiveness (SO 2.1), low carbon economy policies (SO 3.1), natural and culture heritage policies (SO 4.1) and resource-efficient economy policies” (SO 4.2).

⁴ To be addressed for projects under each SO: (1) To which extent are projects contributing to the specific objectives of the programme? (2) Are the new programme requirements for projects relevant and sufficient to contribute to the project objectives? (3) To which extent is the increased capacity of people and organisations leading to policy change and in particular to an influencing of the policy instruments addressed by the projects? (4) Is there any possibility to further define / categorise the notion of increased capacity?

2.2 Current outputs and results of projects and their contribution to the six thematic SOs

The projects' contribution to the six specific objectives of Interreg Europe is analysed on ground of data for relevant programme-level output / result indicators and other quantitative information that can support this analysis. This information is shown in several overview tables at the end of the present report (see: Annex II, tables 1-3).

Figures for output and result indicators originate from the most recent submitted progress reports that were approved by the Joint Secretariat (JS) at the end of September 2018. It should be noted that some values may have changed in the meanwhile, as more progress reports were approved by the JS since the finalisation of this evaluation report.

Key findings from this contribution analysis are first presented for the currently achieved outputs (see: section 2.2.1) and then for achieved results (see: section 2.2.2).

2.2.1 Programme-wide and SO-level output achievement

This section looks at the output achievement of all 130 projects and also at the achievements of projects having finalised their phase 1.

Both parts analyse in particular the performance of projects in terms of reaching their own final target values and, in case of the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1, also their contribution to the programme's pre-defined target values for 2023.

Outputs achieved by the 130 projects of the 1st and 2nd calls

The 130 projects of the 1st and 2nd calls involve 1,012 lead partner and partner organisations and have already achieved substantial outputs. **The current programme-wide outputs** under the three relevant indicators **are 3,753 organised policy learning events and 1,809 identified good practices as well as 4,822 appearances of projects in media** (see: Annex II, table 1).

However, **projects under the six SOs are contributing quite differently to these programme-wide outputs**. General reasons for this are the different sizes of the SO-specific project portfolios (i.e. number of projects) and also the varying shares that 2nd call projects with a still less advanced implementation state are having within SO-level project portfolios (see: Annex II, table 3).

- Three SOs ensure together more than two thirds of the contribution to programme-wide outputs that are achieved under the considered indicators (i.e. SO 1.2, SO 2.1 and SO 3.1). These SOs cover around 75% of all examined projects, whose implementation state is often more advanced (SO 1.2, SO 2.1) or at an average level (SO 3.1).
- The other three SOs ensure together the remaining third of the contribution to programme-wide output achievements (i.e. SO 1.1, SO 4.1 and SO 4.2). They only cover 25% of the approved projects that, in addition, also have clearly above-average shares of 2nd call projects in their respective

portfolios. The lowest contributions are under all considered indicators made by SO 1.1, mainly because there are still very few projects implementing this SO (i.e. 7 projects in total).

The current level of project performance can be assessed by looking at the extent to which the projects' self-determined final target values for the three concerned indicators are already reached (see: Annex II, table 1). This performance assessment must also take into account that for two of the three indicators (i.e. number of organised policy learning events, number of good practices identified), the actual outputs achieved at the end of phase 1 will not substantially increase by an implementation of phase 2 activities.

The total of project targets from all SOs shows that the programme-wide performance of projects is currently medium for the indicators "organised policy learning events" (50%) and "identified good practices" (53%), but medium-high for the indicator "project appearance in media" (around 60%).

When looking at the final target values defined for each indicator at the level of the six SOs, however, **stark differences in project performance become evident:**

- In case of the indicator “organised policy learning events”, projects implementing SO 1.2 and SO 4.1 are clearly performing better (i.e. targets are reached at respectively 57% and 53%) than projects implementing the other four SOs, where targets are currently reached at between 39% and 49%.
- The situation is different for the indicator “identified good practices”, where project performance is already high or medium-high in case of SO 2.1 (70% of targets reached), SO 3.1 (61% of targets reached) and SO 4.1 (58% of targets reached). Under the other SOs, however, current project performance is medium-low (SO 1.1: 41 % reached) and even low in two cases (SO 1.2: 37% reached; SO 4.2: 33% reached).
- In case of the indicator “project appearance in media”, finally, project performance is already high in case of SO 3.1 (77% of targets reached), SO 4.1 (70% reached) and SO 4.2 (73% reached). Under the other SOs, current project performance is medium-low or medium and ranges between 45% and 54% (SO 1.1, SO 1.2 and SO 2.1).

A certain risk on not fully reaching the planned project targets exists only for SO 1.2 and in case of the indicator “identified good practices”: many of the 33 projects are already in an advanced stage of implementation (i.e. 54% are 1st call projects), but realised their own targets only to 37%.

In all other cases, the prospects on full achievement are clearly more positive, as the vast majority of the 130 projects (111 in total) still has to fully complete phase 1 and because SOs with lower project performance on some indicators also include many 2nd call projects.

Outputs achieved by the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1

Also the 19 projects with an already finalised phase 1 have reported substantial outputs (see: Annex II, table 1) for the two relevant indicators “number of people with increased capacity” and “number of action plans developed”⁵.

The current programme-wide outputs amount to 1,760 people with an increased professional capacity and to 131 elaborated action plans. SO 1.2 and SO 3.1 contribute most to an increased capacity of persons (71%) and to the elaborated action plans (63%), as both SOs are implemented by 12 out of the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1.

(1) The extent to which projects have reached their self-determined final target values for both indicators (i.e. as indicated in the application forms) at the end of phase 1 **is rather variable in overall terms and also across the six SOs:**

- **For an elaboration of action plans** aimed at improving local or regional policy instruments during phase 2, **the overall performance of projects is expectantly very high.** The programme-wide sum of project target values is reached to 98.5% (i.e. all SOs) and also the aggregated targets at SO-level are reached by projects to 100% in nearly all cases. Only SO 3.1 is with around 94% slightly below the initial target value (i.e. 30 elaborated action plans instead of an expected 32).
- As regards **the capacity increase of persons** having participated in organised policy learning events (i.e. interregional workshops, seminars and other cooperation activities; regular meetings of local/regional stakeholder groups), the programme-wide sum of initial project targets is only reached to 57% (i.e. all SOs). However, **significant differences in performance are observed at SO level.** The aggregated targets at SO-level are only in three cases nearly reached (SO 4.1: 95%), fully reached (SO 1.1) or even over-reached (SO 3.1: 107%). Under the other three SOs, the projects’ performance is either high (SO 1.2: 64% of targets reached), medium (SO 4.2: 50% of targets reached) or particularly weak (SO 2.1: around 15% of targets reached).

In case of the output indicator “increased professional capacity of persons”, low performance can sometimes be explained by the fact that some 1st call projects have not realistically defined the initial target values and also because the JS did not check these values as rigidly as in the case of projects from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th calls.

Overall, however, we assume that the projects’ current output figures will not substantially change during phase 2. This is because the policy learning process is largely completed (i.e. main focus of phase 1) and will only continue to a very limited extent in phase 2 (i.e. interregional monitoring of action plan implementation). Medium or low performance of SO 4.2 and SO 2.1 projects at the end of

⁵ Both indicators have only to reported by projects that finalised their phase 1.

phase 1 therefore also implies that their actual contributions to the respective SO-target values for 2023 will be significantly lower than initially expected.

(2) Irrespective of this partially lagging performance, **the 19 projects contribute** with their already achieved outputs **quite substantially to the pre-defined target values for 2023**. Their contribution to the programme-wide sum of all 2023 target values for these indicators is in both cases slightly above 14%. Projects also contribute to reaching the SO-level target values for 2023, albeit at variable extents.

- As regards **the SO-level target values for an increase of professional capacity of persons by 2023**, projects of SO 1.2 and SO 3.1 are with respectively around 29% and 23% making the strongest contributions to the expected totals. Under the four other SOs, project contributions to the relevant 2023 target values are ranging between around 4% and 14%.
- **In case of the SO-level target values for elaborated action plans**, projects under SO 1.2 contribute already at around 37% to the expectations for 2023. Project contributions to the five other SO-level target values for 2023 are ranging between around 7% and 13%.

When considering that the six SOs are implemented by another 111 projects from the 1st and 2 calls with a not yet finalised phase 1 as well as by further projects from the 3rd and 4th calls, it is thus realistic assuming that most of the SO-level 2023 target values for both indicators will be reached or even over-reached at the end of the programming period. Only under SO 1.1 the evolution should be observed attentively because the number of approved projects is currently still low.

Finally, it should also be noted that 11 project partners from 5 out of these 19 projects with a finalised phase 1 have applied for **an (optional) implementation of pilot actions at the beginning of phase 2** (see: Annex II, table 3). The 11 pilot actions are allocated a total support of € 622.737, which is in all cases financed through funds emerging from under-spending. These pilot actions aim at testing some of the partners' policy improvement measures and the demand for this seems to be strongest under the projects *NICHE* (SO 1.2), *iEER* (SO 2.1) and *CHRISTA* (SO 4.1). A particularity is the joint pilot action "Aula Emprende" realised under the *iEER*, which is tested simultaneously in 9 different project partner regions⁶.

2.2.2 Programme-wide and SO-level result achievement

The overview in Annex II (table 2) shows that the 130 examined projects are planning to improve a total of 888 policy instruments⁷, of which 729 relate to Investment for Growth and Jobs programmes or ETC programmes.

⁶ Interreg Europe, Excel file "28-05-07 Pilot actions overview updated"

⁷ The number of policy instruments addressed by projects differs strongly from the number of national or regional EU programmes concerned. This is due to the fact that several partners from the same region /country are often involved in different Interreg Europe projects, which are then working on individual parts (e.g. a priority axis, a measure, a particular

The projects' own targets for ESIF-related policy instruments to be influenced under the six thematic SOs represent together already 172% of Interreg Europe's aggregated target value for 2023. Also the aggregated amount of ESIF support that the projects' policy improvements are planning to influence at the end of phase 2 exceeds already hugely (560%) the total amount of programme funding that shall be reached at the end of 2023. Moreover, the projects also plan improving a further 159 "other local / regional / national policy instruments" and influencing related funding of around € 460 million.

Against this background, it is interesting to see which policy improvements the projects have already achieved by September 2018 and what the perspectives are for fully realising the expected results of Interreg Europe by the end of 2023. The current level of result achievement is first analysed from a programme-wide perspective and then at the level of each SO.

Programme-wide result achievement

Although policy improvements are in general expected to emerge only at the end of the projects' phase 2, some of the 130 projects have already realised first policy improvements in phase 1 (i.e. 47 improvements in total). These improvements were reported in accordance with the pre-defined result indicators at programme level (see: Annex II, table 2).

- Across the six SOs, a total of 34 Growth and Jobs / ETC programmes were influenced. The achieved improvements represent around 5% of the aggregated own final targets defined by all 130 projects and contribute with around 8% to the programme's overall target value for 2023 (all SOs).
- These early policy improvements have influenced funding from the concerned ESIF programmes, with an amount representing around 6% of the aggregated own final targets defined by all 130 projects. Nevertheless, the influenced programme funding already contributes substantially to Interreg Europe's aggregated 2023 target value for all SOs (i.e. at around 34%).
- Projects have also improved 13 instruments from other local, regional or national policies and these improvements represent around 8% of the aggregated own final targets defined by all 130 projects. However, the related amount of influenced funding covers only a very small proportion of the overall amount that all 130 projects have planned to influence (i.e. around 1%).

Considering that only 11 projects from the 1st and 2 calls have just started their phase 2 and bearing also in mind that projects from the 3rd and 4th calls have still to be implemented, **it is quite realistic assuming that the SO-level 2023 target values** for the result indicators "number of Structural Funds instruments influenced" and "amount of Structural Funds influenced" **will be fully reached or even over-reached at the end of the programming period.**

funding scheme etc.) of the same ESIF programme. On average, ten projects work on improving each of the ERDF Growth and Jobs programmes in a country. For more information, see infographic at: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/about-us/stats/>

Contribution of projects to improving innovation infrastructures policies (SO 1.1)

A majority of the 7 projects currently implementing SO 1.1 is still at an early implementation stage (4 projects of the 2nd call), while others are more advanced in delivering their phase 1 activities (3 projects of the 1st call). These 7 projects address sector-/area-specific innovation policies (4 projects) or the governance context and infrastructures connected with research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (3 projects).

The overview in Annex II (table 2) shows that the current level of result achievement is still very low. In fact, only one project has reported a policy improvement. The project *SmartPilots* improved one policy instrument for the bio-economy sector under the regional Growth & Jobs programme Flanders 2014-2020⁸. This improvement represents 2% of the target value of all 7 projects and contributes with around 4% to the SO's target value for 2023. The amount of influenced programme funding (€ 3.72 million) represents 3.5% of the target value of all 7 projects and contributes with around 8% to the SO-level target value for 2023.

Contribution of projects to improving innovation delivery policies (SO 1.2)

SO 1.2 is currently implemented by 33 projects that address 6 different sub-topics relating to innovation delivery policies⁹. 18 projects are more advanced in delivering their phase 1 activities (i.e. projects from the 1st call) and 8 of them have already reported first policy improvements (i.e. *Beyond EDP*; *ERUDITE*; *HIGHER*; *HoCare*; *S34Growth*; *S3Chem*; *CLUSTERIX 2.0*; *InnoBridge*). But also the 2nd call project *ITHACA* has reported a policy improvement.

These 9 projects have improved 12 policy instruments from ESIF programmes and a further 3 instruments from other local, regional or national policies (see: Annex II, table 2).

The number of improved policy instruments from ESIF programmes represents around 6% of the aggregated own targets of all 33 projects currently implementing SO 1.2, but it contributes with around 15% to the SO's target value for 2023. While the amount of funding influenced through the improved ESIF programmes indeed represents only 1% of the aggregated own targets of all 33 projects, it already contributes noticeably to the SO 1.2 target value for 2023 (i.e. at around 9%). Around 94% of this total amount of ESIF funding influenced relates to policy improvements of the projects *ITHACA* (€ 8.972 million) and *ERUDITE* (€ 2.95 million), with the latter being briefly presented below (see: box 1).

The 3 improved other local, regional or national policy instruments represent already 10% of the aggregated final targets of all 33 SO 1.2 projects, but the influenced amount of funding reaches only around 3% of the overall amount that the 33 projects are planning to influence.

⁸ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file "2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results"

⁹ Sub-topic 1: "Innovation capacity of SMEs" (3 projects). Sub-topic 2: "Innovation in sector" (7 projects). Sub-topic 3: "RIS3 governance" (6 projects). Sub-topic 4: "RIS infrastructures" (6 projects). Sub-topic 5: "RIS sector" (6 projects). Sub-topic 6: "Open innovation and other innovation" (5 projects).

Box 1 – Policy improvements from ERUDITE contributing to the SO 1.2 result¹⁰

The 1st call project *ERUDITE* has finalised its phase 1 and improved 3 policy instruments stimulating open innovation and other forms of innovation.

In Slovenia, under the national Growth & Jobs Operational Programme 2014-2020, funding was approved for the national Fab-Lab network that has been recognised by several managing bodies responsible for the programme. Good practices from four *ERUDITE* partners in France, Italy, Finland and Ireland have directly influenced the change/creation of a Fab-Lab network and the setting up of individual fab-labs in Slovenia.

In Ireland, *ERUDITE* contributed to the improvement and delivery of the policy instrument “Local Economic and Community Plan for County Donegal” (Donegal Digital Action Plan). The definition of local digital hubs in Donegal (action 10 of the Action Plan) has used experiences / good practices from other *ERUDITE* partners in France and Slovenia. This improved definition has further clarified the content and focus of projects to be submitted under the Donegal Digital Action Plan.

In Italy, under the National Operational Programme “Metropolitan cities 2014-2020” (NOP METRO), funding was approved for the CZRM (CitiZens Relationship Management). Project activities undertaken by the City of Venice focussed on planning and designing the new CZRM service, which consists of a multichannel platform providing a single point of access to all metropolitan public services (city councils, public transports, waste management, city events, etc.). The main actors responsible for building the new service, in particular the City of Venice IT department and Venis, the City of Venice in-house IT company, have been involved in the *ERUDITE* Regional Stakeholder local working group and in the transnational activities about the SEROI+ methodology.

Contribution of projects to improving policies for enhancing SME competitiveness (SO 2.1)

This SO is currently implemented by 33 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls, of which more than half are already quite advanced in delivering their phase 1 activities (around 52%). The 33 projects address 5 different sub-topics connected with an improvement of SME competitiveness¹¹.

Out of these 33 projects, 8 have already reported first policy improvements in phase 1 (i.e. *ATM for SMEs; Destination SMEs; ESSPO; FFWD EUROPE; iEER; SIE; SOCIAL SEEDS; UpGradeSME*). They improved 11 policy instruments from ESIF programmes and a further 2 instruments from other local, regional or national policies (see: Annex II, table 2).

The 11 improved policy instruments from ESIF programmes represent around 6% of the aggregated own targets of all 33 projects implementing SO 2.1 and contribute with 10% to the SO’s final target value for 2023. The amount of funding influenced through the improved ESIF programmes reaches around 5% of the aggregated final targets of all 33 projects and also contributes significantly to the SO 2.1 target value for 2023 (i.e. at around 32%). This influenced ESIF funding originates from only four projects (*FFWD EUROPE; SIE; SOCIAL SEEDS; UpGradeSME*). Moreover, it is remarkable that around 97% (or € 59.3 million) of the influenced ESIF funding was achieved by only 2 policy improvements realised under *SOCIAL SEEDS* (see: box 2).

¹⁰ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results”

¹¹ Sub-topic 1: “Sector-specific support” (7 projects). Sub-topic 2: “Entrepreneurship & access to finance” (6 projects). Sub-topic 3: “Innovation capacity of SMEs” (6 projects). Sub-topic 4: “Support to SMEs” (11 projects). Sub-topic 5: “Social enterprises & social responsibility” (3 projects).

The 2 improved local, regional or national policy instruments represent around 6% of the aggregated final targets of all 33 SO 2.1 projects, but the influenced amount of funding reaches only around 3% of the overall amount that the 33 projects are planning to influence.

Box 2 – Policy improvements from SOCIAL SEEDS contributing to the SO 2.1 result¹²

In Hungary, *SOCIAL SEEDS* has influenced two policy instruments under the national Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (EDIOP) that aim at strengthening employment capacities of social enterprises (priority 5) and at improving access of enterprises – including social enterprises - to external funding (priority 8).

The *SOCIAL SEEDS* partner “IFKA Public Benefit Non-Profit Ltd. for the Development of the Industry” improved the national priority project „PiacTárs” (EDIOP-5.1.2-15-2016-00001), which allowed influencing € 9 million of funding. The priority project has the mission to develop self-sustaining social enterprises registered in Hungarian convergence regions with non-refundable financial support to increase job opportunities of vulnerable social groups. With the assistance of IFKA, the timeline and budget of the national priority project have been increased and so far, a total of 141 organisations were certified. A total of 900 enterprises expressed their interest towards the pre-qualification and 345 have defined project plans out of 2000 third sector organizations available in Hungary.

IFKA also supported the Managing Authority of EDIOP (Ministry for National Economy) in changing the management of specific EDIOP calls for proposals, which allowed influencing € 50.3 million of funding. IFKA supported the MA in revising the new methodology for monitoring (audit) proposals as pre-qualification criteria of calls under EDIOP 5.1.3. The change had two sides: the first was to refresh the system of non-refundable financial assistance for social enterprises (EDIOP 5.1.3, Priority 5) and the second was to connect the EDIOP 5.1.3 call with a scheme on refundable ESIF grants and loans (EDIOP 5.1.7, Priority 8). Minimum requirements have been re-structured, the professional tasks have been widened, the budget has been increased and the timeframe of the call has been extended. Through fulfilling the post-secondary level criteria, social enterprises having a sustainable business plan are now entitled to apply for ESIF grants and loans under EDIOP 5.1.7.

Contribution of projects to improving policies for a low carbon economy (SO 3.1)

SO 3.1 is currently implemented by 31 projects that are most often still at an early implementation stage (i.e. around 52% are 2nd call projects). These 31 projects address four different sub-topics connected with an improvement of low carbon economy policies¹³ and 9 projects have already reported first policy improvements. Most of them are 1st call projects (i.e. *LOCARBO*; *REBUS*; *BIO4ECO*; *RESOLVE*; *TRAM*) and some have already finalised their phase 1 (i.e. *CISMOB*; *REGIO-MOB*; *ZEROCO2*), but the group also includes a 2nd call project (*OptiTrans*).

Out of these 31 projects, 9 have already improved 6 policy instruments from ESIF programmes and a further 5 instruments from other local, regional or national policies (see: Annex II, table 2).

The 6 policy instruments from ESIF programmes were improved by 5 projects (i.e. *CISMOB*; *LOCARBO*; *OptiTrans*; *REBUS*; *REGIO-MOB*). These improvements correspond to 4% of the aggregated final targets of all 31 projects from SO 3.1 and contribute with around 6% to the SO’s target value for 2023.

¹² Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results”

¹³ Sub-topic 1: “Energy efficiency” (11 projects). Sub-topic 2: “Low carbon strategy” (3 projects). Sub-topic 3: “Mobility” (14 projects). Sub-topic 4: “Renewable / sustainable energy” (3 projects).

The situation is considerably different for the amount of funding influenced through improved ESIF programmes: the current achievements of only four projects (i.e. *LOCARBO*; *OptiTrans*; *REBUS*, *SET-UP*¹⁴) reach already 23% of the aggregated own targets of all 31 projects and represent 97% of the SO 3.1 target value to be achieved at the end of 2023. Noteworthy is the project *LOCARBO*, which ensures with an influenced funding amount of € 166.5 million around 87% of this contribution (see: box 3).

4 projects have improved 5 instruments from other local, regional or national policies (i.e. *BIO4ECO*; *RESOLVE*; *TRAM*; *ZEROCO2*), with these improvements representing around 10% of the aggregated own targets of all 31 projects under SO 3.1. However, related funding has not been influenced.

Box 3 – Policy improvement from LOCARBO contributing to the SO 3.1 result¹⁵

Under the Hungarian Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (EDIOP 2014-2020), a draft grant scheme addressing the support of SME building-related energy efficiency and renewable energy investments (EDIOP measure 4.1.1 scheme) was ready by mid-2015 but did not launch. In the following, intense consultation with the Managing Authority (MA) and other stakeholders was realised in the framework of *LOCARBO*, with this process relying mainly on policy learning and knowledge sharing through preparatory meetings, analysis and consultations. This process had a positive influential effect on the MA and allowed it revising the conditions of the grant scheme based on stakeholder feedback, real project implementation experience and actual market demand. The improved EDIOP 4.1.1 scheme already opened on 31.10.2017 and EDIOP 4.1.2 is expected to open in 01.2018. The MA confirmed that it had taken on board insights / expert information and transferred market knowledge provided by *LOCARBO* in improving and changing the management and strategic focus of this policy instrument.

Contribution of projects to improving natural and culture heritage policies (SO 4.1)

This SO is currently implemented by 14 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls, of which 57% are still at an early implementation stage (i.e. 2nd call projects). These 14 projects address three different sub-topics related to an improvement of natural and culture heritage policies¹⁶.

The overview in Annex II (table 2) shows that policy instruments from ESIF programmes were not yet influenced during phase 1.

However, it seems that funding of instruments connected to other local, regional or national policies was influenced by the projects *HERICOAST* and *BID-REX* (see: box 4). Nevertheless, the indeed existing information on influenced amount (€ 83.805, representing 0.2% of the aggregated own targets of all 14 SO 4.1 projects) is not supported by data indicating the number of other policy instruments improved¹⁷.

¹⁴ The project *SET-UP* is listed in the Interreg Europe dataset for having influenced ESIF funding, but it is not mentioned among the projects having improved a policy instrument (data inconsistency).

¹⁵ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results”

¹⁶ Sub-topic 1: “Natural and cultural heritage” (2 projects). Sub-topic 2: “Natural heritage and biodiversity preservation” (7 projects). Sub-topic 3: “Cultural heritage & sustainable tourism” (5 projects).

¹⁷ The project *BID-REX* is listed in the Interreg Europe dataset for having influenced ESIF funding, but the same source does not include information on the number of improved policy instruments (probably data encoding error). The JS informed the evaluators that 3 instruments were improved.

Box 4 – Phase 1 policy improvement from *BID-REX* contributing to the SO 4.1 result¹⁸

In the Catalan partner region of *BID-REX*, first meetings with the local stakeholder group (September 2016) were focused on identifying weaknesses of the current situation of biodiversity information and its link with decision making. One important aspect raised was the diffusion of biodiversity data and the need to have all data integrated into one database to facilitate its access and use. Following in interregional workshop in Wallonia where an approach for collecting, collating and managing information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area was presented, the Walloon organisation provided support to and collaborated with a network of experts in Catalonia for making information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers. Inspired by the Walloon experience, the Government of Catalonia decided in March 2017 to fund a new project which involves the Deputy of Barcelona, the University of Barcelona, GBIF-Spain and the collaboration of other local stakeholders to create a database including the whole biodiversity observations registered in Catalonia. This project is funded by own funds from the Government of Catalonia and the Deputy of Barcelona.

Contribution of projects to improving policies for a resource-efficient economy (SO 4.2)

This specific objective is currently implemented by only 12 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls, of which 58% are also still at an early implementation stage (i.e. 2nd call projects). These 14 projects focus on three different sub-topics related to an improvement of natural and culture heritage policies¹⁹.

Despite the still low level of implementation, there are 4 projects having already reported a total of 7 policy improvements during phase 1 (see: Annex II, table 2).

The 4 improved policy instruments from ESIF programmes represent around 7% of the aggregated own targets of all 12 projects from SO 4.2 and contribute with around 8% to the SO's target value for 2023. However, only one policy improvement under *INTHERWASTE* has also influenced a small amount of ESIF funding that represents a negligible share in the aggregated own targets of all projects (0.03%) and also in the SO's target value for 2023 (0.5%). The other 3 policy instruments were improved by the projects *RETRACE* and *SYMBI*, but without influencing ESIF funding.

The situation is somewhat different in case of the 3 improved instruments from other local, regional or national policies, as they represent already around 18% of the aggregated own targets of all 12 projects implementing SO 4.2. However, the improvements realised by the projects *INTHERWASTE*, *SYMBI* and *BIOREGIO* (see: box 5) have not influenced funding from these other local, regional or national policy instruments.

Box 5 – Policy improvement from *BIOREGIO* contributing to the SO 4.2 result²⁰

In Slovakia, *BIOREGIO* contributed to change the domestic “Programme of Economic and Social Development” of the Nitra self-governing region with a view to also support circular economy projects. The region adopted and issued a new supplement no. 1 to the guideline for administration of funding of this instrument, which became effective within measure 1 “renewal of municipalities” and now includes two new sub-activities under activity 1.2. The *BIOREGIO* project team boosted the introduction of this bio-based circular economy approach into the

¹⁸ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results”

¹⁹ Sub-topic 1: “Circular economy” (6 projects). Sub-topic 2: “Waste management & soil pollution” (4 projects). Sub-topic 3: “Resource efficiency & green public procurement” (2 projects).

²⁰ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results”

policy instrument through presentations on circular economy to highest representatives of Nitra region, negotiations with higher management units of Nitra region on formulating a related policy, the development of policy measures and also the creation of tools for implementing this circular economy in practice.

2.3 Influence of new cooperation requirements and increased capacity on policy change

This section explores (1) whether the new cooperation requirements for projects are relevant and sufficient to achieving the projects' objectives and (2) whether an increased capacity of persons and organisations involved in projects can actually contribute to influencing the addressed policy instruments.

However, these complex causality relations can hardly be examined on ground of quantitative data for programme-level output and result indicators. A practice-oriented analysis of these aspects first uses evidence from an online survey carried out on these matters among 43 projects from the 1st call having already a well-advanced implementation status. More details on the set-up and realisation of this online survey are given in an annex at the end of this report (see: Annex III). The analysis of learning processes and induced capacity is further deepened on ground of qualitative evidence from progress reports of projects with a finalised phase 1, as the latter were also covered by the online survey.

2.3.1 Survey-based evidence on the relevance of new project-level cooperation requirements

The newly introduced requirements for project-level cooperation are (1) the setting up of regional / local stakeholder groups, (2) the mandatory elaboration of action plans, (3) the phase 2 activities for monitoring implementation of action plans and (4) the optional implementation of pilot actions. The survey introduced each requirement for project-level cooperation by a pre-formulated statement, for which participants then had to determine the extent to which this matches their own situation.

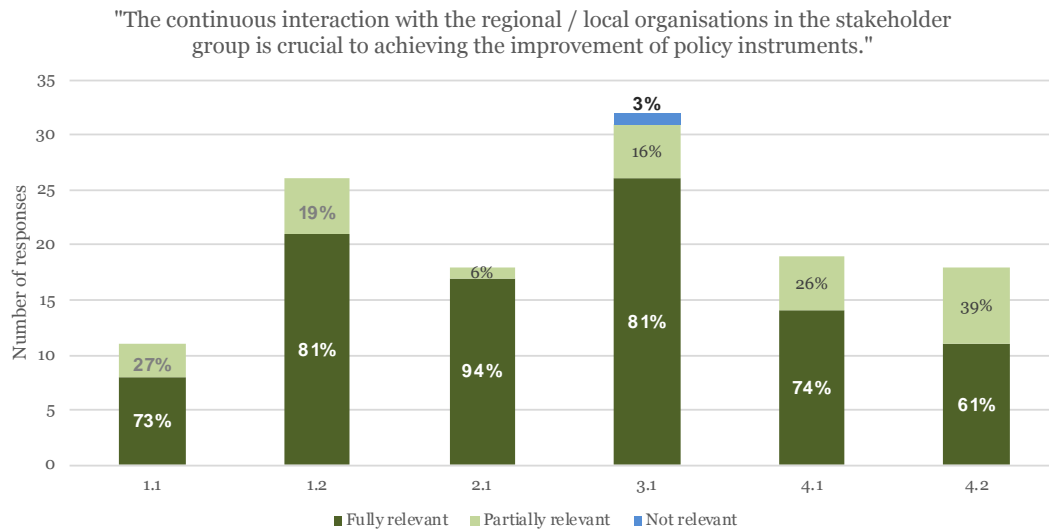
The setting up of regional / local stakeholder groups

Overall, 78% of the survey respondents considered continuous interaction with regional / local organisations in the established stakeholder groups crucial for achieving improvements of the respectively addressed policy instruments. 21% of the respondents stated that interaction with stakeholders is partially relevant and only 1% stated (i.e. one respondent) that this is not relevant²¹.

Differences between the patterns of responses at SO-level are negligible (see: figure 1), as the share of respondents indicating full relevance is in most cases clearly or largely above 70%. Only in case of SO 4.2, a relatively important share of judgements on partial relevance is observed (around 39%).

²¹ i.e. despite good interaction within the group, the responsible policy makers at the Managing Authority have changed.

Figure 1 - Relevance of the statement on regional / local stakeholder groups, by SO



Source: service provider

71 respondents have also further specified their answer in the survey and explained why they consider an involvement of other local / regional organisations within stakeholder groups fully or partially relevant for the projects' activities (see: box 6).

Box 6 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the setting up of stakeholder groups

Stakeholder involvement is considered **fully relevant** because it relates the project better to the needs of other policy relevant local or regional organisations and also supports implementation of project activities at this level. The most important benefits are the following:

- Stakeholder involvement helps developing a common understanding, involvement and ownership of the projects' results among a wider audience, although it is sometimes hard to combine different views or engagements in the scheduled meetings.
- Interaction with stakeholders delivers to projects additional policy-relevant information and allows receiving valuable local / regional feedback. Finally, stakeholder involvement establishes a multi-perspective approach for the regional / local work process, especially in case of a diversified composition of the stakeholder group.
- Respondents also remarked that the quality of this local cooperation with stakeholders is decisive, both with respect to the scope of involvement and the level of commitment of stakeholders.
- In some cases, also an involvement of political decision-makers is particularly needed. This is mainly because introducing new policy instruments takes time and often happens outside the scope of the projects' direct influence. A lacking involvement of political decision-makers therefore creates a risk that cooperation / involvement at the local or regional level is ending.

Partial relevance is often stated when stakeholder organisations are not representing policy responsible bodies or the actual (political) decision making levels, but also when stakeholder involvement is not very intense in practice.

Several respondents observe that stakeholder organisations are not really familiar with such kind of activities and that the value of their involvement depends a lot on how eager stakeholders are to achieving policy changes. Some respondents also highlight that formal stakeholder meetings are a tool with limitations and consider, instead, a more general promotion of and awareness raising about policy improvements a more important approach.

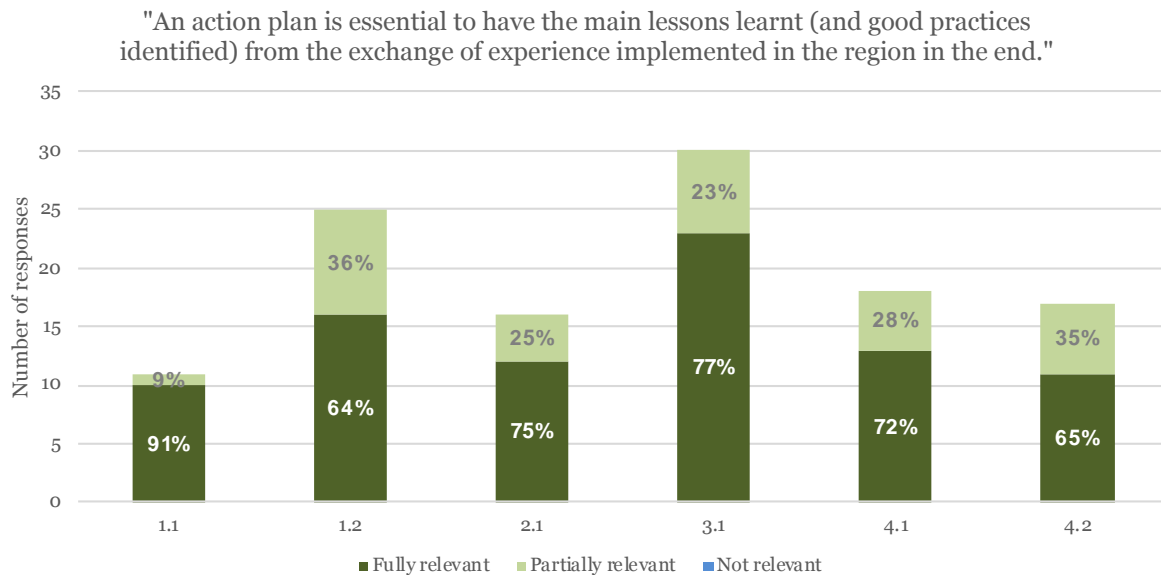
Elaboration of action plans

Overall, 73% of the respondents assessed the mandatory elaboration of action plans as being fully relevant for capitalising on lessons learnt from the exchange of experience process. The remaining 27% of the respondents considered action planning as partially relevant.

This overall pattern of responses is also relatively similar under most of the SOs (see: figure 2), although two objectives show above-average shares of respondents stating only partial relevance (SO 1.2: 36%; SO 4.2: 35%).

64 respondents also elaborated further comments on their answers and explained why they consider the elaboration of action plans fully or only partially relevant for their projects (see: box 7).

Figure 2 - Relevance of the statement on action plan elaboration, by SO



Source: service provider

Box 7 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the elaboration of action plans

Respondents stating **full relevance** consider that an elaboration of action plans makes project activities more focused and eases the project-level monitoring of progress, but also supports the commitment of policy-makers to the project. Moreover, action planning makes project activities more realistic (e.g. by better integrating projects into the current regional or local context of policy planning) and also helps ensuring that projects become more durable (e.g. by providing a framework for implementing future follow-up measures and by ensuring legacy of the project after its ending).

Respondents seeing action plans as only **partially relevant** mention, for example, that the status of an action plan is not formal enough to receive commitment from all relevant stakeholders or that not all good practices can be taken up and translated into other regional or local contexts. It is also observed that some measures defined in action plans are in contradiction with other local and regional strategies having a proper legal and administrative basis, which makes it difficult to implement such measures in the concerned regions.

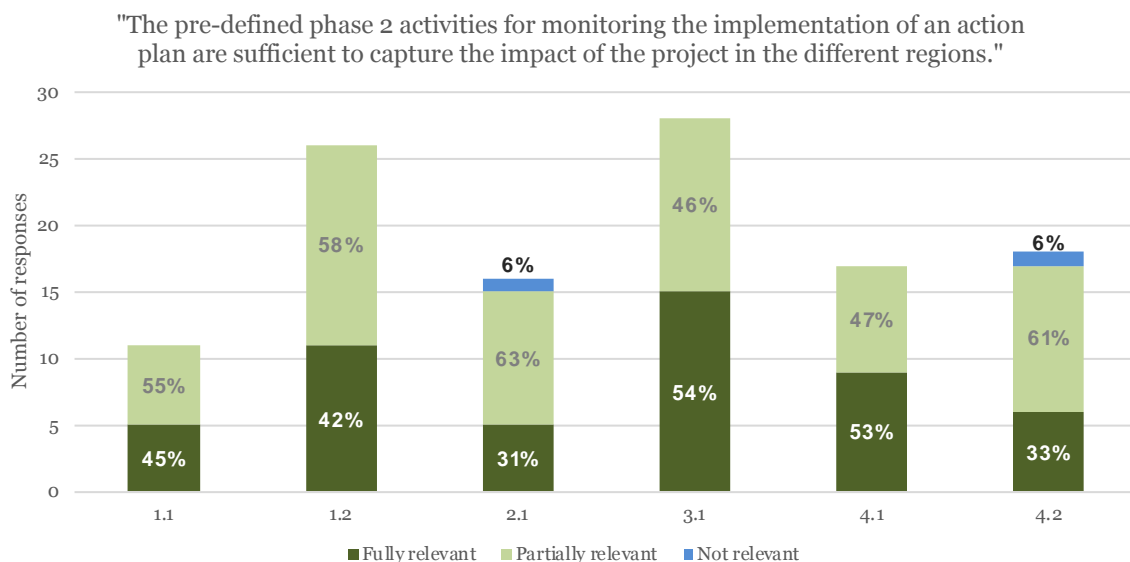
Phase 2 activities for monitoring action plan implementation

Different to the previously analysed new requirements for project-level cooperation, **phase 2 activities for monitoring the implementation of action plans are seen more critically** by the survey respondents. Only 44% of the respondents consider monitoring activities as relevant, while 54% consider them as partially relevant and 2% even as not relevant. The relatively higher share of respondents indicating a partial relevance of monitoring activities may in parts be explained by the fact that not all surveyed projects have yet entered into phase 2.

Nevertheless, there are also **stark differences between the patterns of responses given for individual SOs** (see: figure 3). The individual patterns under SO 1.1 and SO 1.2 are more or less similar to the overall pattern of responses. In case of SO 3.1 and SO 4.1, however, a majority of survey respondents considers the foreseen monitoring activities as fully relevant (i.e. respectively 54% and 53%). A more critical view is observed in case of SO 4.2 and SO 2.1, as partial relevance and/or non-relevance of monitoring activities was stated in either case by more than two thirds of the respondents (respectively 69% and 67%).

69 respondents have commented their judgements and explained why phase 2 monitoring activities are either considered fully relevant or less / not relevant (see: box 8).

Figure 3 - Relevance of the statement on phase 2 activities for monitoring action plan implementation, by SO



Source: service provider

Box 8 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on phase 2 action plan monitoring activities

Respondents with a **positive view** emphasised again the importance of phase 2 activities for ensuring that an adequate follow-up is given to previous exchange of experience activities and that, in doing so, also continuing contact with the relevant stakeholder organisations is essential from the beginning.

Respondents considering the statement only **partially or not relevant** listed for this judgement a variety of

reasons. Implementation monitoring is only partially relevant because a financing of policy improvements and an achievement of the projects' ultimate objectives is strongly only depending on a mobilisation of support from other national, regional or local sources. Successful action plan implementation also depends on the complexity of the envisaged measures, with a timeframe of 2 years being often considered too short for implementing a new policy approach and for capturing the related impact of the project. Also external factors might change the envisaged measures and desired results of actions plans, especially if new regional or local governments are put into place after elections. As it is often too difficult to anticipate such government changes and the implications these have on regional / local policies, action plans should rather be guidance documents than documents stipulating firm obligations. Finally, respondents also highlight that additional activities and further cooperation is needed for ensuring this monitoring and that there is also a need for strengthening implementation capacity, both in terms of time and funding.

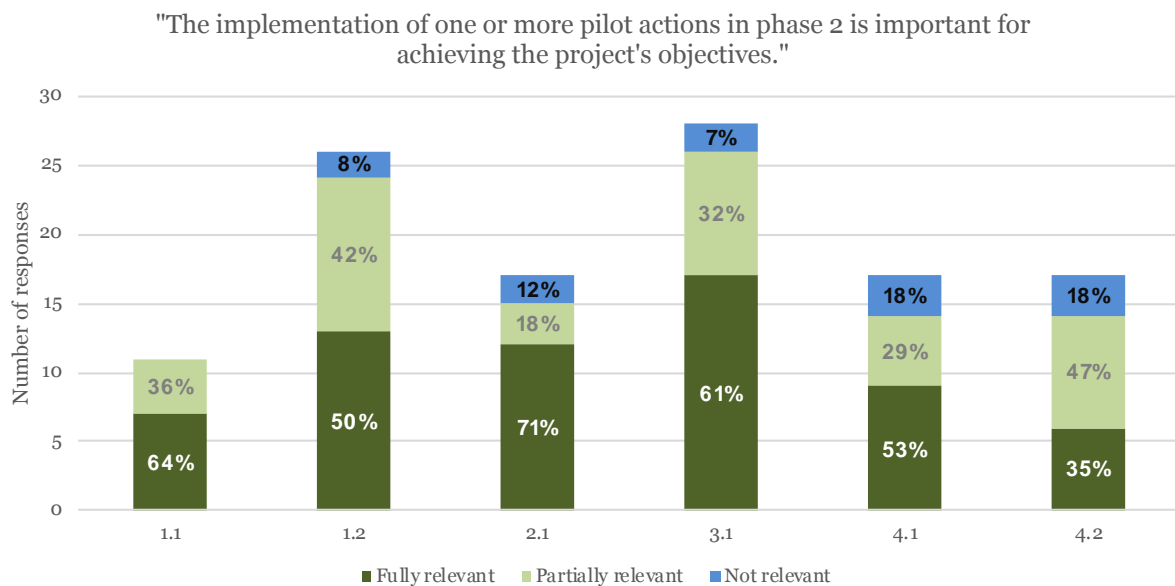
Optional implementation of pilot actions

An implementation of pilot actions within projects at the beginning of phase 2 is optional and only dedicated to testing the practicability of one or more measures foreseen by the adopted action plans. As pilot actions are exceptionally financed by Interreg Europe, very clear and also detailed rules / procedures were set out in the programme manual²².

Overall, **55% of the survey respondents consider that implementing one or more pilot actions is relevant** for achieving the projects' objectives. For 34% of the respondents, however, these actions are partially relevant and 10% consider them even as not at all relevant.

Nevertheless, **strong deviations** from this overall pattern of responses **exist at the level of the individual SOs** (see: figure 4).

Figure 4 - Relevance of the statement on an optional implementation of pilot actions, by SO



Source: service provider

²² Interreg Europe Programme Manual, pp.50-52

While the shares of responses on full relevance are under SO 4.1 and SO 1.2 more or less similar to the overall level of responses, an implementation of pilot actions is seen much more positively by respondents from projects under three other SOs (i.e. SO 1.1: 64%; SO 2.1: 71%; SO 3.1: 61%). A very pronounced critical view is only observed in case of SO 4.2, as partial relevance and non-relevance was stated by around two thirds of the respondents (65%).

These differences between SOs can result from the fact that more than half of the 43 surveyed projects have not yet finalised their phase 1 (i.e. 24 projects). Another influencing factor may also be that 75% of the projects with a finalised phase 1 concentrate on three SOs showing either an average share of positive responses (SO 1.2) or a clearly above-average share of positive responses (SO 2.1; SO 3.1). These SOs also include 3 out of the currently 5 projects, for which an implementation of pilot actions is already approved by the programme²³.

Be this as it may, 56 respondents have commented their judgements on this statement and explained why an implementation of pilot actions is considered either fully relevant or less / not relevant (see: box 9).

Box 9 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the optional implementation of pilot actions

Respondents judging an implementation of pilot actions positively (fully relevant) highlight various supporting effects. These actions are needed for ensuring a successful completion of the action plan, as the knowledge potential generated by a project is not manifesting in practice unless there is implementation. Pilot actions also allow identifying barriers and challenges linked to policy improvements envisaged in an action plan, as the latter is not an objective in itself but an essential guidance for implementation. Finally, pilot actions with concrete milestones are also important for mobilising other regional / local stakeholder organisations and for obtaining commitment from them.

Judgements on partial or non-relevance of pilot actions are not in principle questioning their usefulness, as comments are mainly pointing to practical limitations. A first aspect is the unequal distribution of project funding resources between both implementation phases, with the resources being considered insufficient for phase 2 activities. Other aspects mentioned are that pilot actions are in some cases facing barriers for their implementation or are simply not needed because such actions are only relevant in specific constellations.

2.3.2 Survey-based evidence showing the role of increased capacities for policy improvements

This part explores to what extent an increased personal and organisational capacity is actually needed for achieving improvements of regional or local policy instruments in the territories covered by project partners.

The driving factor behind this capacity increase are phase 1 project activities aimed at initiating a **complex policy learning process at different levels** encompassing

²³ At the moment (August 2018), 5 projects among the 19 projects with a completed phase 1 are carrying out pilot actions: these are NICHE (SO 1.2), iEER (SO 2.1), CISMOB (SO 3.1), CHRISTA (SO 4.1) and CESME (SO 4.2). One or more partners from all of these projects have also responded to the survey.

- “individual learning”, e.g. through a direct involvement of staff members from partner organisations in all project activities;
- “organisational learning”, e.g. through sharing and further developing new policy-relevant knowledge within project partner organisation;
- “inter-organisational learning within the concerned policy sub-systems”, e.g. through continuous interaction and exchange with other policy relevant local / regional organisations or actors within the established stakeholder groups.

For uncovering this causal relationship, lead partners and project partners were first asked about the nature of their planned policy improvements, and then about the actual importance of these parallel learning processes required for achieving policy improvements.

Types of policy improvements and approaches envisaged in the action plans

The programme manual²⁴ presents three basic types of improvements by which cooperation projects can influence policy instruments and thereby contribute to the expected results of Interreg Europe.

- An implementation of new projects (**type 1**) is relatively straightforward because such measures require the existence of an appropriate support programme or funding scheme (i.e. EU, national, regional/local) and of course the availability of sufficient funds.
- Changes in the management of a policy instrument (**type 2**) and in the strategic focus of a policy instrument (**type 3**) are not necessarily associated with substantial cost, but related measures can be rather demanding and also complex. Improving the governance of a policy instrument or even adapting its overall strategic focus may, for example, require arbitration and consensus building processes between different political or sector-specific interests.

Against this backdrop and based on the three types of policy improvements presented above, respondents were asked to either select a single type or combine various types for reflecting best what is defined (or will be foreseen) in their action plans.

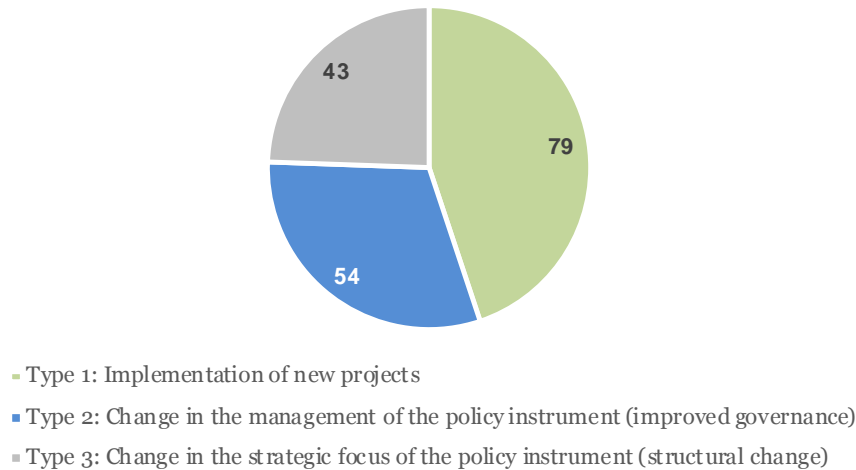
The overall result is shown in the overview below (see: figure 5). It should be noted that the possibility for multiple choices results in a total number of responses being much higher (i.e. 176) than the number of lead partners / project partners having participated in the online survey (i.e. 128).

Across all SOs, the most frequently mentioned type of policy improvement is an implementation of new projects (45% of all responses), followed by measures changing the management of policy instruments (31% of all responses) and finally by measures changing the strategic focus of policy instruments (24% of all responses).

²⁴ Interreg Europe Programme Manual, pp.54-57

Figure 5 - Types of policy improvements foreseen in actions plans of project lead partners and partners (all SOs, with possibility of multiple answers per respondent)

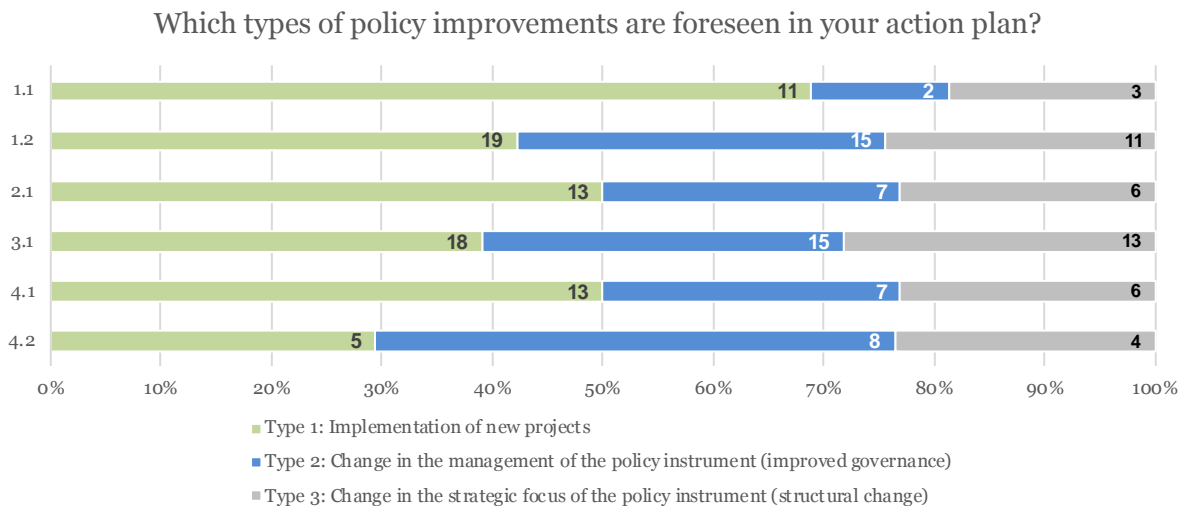
Which types of policy improvements are foreseen in your action plan?



Source: service provider

If this general pattern of responses given is now examined more closely at the level of the six policy themes addressed by Interreg Europe, it becomes clear that **the three types of policy improvement play quite different roles under the SOs** (see: figure 6).

Figure 6 - Types of policy improvements foreseen in actions plans, by number of responses per SO



Source: service provider

- An **implementation of new projects (type 1)** is clearly most important for an improvement of policies in the field of innovation infrastructures (SO 1.1: 69% of all responses). Under other SOs,

however, this option is comparatively less important for achieving policy improvements. Type 1 measures are least important for an improvement of policies that aim at enhancing a resource-efficient economy (i.e. SO 4.2: 29% of all responses).

- A **change in the management of policy instruments (type 2)** is particularly important for an improvement of policies enhancing a resource-efficient economy (SO 4.2: 47% of all responses). At a clearly lower but still above-average level, measures of this type are also important for an improvement of policies enhancing a low carbon economy (SO 3.1: 33% of all responses) and a delivery of innovations (SO 1.2: 33% of all responses). Type 2 measures are least important for an improvement of policies that are addressing regional innovation infrastructures (SO 1.1: around 13% of all responses).
- A **structural change of policy instruments (type 3)** is somewhat more important only for an improvement of policies that aim at enhancing a low carbon economy (SO 3.1: 28% of all responses). While most of the other SOs have shares close to the overall average, type 3 measures are least important under SO 1.1 (19% of all responses). This might also be due to the fact that implementing structural change in well-established regional innovation infrastructures is difficult.

As regards **the selected approaches for achieving policy improvements (see: table 1)**, it appears from the responses that around half of the lead partners / partners (55) foresee realising just one of the three types of policy improvement. The other half (57) foresees different combinations of the three policy improvement types within their areas. Most frequent are the combinations “new projects (type 1) & change in the management (type 2)” and “new projects (type 1) & structural change (type 3)”. More demanding approaches combining governance-related and structural policy improvements (type 2 & type 3) or even all three types are only implemented in 17 partner areas.

Table 1 – Action plan approaches for achieving improvements of local / regional policy instruments

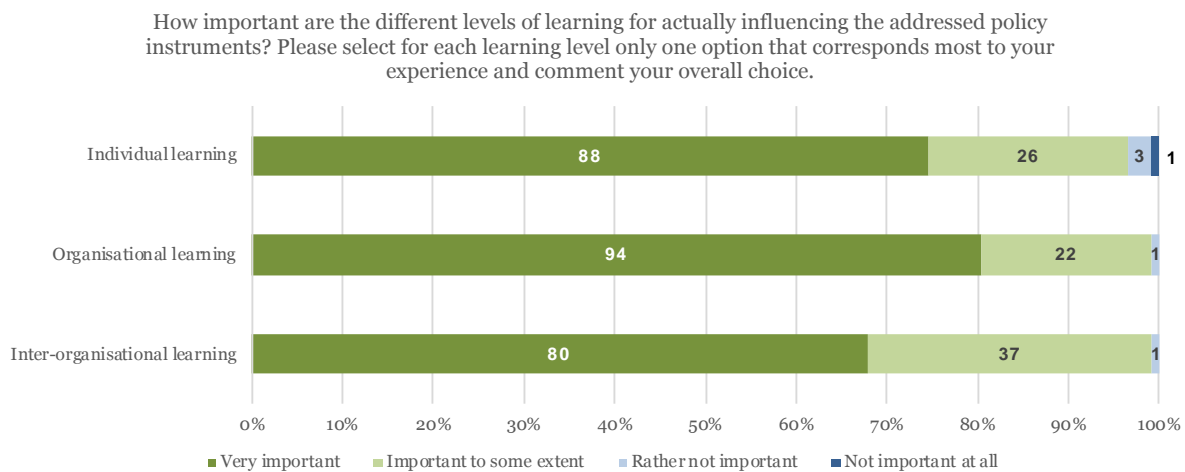
Approach	Focus of policy improvements	No of respondents
Policy improvement by only one type	Implementation of new projects (type 1)	32
	Change in the management of policy instruments (type 2)	14
	Structural change of policy instruments (type 3)	9
Policy improvement by combining different types	New projects (type 1) + change in the management (type 2)	23
	New projects (type 1) + structural change (type 3)	17
	Change in the management (type 2) + structural change (type 3)	10
	Type 1 + type 2 + type 3	7
Total		112

A closer look at the response pattern also shows that there are often strong variations within each project as regards the adopted approaches for policy improvements (see: Annex IV). Good examples are the projects *CESME* (SO 4.2), *CD-ETA* (SO 4.1) and *REGIO-MOB* (SO 3.1), but to some extent also *BRIDGES* (SO 1.1.) and *RATIO* (SO 1.2). This variation reflects the fact that policy improvement approaches are always tailored to the specific context conditions and needs of each project partner.

Required levels of learning for achieving policy improvements

A total of 118 lead partners and project partners have judged the respective importance of the three levels of learning that are required for achieving regional / local policy improvements (see: figure 7).

Figure 7 – Importance of each level of learning for influencing policy instruments (all SOs and number of respondents)



Source: service provider

More than two thirds of the respondents consider all three learning levels to be very important, although some variations exist between these levels.

- Clearly **most important is “learning within the project partner organisations” (80%)**, because this is the “place” where newly acquired policy-relevant knowledge (e.g. via the interregional exchange of experience) is shared and further developed for being used to influence policy instruments.
- At a second position is **“learning of individual staff members”** from project partner organisations being directly involved in all interregional and local/regional project activities **(around 75%)**. These persons are the indispensable “transmission belts” introducing newly acquired policy-relevant knowledge into the project partner organisations.
- Although **“inter-organisational learning within the relevant policy sub-system”** comes last, more than two thirds of the respondents consider continuous interaction and exchange with other policy relevant local / regional organisations within the established stakeholder groups

important (**around 68%**). This also supports previously presented survey findings showing that a continuous interaction with regional / local organisations in the established stakeholder groups is considered crucial for achieving policy improvements (78% of the respondents).

48 respondents have further commented their judgements made and explained how the different levels of learning are supporting policy improvements. A clear majority considers the three levels as interconnected “elements” of the same chain and also states that by reaching out to all levels at the same time it becomes possible to gaining the necessary capacity for truly influencing policy instruments. But also the respondents' perception of the individual levels provides interesting insights (see: box 10).

Box 10 – Summary of comments made by survey respondents on the importance of the 3 learning levels

Individual learning: Policy change requires people to understand the needed adaptations / improvements and how they can be achieved. Visiting other partners facing similar situations / difficulties is very useful for getting inspiration on how to implement policy improvements back home. Making first-hand-experiences that allow seeing how solutions to common problems or other good practices work in other partner regions directly change the mind-sets of the participating people (i.e. partners, government officials, politicians etc.).

Organisational learning: This form of learning starts to emerge when knowledgeable individuals involved in the project spread and discuss new ideas about policy change within the project partner organisation. These individuals are important for explaining new experiences to other colleagues in the organisation that might have more leverage in implementing changes on the policy instrument at stake. Intra-organisational learning between other technical and/or directing staff members in charge of a policy instrument is even an absolute imperative especially when a good practice transfer implies additional commitment of funds. Some respondents consider the need for learning within project partner organisation to be comparatively more important than learning within other local/regional stakeholder organisations.

Inter-organisational learning within the relevant policy sub-system: This process allows other regional/local stakeholders bringing their specialist knowledge of a sector or policy into the project and also helps them with up-building their own capacity. The latter not only involves capacity on the “activities side” but also knowledge about new good practices or other policy approaches. It is observed that the most intensively involved stakeholders are usually also those likely to learn most within this collaborative process. When this joint learning of regional/local partners is associated with concrete benefits on the ground, stakeholders are in general more prepared to supporting a change of policy instruments. Joint learning processes also strengthen collaboration between the involved organisations and can even create new networks of motivated actors and organisations, being drivers for experimenting alternative paths in local development. Inter-organisational learning is particularly important where policies are complex and driven by multiple and sometimes powerful interest groups. Influencing a complex policy requires developing a mixed strategy approach and creating a broad public and organisational interest-coalition on that theme. This also makes it more likely to mobilising funds for subsequent policy improvements. However, stakeholder involvement is often highly variable due to their ongoing own work. Moreover, especially regional / local companies like to be involved in concrete projects rather than in learning processes on policy change. Finally, it seems that this joint learning is more suited for influencing local/regional instruments rather than national policy instruments (i.e. slow progress of change within national ministries).

A tentative approach for further defining / categorising the notion of capacity increase

As the terms of reference for this evaluation ask to see if the notion of personal and organisational capacity increase needed for influencing policy instruments can be further defined and categorised, we have developed a tentative approach that cross-relates previously presented survey results.

The analysis assumes that every learning process leads to a certain form of capacity increase, which then equally implies that judgements on importance of learning processes also depict the scope of capacity increases required for achieving policy improvements mentioned in the projects' action plans.

As respondents have previously assessed the importance of learning levels only in general terms and also indicated their planned policy improvements through selecting either a single type or a combination of types, survey data was further processed in order to establish a direct relationship between the different answers as well as to make information about the respectively required learning levels comparable (see: Annex III).

The outcome of this tentative analysis is presented in the below overview (see: table 2) and related key findings are summarised by the following points.

Table 2 – Importance of learning and capacity increase for realising envisaged policy improvements

Action plans	Policy improvement approaches ...							Overall importance of learning (**)
	... applying one type			... combining different types				
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 1 & Type 2	Type 1 & Type 3	Type 2 & Type 3	Type 1 & Type 2 & Type 3	
Individual learning: Capacity increase of individual staff members from project partner organisations	++	+++	+	++	++	++	+++	15
Organisational learning: Capacity increase at the level of the entire project partner organisations / institutions	+++	+++	+	++	++	++	++	15
Inter-organisational learning within the policy sub-system: Joint capacity increase of project partner organisations and other policy-relevant stakeholder organisations	++	++	+	++	+++	+	++	13
Overall intensity of the policy learning process (**)	7	8	3	6	7	5	7	-

(*) +++ = high importance; ++ = medium importance; + = low importance
 (**) total number of “pluses” in row or column

(1) When looking first at the overall importance of the three learning levels, it can be seen that a capacity increase of individual staff members from the project partner organisations (individual learning) and of project partner organisations themselves (organisational learning) is most important for an improvement of regional / local development policies.

A joint capacity increase of project partner organisation and of other policy-relevant local or regional stakeholder organisations is also important (inter-organisational learning within the policy subsystem), albeit at a slightly lower level. This may, for example, involve a capacity increase in other relevant local/regional stakeholder organisation or the forging of "advocacy coalitions" among political decision makers, administrations and other stakeholders or even the establishment of new topic-focussed networks acting as drivers for experimenting alternative paths in regional or local development.

(2) Each level of learning and also the related capacity increases have a highly variable importance within the different approaches for policy improvements:

- A capacity increase of individual staff members from project partner organisations is highly important for implementing a change in the management of policy instruments (type 2) and also a combined implementation of all three types of policy improvement.
- A capacity increase at the level of the entire project partner organisations is highly important for implementing new projects (type 1) and, not astonishing, also for changing the management of a policy instrument (type 2).
- A joint capacity increase in project partner organisations and other policy-relevant stakeholder organisations is highly important for an introduction of new projects that is combined with a change in the structure of a policy instrument (type 1 + type 3).
- Low importance of all learning processes and the related capacity increases is only noticed in case of a structural change of policy instruments (type 3) and, for inter-organisational learning only, in case of a parallel implementation of changes in the management and structure of a policy instrument (type 2 + type 3).

(3) A final look at the overall intensity of policy learning process shows that **under more than half of the action plan approaches, a considerable personal and organisational capacity increase is needed for actually achieving the envisaged single or combined policy improvements:**

- The most intense policy learning process and also the most significant capacity increase seems to be needed for implementing a change in the management of policy instruments (type 2). Intense policy learning processes and substantial capacity increases are also needed when new projects are implemented (type 1) or when the latter improvement is combined with a structural policy change (type 1 & type 3) and, not surprisingly, when all three types of improvements are realised at once.
- A still substantial policy learning process and capacity increase is also needed for policy improvements combining an implementation of new projects with a change in the management of an instrument (type 1 + type 2) as well as for a parallel implementation of changes in the management and structure of a policy instrument (type 2 + type 3).

- The least intense policy learning process seems to be needed for a structural change of policy instruments (type 3). Also the required capacity increase is consequently low, probably because respondents were organisations fully in charge of the policy instruments to be changed.

Although these general patterns for required learning and capacity increase are indeed of interest, they should not be understood as practical rules of thumb for realising policy change within projects. The patterns were theoretically derived from opinions expressed by respondents from different types of organisations that are sometimes directly in charge of improving policy instruments and sometimes not. Moreover, these organisations are also active in different policy fields and embedded in particular national and regional / local policy contexts (i.e. different allocation of policy competences; different modes of implementing policies; different types of other policy-relevant actors needed for realising improvements etc.).

Due to these limitations, the role of increased capacities for policy improvements is now further explored by analysing qualitative evidence from progress reports of the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1.

2.3.3 Policy learning processes realised under the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1

The in-depth analysis of the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1 looks more closely at the causal relationship between the realised exchange of experience and policy learning processes, the induced increase of professional capacities and their direct effect on a preparation or implementation of local or regional political improvements. For each project examined, a short summary of the realised in-depth analysis can be found at the end of this report (see: Annex IV).

The table below provides a “summary of project summaries” (see: table 3) and key findings are summarised by the following points.

(1) Under most of the 19 examined projects, the overall exchange of experience process was very intense during phase 1. Only a few projects had a medium intense exchange of experience (i.e. *PASSAGE*) or processes that started sluggishly and then became more intense over time (i.e. *SME ORGANICS*, *REGIO-MOB* and *S34Growth* to some extent). Hampering factors at an early stage were a non-regular participation of all project partners in this process (*SME ORGANICS*), changes in the project partnership adversely affecting the entire process (*REGIO-MOB*) or the prior needed establishment of good working relations between all project partners (*S34Growth*).

(2) The involvement of other local / regional actors in the established stakeholder groups was in general also very intense. Under few projects, however, stakeholder involvement was not equal in all partner regions and remained medium throughout phase 1 (i.e. *CISMOB*) or only became more intense over time (i.e. *ERUDITE*). Specific cases are *FINERPOL* and *ZEROCO₂*, as in respectively one project partner there had not been any regional / local stakeholder involvement.

Table 3 – Main features of learning processes and capacity increase under projects with a finalised phase 1

SOs / Projects		Intensity of the phase 1 exchange of experience, overall (*)	Involvement of other local / regional actors in stakeholder groups (*)	Reported and approved policy improvements at the end of phase 1
SO 1.1	SmartPilots	+++	+++	1 (Belgium/Flanders)
SO 1.2	NICHE	+++	+++	None
	RATIO	+++	+++	None
	HoCare	+++	+++	1 (Czech Republic)
	ERUDITE	+++	++ → +++	3 (Slovenia, Italy, Ireland)
	ClusterS3	+++	+++	None
	P2L2	+++	+++	None
SO 2.1	S34Growth	++ → +++	+++	2 (Spain, Portugal)
	iEER	+++	+++	2 (Finland)
SO 3.1	SME ORGANICS	+ → ++ → +++	+++	None
SO 3.1	CISMOB	+++	++	1 (Romania)
	FINERPOL	+++ (except 1 PP)	+++ (except 1 PP)	None
	ZEROCO2	+++	+++ (except 1 PP)	1 (Finland)
	REGIO-MOB	+ → ++ → +++	+++	1 (Romania)
	PASSAGE	++	+++	None
SO 4.1	IMPACT	+++	+++	None
	CHRISTA	+++	+++	None
SO 4.2	RETRACE	+++	+++	2 (Italy, Romania)
	CESME	+++	+++	None

(*) +++ = high, ++ = medium, + = low, → = observed evolution over time

Interaction with other policy-relevant organisations usually took place within the local or regional stakeholder groups. Under many projects, however, these actors also participated in the interregional cooperation activities of project partners (e.g. *SmartPilots*, *P2L2*, *ERUDITE*, *FINERPOL*, *ZEROCO2*, *PASSAGE*, *CHRISTA*, *CESME*). In case of *P2L2*, for example, two partners organised a bilateral stakeholder event enabling these actors to engage in a one-to-one learning process.

This generally intense involvement of other local / regional actors was also very beneficial for projects. Stakeholders brought policy-relevant “grassroots knowledge” to local and/or interregional events, contributed to an identification of good practices, introduced ideas for improving policy instruments and sometimes also played a significant role in the elaboration of local/regional action plans (e.g. *NICHE*, *ZEROCO2*).

(3) Under all projects, the partners’ interregional exchange of experience processes and their continuous interaction with other policy-relevant organisations in existing stakeholder groups **induced substantial individual, organisational and inter-organisational learning within and between the involved actors**. An interesting approach for pro-actively initiating a structured individual and organisational learning process is found under *CESME*, which elaborated a “project manual” for the partnership including guidelines on how to realise the exchange of experience process.

Learning processes were organised quite differently across the projects. *iEER* organised so-called “learning camps” that also involved other local stakeholders from project partner regions and proved of particular use for the learning process. *ZEROCO2* organised a broad inter-organisational learning process during the elaboration of final action plans. As the plans include good practice examples from other regions, draft versions were shared among the project partners for learning purposes. Under *RATIO*, the inter-organisational policy learning process with local/regional stakeholder organisations has progressed even better than originally planned and the intense engagement has allowed project partners setting up strong partnerships with them.

Another interesting example is *PASSAGE*, which aims to improving maritime Interreg-A programmes: here, learning processes have not only increased capacities of local stakeholders but also of existing local cross-border stakeholder organisations.

(4) An early direct effect of the realised learning processes and the associated capacity increase was that around half of these 19 projects also achieve first improvements of policy instruments during phase 1. In their progress reports, projects often mentioned even more than just the 14 indicated policy improvements, but the JS recognised / approved only parts of them as real improvements. *ERUDITE* has achieved the highest number of policy improvements and their focus was already described earlier (see: section 2.2.2, result achievement under SO 2.1).

3 The effectiveness of the Policy Learning Platform

3.1 Brief introduction to the subject-matter and focus of the effectiveness evaluation

The Policy Learning Platform (PLP) is a new element under Interreg Europe that addresses each of the four thematic objectives (TO) of the programme strategy. Consequently, the PLP was established with four thematic sections covering “Research & innovation” (TO 1), “Competitiveness of SMEs” (TO 3), “Low-carbon economy” (TO 4) and “Environment & resource efficiency” (TO 6).

In order to achieve the overall objective of Interreg Europe²⁵, the PLP aims to facilitate continuous EU-wide policy learning and the capitalisation of good policy practices among relevant actors of regional relevance (i.e. 1st operational objective of Interreg Europe). This overall mission is further specified by **the three PLP objectives** that focus on external and internal capitalisation²⁶:

- contributing to EU-wide capacity building and policy learning, by supporting networking and the exchange of experience and practices among relevant stakeholders (external capitalisation);
- exploiting results of interregional cooperation projects and making them available to a wider audience of regional policy stakeholders across Europe (internal capitalisation);
- improving the quality of the programme’s content, by advising the programme’s monitoring committee on the thematic orientation or by advising projects on content-related issues that are distinct from the assistance offered by the joint secretariat to applicants (internal capitalisation).

For achieving this overall mission in practice, **the PLP is expected to provide various types of services** for the whole community of regional policy stakeholders and in particular those involved in Investment for Growth and Jobs and European Territorial Cooperation programmes across Europe. An additional and important service is the good practice database, which makes regional policy-relevant knowledge generated by interregional cooperation projects accessible to everyone.

The PLP services are intended to reach out to a broad target group. It covers all kinds of interested and thematically relevant organisation as well as individual policymakers in Europe, independently from their involvement in an interregional cooperation project. Nevertheless, certain target groups have been defined to better focus PLP resources and services: (1) managing authorities of ESIF programmes, (2) regional and local authorities as well as (3) agencies, institutes and private non-profit making organisations.

The basic causality relation underlying the overall mission of the PLP and its services is that high satisfaction of users will result in learning effects and increased motivation to implement new policies

²⁵ To improve the implementation of policies and programmes for regional development, principally of programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal and, where relevant, of programmes under the European Territorial Cooperation goal (...).

²⁶ See Interreg Europe Programme Manual, pp.32-33

(results), which then leads to an implementation of improved policies that will have a measurable and positive policy impact in the relevant areas.

The focus of the PLP effectiveness evaluation is defined by three general questions that were set out by the terms of reference²⁷. For answering these evaluation questions, we first look at difficulties that have hampered a set-up of the PLP (see: section 3.2) and then analyse in more detail the current PLP performance as well as the actual use of PLP services by partners from the 130 projects operating since the 1st and 2nd calls (see: sections 3.3 and 3.4).

3.2 Difficulties during the set-up phase and the early online operation of the PLP

The PLP is a novel element under the Interreg Europe programme that was conceived, technically established and actually launched online during a first implementation period covering a total of 18 months (i.e. May 2016 to November 2017). The corresponding service contract (i.e. Subsequent Contract 1) lasted from May 2016 to January 2018 and was implemented in 2 phases: (1) the elaboration of an inception report for the first year of setting up and implementing the PLP and (2) the actual implementation of the annual work plan.

Various problems occurred during the early PLP set-up phase lasting from May 2016 until September 2017²⁸ (see also section 4.4 of the final report on lot 1), **which also adversely affected the performance of the PLP.** One important problem was that the PLP service provider has produced relevant deliverables only with delay. At the interim stage of the PLP set-up phase when half of the deliverables should have been produced, only between 5% and 35% had been accomplished in practice depending on the concerned sections of set-up activities.

Due to this, also the web platform development could not be completed within the agreed timeframe (expected 03/2017; actual 11/2017). Since most of the PLP services rely either entirely or partly on online resources, also deliverables of the different set-up activities were strongly interrelated. This holistic nature of the PLP set-up process also meant that delays in developing the web platform had immediate repercussions on the provision of additional deliverables. As a consequence of this, other PLP activities had to be put on hold. Delays were encountered in the management of PLP tasks and meetings, communication as well as in monitoring and evaluation.

Also shortcomings regarding the quality and quantity of the work performed during the set-up phase were observed, both in terms of the methodology applied and the analysis conducted. Most relevant problems were recurrent misunderstandings between the PLP team and the JS, an underestimation of

²⁷ For each TO and PLP, the evaluation is expected to appraise (1) the relevance of the PLP services, (2) the capacity of the PLP to increase professional capacities of its beneficiaries and (3) the capacity of the PLP to lead to policy change.

²⁸ See on the following: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Revised Interim Implementation Report v2 (pp. 4, 8, 11, 40) and JS Feedback to the Interim Implementation Report (pp. 2, 3, 4, 13)

the necessary implementation timeframes as well as a lack of proper coordination within the PLP project management and between the individual PLP teams (see: box 11).

Box 11 – Shortcomings regarding the quality and quantity of work performed during the PLP set-up phase

Recurrent misunderstandings between the PLP team and the JS about the PLP (including its purpose, technical aspects, and particularly the development of the web platform) stand out as one of the main drivers of shortcomings in the work process. This resulted in different expectations regarding the content and purpose of deliverables. Both the JS and the PLP team indicated a lack of proper coordination within the management of the PLP project as the cause of misunderstandings (see below).

An underestimation of necessary timeframes allocated to the implementation was highlighted by both the PLP team and the JS as another important factor leading to delays in the provision of deliverables. Both sides agreed with the assessment that the mission proved more complex than originally foreseen and too ambitious. These issues were compounded by difficulties in the inception phase, with the inception report proving impractical.

A lack of proper coordination within the PLP project management and between the individual expert teams was also identified by both the JS and the PLP team as contributing to existing problems. An absence of a daily manager as well as insufficient meetings held regularly between the teams and with the involved experts exacerbated the misunderstandings and differing expectations.

The main solution proposed to correct the observed problems was a revision of the PLP project management by establishing a new structure and creating new functions / roles²⁹. In addition to the restructuring of the PLP team, also a number of other measures were implemented in order to ensure that misunderstandings were avoided³⁰.

The PLP started its online operation at the beginning of September 2017 when the thematic PLP pages were launched³¹. The corrective actions taken have indeed resulted in a better overall coordination process between the members of the PLP team, but several problems remained and continued to affect the ongoing performance of the PLP.

A continuous provision of service has not been ensured at all times of the now operational PLP and also problems with a timely presentation of deliverables persisted. Consequently, there still was a need for improving the monitoring of deadlines and for planning continuity in a more systematic manner. Shortcomings also existed in case of the PLP section on TO4, which operated poorly especially during the first year. Since the changes in the PLP team at the end of 2017, however, this section has become by far the best TO-section of the PLP. Also the quality of the PLP output continues to be suboptimal, wherefore the JS highlighted that the PLP project manager should better and more systematically verify the deliverables submitted.

²⁹ “Project Manager” responsible for daily on-site management and “Web Manager” responsible for better streamlining and coordinating the development of the web platform

³⁰ e.g. adoption of a more realistic number of deliverables; adoption of a web implementation plan with priority actions to be taken; more regular exchanges between all teams to ensure coherence of tasks and services

³¹ See on the following: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Annual implementation report, 01 April 2017 to 05 January 2018 (pp. 4, 72, 73) and JS Feedback to the Annual implementation report (pp. 1, 2, 11, 12)

3.3 Current output and result achievement of the PLP (June 2017 - end of July 2018)

This section evaluates the performance of the PLP on ground of monitoring data gathered for a broad range of output and result indicators. These are the pre-defined output and result indicators mentioned in the Interreg Europe programme document and the programme manual³² as well as a larger number of other output and result indicators that were elaborated for internal monitoring purposes³³.

Data originates from the 1st PLP evaluation report³⁴ covering the time period from June 2017 until the end of December 2017 (i.e. some data also includes the first days of January 2018) and from the 2nd PLP evaluation report³⁵ covering the period from January 2018 until the end of July 2018. Data is available for nearly all output indicators, but not yet for most of the result indicators (except: (“*share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events*”). Moreover, the available data is in most cases aggregated for the entire PLP and therefore does not allow differentiating between the thematic PLP sections. These limitations make it difficult carrying out the evaluation in accordance with the prescribed approach (i.e. effectiveness analysis and answering of evaluation questions at the level of the PLP sections established for TO 1, TO 3, TO 4 and TO 6).

Nevertheless, existing data for these indicators (see: overview table in Annex VI) and further information in the PLP evaluation reports allow analysing the evolution of the PLP online community, the current scope of and demand for PLP services, the external promotion of the PLP and also first PLP results.

Evolution of the PLP online community

Since the opening of PLP registration on 5th September 2017 until 11th January 2018, the online community has grown to a total of 1,372 members registered at the PLP. Since then, the number of registered PLP users has considerably increased to 4,381 at the end of July 2018 (i.e. + 3.009).

The total of registered members in all PLP sections now represents around 44% of the target value to be reached in 2023 (i.e. 10,000 members). The PLP members are currently located in 59% of the existing European regions at NUTS 2 level, with this level of coverage being already considerably higher than the target value expected for 2023 (ca. 17%).

The PLP online community includes 2,045 public authorities (47%) and 1,001 Managing Authorities of ESIF programmes (23%) as well as 1,426 organisations involved as partners in the currently operating Interreg Europe projects (33%)³⁶. The current share of registered Managing Authorities / Intermediate

³² See: Interreg Europe Programme Manual, 13 December 2016, version 4, pp.57-60

³³ See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform. Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy covering impact assessment, version of 19.07.2017.

³⁴ See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, 12 January 2018

³⁵ See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, 07 September 2018

³⁶ The PLP expert team highlights that the individual figures of this actor-specific breakdown of PLP members cannot be added up to achieve the above-indicated total of PLP members, as a registered member can form part of various groups.

Bodies responsible for ESIF programmes (around 23%) has already reached more than the double of the 2023 target value (i.e. 10%).

Current scope of and demand for PLP services

As regards policy learning events organised by the PLP, current achievements (i.e. 12 events) are still far behind the 2023 target value (i.e. 406 events). During the 2nd half of 2017, a total of 6 offline events were realised. These were the 4 thematic workshops for project partners in Brussels (June 2017) that addressed specific topics being relevant under different PLP sections³⁷ as well as the 2 combined back-to-back policy learning events of October 2017 that addressed TO1 / TO3 (i.e. in Milan on research & innovation and SME competitiveness) and TO4 / TO6 (i.e. in Seville on energy and resource efficiency). In the following reporting period (January-July 2018), a further 6 offline and online events were organised: these were the 3 thematic workshops for project partners realised in June 2018³⁸ and 3 webinars on TO1, TO 4 and TO 6. Even if the annual frequency of event organisation is significantly increased, it must be expected that the final target value for 2023 will not be reached.

A total of 652 persons participated in the 12 organised PLP offline and online events (excl. members of the JS and PLP team). The number of participants was usually lower in thematic workshops and webinars (i.e. ranging between 19 and 39) that in the combined back-to-back policy learning events (i.e. ranging between 70 and 120). The current overall output represents only around 9% of the final target value for 2023 (i.e. 7,500 participants), which also suggests that this target will not be reached.

The PLP “Expert support helpdesk” offers policy advice on the four TOs covered by the PLP. The thematic PLP experts answer requests for guidance on how to improve the management and implementation of public policies and there is also the possibility to apply for on-site peer reviews. During the first year of operation, however, only 18 people had received policy advice. This shows that there is still a **huge gap between actual achievements and the target value for 2023** expecting 1,120 persons to be assisted. As a provision of this service is primarily driven by the actual demand of users (e.g. the projects’ request for assistance), the currently low output suggests that the service is still of little relevance. However, the still low demand can also result from the fact that this PLP service is not yet well known to potential users.

In contrast, **there is a very strong interest in the online content of the PLP.** This can be shown by the average monthly sessions on PLP website pages in the reporting periods September-December 2017 (1,800 sessions) and January-July 2018 (2,631 sessions), which are in both cases considerably higher than the target value expected for 2023 (i.e. 500 sessions).

³⁷ Thematic workshops on SME internalisation, on circular economy, on investing in health and well-being as well as on sustainable transport

³⁸ Thematic workshops on TO1/3 in Leuven (clusters as drivers of regional innovation, SME competitiveness and interregional cooperation), on TO 4 in Florence (energy efficiency in buildings) and on TO 6 in Berlin (cultural heritage for sustainable development in European regions and cities)

The interest is also very strong in the PLP online database of good practices that currently includes 366 approved practices³⁹. During the first four months since the online start of the PLP, there were already 2,062 page views in the good practices database (status: 5th January 2018). In the period January-July 2018, the number of page views has considerably increased to 14.057 and over-reaches the target value expected for 2023 (i.e. 10,000 page views). Moreover, also 75% of the good practices were “followed” by registered users during the most recent period. Also this value clearly over-reaches the target expected for 2023 (10%).

External promotion of the PLP

External promotion of the PLP as an EU-wide one-stop-shop reference portal for stakeholders involved in regional development policies and ESIF programmes is progressing fairly well.

The number of presentations of the PLP in external events not linked to Interreg Europe is still low at the end of July 2018 (15 presentations) and only little progress has been made between the 1st and 2nd reporting period (+2 presentations). The currently low number of presentations is sometimes explained by the fact that there are only limited external speaking opportunities, making a realisation of 10 external presentations per year difficult (i.e. TO4)⁴⁰. Current outputs suggest that the expected target value for 2023 (280 presentations) will most likely not be reached.

In contrast, the already realised presentations have reached a significant audience (2,970 persons) that represents around 21% of the target value to be attained in 2023 (14,000 persons). Considering the implementation time still ahead, it can be expected that larger parts of the 2023 target value will most likely be reached.

Results achieved by the PLP

Quantitative information on results achieved by the PLP exists only for the indicator “share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP”. From existing data it appears that 100% the persons having participated in the 12 already organised PLP policy learning events (see above) were satisfied. This percentage emerged from an analysis of responses given in a questionnaire circulated among participants at the end of each event.

Several charts in the Annex part of this report provide a more differentiated view on the “usefulness” and „relevance” of the PLP thematic workshops organised in 2017 and 2018 (see: Annex VII). Overall, participants gave a positive feedback on the workshops realised. Workshop organisation, group discussions and the participatory approach were particularly appreciated. The workshops enabled person-to-person meetings with representatives of other projects, a sharing of ideas or concepts and also helped better understanding PLP services. Still, participants suggested that future workshops should become more concrete in order to deepen understanding of other project approaches and to

³⁹ TO 1: 139 good practices; TO 3: 42 good practices; TO 4: 90 good practices; TO 6: 95 good practices. See: Interreg Europe Excel file “goodpractive_240918”

⁴⁰ See: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Interim implementation report, 15.08.2018, p.31

stimulate learning about their specific good practices. Moreover, participants wished to meet partners from projects under other TOs.

3.4 Participation of projects in services and activities offered by the PLP

The previous general analysis of programme-level monitoring data is now further deepened at the level of the four thematic PLP sections. It does so by providing insights into the actual participation of projects in different types of PLP services and activities. Information on this participation is important, as one third of the currently registered PLP members are lead partners and partners of projects and because PLP participation forms part of the mandatory actions to be realised by projects.

This analysis is based upon a comprehensive review of all progress reports that the 130 projects of the 1st and 2n calls submitted to the JS⁴¹ of Interreg Europe until the end of July 2018. PLP participation was analysed by applying specific criteria (see: box 12), on ground of which projects were allocated to one of following categories: (1) no PLP participation, (2) low PLP participation, (3) regular PLP participation and (4) intense PLP participation. The latter category covers projects frequently realising one action and/or combining several actions that are mentioned under the 2nd criterion.

Box 12 – Criteria applied for assessing the PLP participation of projects

Criterion 1: Projects were considered inactive in the PLP if they did not state anything in their progress reports or if they only reported one or more of the following actions: (1) a registration for an upcoming PLP event without a reported proof of actual participation, (2) a simple registration to the PLP without a reported use of thematic online content and (3) simply promoting the PLP to other project partners or stakeholders.

Criterion 2: Projects were considered active in the PLP if they reported at least once or more often a realisation of the following actions: (1) attending and participating in PLP offline policy learning events or other online PLP events, (2) following online content of a PLP section and extracting new ideas from the database or thematic/ documents for their proper use and (3) realising meetings and/or cooperation with other projects connected to the same PLP section.

For the early PLP implementation phase (2017), it should be noted that the organised offline events (i.e. 4 thematic workshops, 2 back-to-back events) were thematically focussed and also involved targeted invitations to relevant projects. A non-participation in these events was therefore rather normal in case of projects that were not concerned by the respective topics addressed.

The outcome of this project participation analysis is first presented for each of the four PLP sections and then summarised at the level of the PLP.

Participation of projects in the PLP section on “Research & innovation” (TO 1)

The group of projects being relevant for the PLP section on “Research and Innovation” covers a total of 40 projects, which were either approved after the 1st call (21 projects) or the 2n call (19 projects). Most

⁴¹ The 64 projects from the 1st call have usually submitted 4 progress reports per project, while the 66 projects from the 2nd call submitted 2 reports per project. Consequently, around 380 reports were accessed via the iDB database.

projects address SO 1.2 “Improving innovation delivery policies” (33 projects), but only few projects address SO 1.1 “Improving innovation infrastructures policies” (7 projects). An overview on the section-specific pattern of project participation is given in Annex VIII (i.e. tables 1).

Among the 40 projects reviewed, **12 projects have not yet reported any interaction within the on-line space of this PLP section and did also not participate in offline policy learning events** or other events organised by the PLP. This non-participation can often be explained and partially justified in case of the 8 projects of the 2nd call having yet a relatively short period of implementation (i.e. *INNOTRANS*; *FoodChains 4 Europe*; *MONITORIS3*; *RELOS3*; *ecoRIS3*; *REMIX*; *MANUMIX*; *MARIE*). Nevertheless, there are also four 1st call projects not yet having reported interaction with the PLP (i.e. *InnoBridge*; *RESET*; *HIGHER*; *Beyond EDP*).

A total of **18 projects have only once reported participation in activities or services of this PLP section**. Low participation is observed under both 1st call and 2nd call projects.

- Half of these projects are 2nd call projects, most of which are implemented under SO 1.2 (i.e. *Islands of Innovation*; *P-IRIS*; *RUMORE*; *ClusterFY*; *STRING*; *STEPHANIE*). The other 2nd call projects are implemented under SO 1.1 (i.e. *Urban M*; *INNO INFRA SHARE*; *CREADIS3*).
- The other half are 1st call projects and implemented under SO 1.2 (i.e. *NICHE*; *NMP-REG*; *ClusterS3*; *P2L2*; *S3Chem*; *S34GROWTH*; *ERUDITE*; *SUPER*) or under SO 1.1 (*SmartPilots*).

Regular participation in the PLP section is observed for 10 projects, which means that they actively used PLP services and support offers throughout the period covered by their submitted progress reports. Not surprisingly, most of these are 1st call projects (i.e. *BRIDGES*; *RATIO*; *TITTAN*; *HoCare*; *Clusterix 2.0*; *HELIUM*; *INKREASE*; *OSIRIS*). Nevertheless, this group also comprises two projects from the 2nd call (i.e. *ITHACA*; *ELISE*). **Half of these 10 projects have participated most intensively in the PLP section on “Research & innovation”**. These 1st call projects cover nearly all sub-topics addressed under SO 1.2 (i.e. except “RIS3/governance”). The realised project actions for ensuring PLP participation are summarised below (see: Annex VIII, box 1).

Participation of projects in the PLP section on “Competitiveness of SMEs” (TO 3)

The group of projects being relevant for the PLP section on “Competitiveness of SMEs” covers a total of 33 projects, which were either approved after the 1st call (17 projects) or the 2nd call (16 projects). An overview on the section-specific pattern of project participation is given in Annex VIII (i.e. table 2).

Among the 33 projects reviewed, **8 projects have not yet reported any interaction within the on-line space of the PLP section and did also not participate in offline policy learning events** or other events organised by the PLP. Half of these projects are running since the 1st call (i.e. *SKILLS+*; *PURE COSMOS*; *iEER*; *ATMforSMEs*), while the other half covers 2nd call projects with a still relatively short period of implementation (i.e. *REBORN*; *STOB regions*; *Road-CSR*; *RaiSE*).

A total of **13 projects have only once reported participation in activities or services of this PLP section**. More than half of these projects with low participation are projects of the 1st call (i.e. *CRE:HUB; SME ORGANICS; RuralGrowth; SPEED UP; TRINNO; ESSPO; SOCIAL-SEEDS*), while the others are operating only since the 2nd call (i.e. *BRANDTour; Rural SMEs; SOCENT SPAs; KISS ME; GROW RUP; FFWD EUROPE*).

12 projects have participated regularly in this PLP section, which means that they actively used various PLP services and support offers throughout the entire period covered by all submitted progress reports. Half of the projects within this group are 1st call projects (i.e. *Destination SMEs; INNOGROW; SIE; UpGradeSME; COMPETE IN; INTRA*), while the other half are projects from the 2nd call (i.e. *RCIA; CLIPPER; Design 4 Innovation; Innova Foster; EIS; Inside Out EU*). One third of these 12 projects **have participated most intensively in this PLP section**. These 1st and 2nd call projects cover most of the sub-topics addressed under this SO (i.e. except “Entrepreneurship & access to finance”; Social enterprises & social responsibility). Their actions realised for ensuring PLP participation are summarised below (see: Annex VIII, box 2).

Participation of projects in the PLP section on “Low-carbon economy” (TO 4)

The group of projects being relevant for the PLP section on “Low-carbon economy” covers a total of 31 projects, which were either approved after the 1st call (15 projects) or the 2nd call (16 projects). An overview on the section-specific pattern of project participation is given in Annex VIII (i.e. table 3).

Among these 31 projects, **8 have not yet reported any interaction within the on-line space of this PLP section and did also not participate in offline policy learning events** or other events organised by the PLP. In most cases, this non-participation can be explained by the fact that projects operate only since the 2nd call and have a yet short period of implementation (i.e. *MOLOC; SCHOOL CHANCE; InnovaSUMP; DEMO-EC; CYCLEWALK MODE; SUPPORT*). However, there are also two 1st call projects with no participation in this PLP section (i.e. *SOCIALGREEN; LOCARBO*).

A total of **14 projects have only once reported participation in activities or services of this PLP section**. One half of these projects with low participation are operating only since the 2nd call (i.e. *CLEAN; VIOLET; ENERSELVES; Green Screen; OptiTrans; REFORM; COALESCCE*). The other half, however, are projects of the 1st call (i.e. *BUILD2LC; REBUS; FINERPOL; PASSAGE; RESOLVE; CISMOB; BIO4ECO*).

A total of **9 projects have participated regularly in the PLP section**, which means that they actively used various PLP services and support offers throughout the entire period covered by the submitted progress reports. Not surprisingly, most of these projects are 1st call projects (i.e. *ZEROCO₂; SET UP; LAST MILE; REGIO MOB; TRAM; SMART-MR*). Nevertheless, this group also comprises three projects from the 2nd call that are already quite active within this PLP (i.e. *EMPOWER; PROMETEUS; EV₄CityNRG*). Out of these 9 projects, **4 projects of the 1st and 2nd calls have participated most intensively in the PLP section on “Low-carbon economy”**.

These projects are all addressing the two main sub-themes “Energy efficiency” and “Mobility”. The realised project actions for ensuring PLP participation are summarised below (see: Annex VIII, box 3).

Participation of projects in the PLP section on “Environment & resource efficiency” (TO 6)

The group of projects being relevant for the PLP section on “Environment & resource efficiency” covers a total of 26 projects, which were either approved after the 1st call (11 projects) or the 2nd call (15 projects). Around one half of the projects address SO 4.1 “Improving natural and culture heritage policies” (14 projects), while the remainder projects address SO 4.2 “Improving resource-efficient economy policies” (12 projects). An overview on the section-specific pattern of project participation is given in Annex VIII (i.e. table 4).

Among the 26 projects reviewed, **7 projects have not yet reported any interaction within the on-line space of this PLP section and did also not participate in offline policy learning events** or other events organised by the PLP. This can mostly be explained by the fact that nearly all projects operate only since the 2nd call and have a yet short period of implementation (i.e. *EPICAH; Land-Sea; Night Light; CRinMA; Cult-RInG; Green Pilgrimage*). Non-participation is observed only in case of one 1st call project (*CHRISTA*).

A total of **7 projects have only once reported participation in activities or services of the PLP section**. Most of these projects with low participation are 1st call projects (i.e. *HERICOAST; IMPACT; SWARE; CESME; TRIS*), while the others are 2nd call projects (i.e. *SHARE; TANIA*).

Regular participation in the PLP section is observed for 12 projects, which means that they actively used various PLP services and support offers throughout the entire period covered by their submitted progress reports. An interesting feature is that more than half of these projects are 2nd call projects, which are already quite active within this PLP (i.e. *BIOREGIO; CircE; PERFECT; ENHANCE; GPP4Growth; ECOWASTE4FOOD; COCOON*). The other projects of this group are operating since the 1st call and had therefore sufficient time for developing interaction with this PLP (i.e. *BID REX; RETRACE; SYMBI; CD-ETA; SWARE; INTHERWASTE*). **6 projects covering both SOs have participated most intensively in this PLP section**. It should be noted that two thirds of them are 2nd call projects (i.e. *BIOREGIO; CircE; PERFECT; ECOWASTE4FOOD*). The realised project actions for ensuring PLP participation are summarised below (see: Annex VIII, box 4).

Summary assessment of project participation in the PLP

The overview below shows the current degrees of project participation for the individual PLP sections and also for the PLP in overall terms (see: table 4). From a comparison of participation degrees emerge a number of findings that are summarised by the following points.

(1) Roughly 1 year after the start of the PLP, the overall degree for non-participation and low participation of projects is still considerable (67%). Above-average degrees for non-

participation exist in the PLP section “Research & innovation”, while for low participation this is the case for the sections “Research & innovation” and “Low-carbon economy”.

No and low participation can partly be explained by the fact that most projects in both categories are only operating since the 2nd call. Also the specific thematic focus of the organised offline events and the targeted invitation of projects might have influenced this. Nevertheless, there are also inactive 1st call projects under several PLP sections. This phenomenon is significant especially in case of the PLP sections on “Research & innovation” and “Competitiveness of SMEs”.

(2) Only one third of the 130 examined projects are more or less frequently using online PLP services and also regularly participating in organised offline PLP events (33%). The degree for regular project participation is highest in case of the PLP section “Environment & resource efficiency” (46%), then followed by the section on “Competitiveness of SMEs” with a still above-average degree of project participation (36%). Unfortunately, the degree of regular participation is lowest in the PLP section on “Research & innovation” that also covers close to one third of the 130 examined projects.

Among the regularly participating projects are also many 2nd call projects, which are especially found in the two above-mentioned PLP sections. This suggests that just starting projects are now rather quickly connecting to the well-established PLP, which was in general not possible for 1st call projects. At their start, the entire PLP-system has still been in the set-up phase and projects often did not know what exactly was expected from them in this new context.

Table 4 – Section-specific and PLP-wide project participation degrees (end of June 2018)

PLP sections	Total number of related projects	Category and degree of participation (*)			Number of projects with intense participation (**)
		No participation	Low participation	Regular participation	
Research & innovation	40	30%	45%	25%	5
Competitiveness of SMEs	33	24%	40%	36%	4
Low-carbon economy	31	26%	45%	29%	4
Environment & resource efficiency	26	27%	27%	46%	6
PLP, overall	130	27%	40%	33%	19

(*) Degree (%) calculated as number of projects in a category divided by the total number of respectively related projects.
(**) These projects were selected by the evaluators from the main category “regular participation” on ground of information provided in the submitted progress reports. Under each PLP section, up to 10 projects maximum could be selected.

(3) Among the regularly participating projects, **there are only 19 projects with an intense PLP participation.** Reporting evidence shows⁴² that they usually participate in offline policy learning events or other online PLP events (e.g. webinars), but often also follow the online content of relevant PLP sections for extracting new ideas that they use in local / regional work processes (e.g. review of the good practice database; analysis of policy-related documents elaborated by the PLP experts etc.).

Further to this, some projects have also established regular exchanges or cooperation with other thematically connected projects of the same PLP section. This is observed in the PLP sections on “Research & innovation” (i.e. *HoCare* with *HELIUM*, *TITTAN* and *ITHACA*; *Clusterix 2.0* with *CLUSTERS3*) and on “Environment & resource efficiency” (*BIOREGIO* with *ECOWASTE4FOOD*).

⁴² See summary for project examples presented the text boxes of Annex VIII (boxes 1-4)

4 Theory-based evaluation of first project impacts

4.1 Brief introduction to the subject-matter and focus of the impact evaluation

At the very beginning of this analysis, it is worthwhile recalling that the meanings of “impact” and “result” as well as the places of both concepts within the overall intervention logic have clearly changed in the programming period 2014-2020 if compared to the previous period. The change between intended results and actual results (i.e. modification of result indicator values) is often coming about in form of a “causal package”: it is the sum of direct effects from programme interventions and of contributions from other factors (i.e. developments taking place beyond and beside the interventions under observation), as well as from the cross-relations amongst interventions and other factors.

Within this new and complex causal relationship, **impact is only the specific part in the actual result of a programme that can be credibly attributed to the outputs achieved by programme interventions.** Today, impact evaluation is mainly about better understanding the direct effects programme interventions are having on the observed change and also about separating (or disentangling) these effects from contributions other factors are making to change. Both aspects can be explored by counterfactual impact evaluation and theory-based impact evaluation.

The evaluation plan of Interreg Europe gives clear preference to **theory-based impact evaluation**, as this method is much more adapted to the specificity of Interreg Europe and because it allows giving more composite (qualitative & quantitative) knowledge about how and why the programme has an impact⁴³. Theory-based impact evaluation generally analyses the causal links between achieved outputs of programme interventions and observed changes in result indicator values, in order to understand why an intervention produces intended and unintended effects and how an intervention works. This approach to impact evaluation has at its core two basic components: the first is conceptual and focuses on articulating a coherent programme theory, while the second is empirical and seeks to test this theory with a view to investigate whether a programme causes the observed results as well as for whom and in which context⁴⁴.

This double approach is also adopted for the evaluation of first impacts emerging from Interreg Europe projects and shall allow answering the two general questions set out in the terms of reference⁴⁵. A coherent programme theory explaining how policy improvements are induced by Interreg Europe projects is presented in section 4.2. The theory was drawn up on ground of results

⁴³ Interreg Europe (2017): Evaluation plan – extracts. Revised version, 20 November 2017

⁴⁴ European Commission, EVALSED: The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, September 2013. European Commission, Evalsed Sourcebook: Method and Techniques, (no date mentioned).

⁴⁵ (1) To which extent the policy change achieved by the project has a territorial ‘impact’ (i.e. is there any evidence that the policy change led to improving the territorial situation, for instance in terms of job creation, CO₂ emission reduced, percentage of natural areas protected)? (2) Can this territorial ‘impact’ be measured and, if yes, how? Can INTERREG IVC projects help in this regards?

from a previously organised focus group meeting⁴⁶ and by testing a “prototype theory” with evidence from completed INTERREG IVC projects. Our explanation of the conceptual frame is done on ground of “theory of change thinking”, which is briefly introduced in an annex to this evaluation report (see: Annex IX). An empirical testing of this theory based on evidence from Interreg Europe projects can only be carried out in an experimental way, as actually realised policy changes are still very limited⁴⁷. This test explores to which extent observed policy changes are likely to emerge from direct effects of Interreg Europe projects (see: section 4.3) and how the programme might contribute to EU-level and country-wide development goals (see: section 4.4).

4.2 A “theory of change” for evaluating the impact of Interreg Europe projects

The conceptual component for evaluating the impact of Interreg Europe projects is a comprehensive theory of change, which explains how and why project-level cooperation is achieving the programme’s core objectives (i.e. overall programme objective; result of the six thematic SOs) and also contributing to other EU-wide or country-level development goals (i.e. Europe 2020 Strategy, territorial cohesion and the delivery of national/regional smart specialisation strategies).

This theory of change now provides a more detailed insight into the right-hand-side part of the “outcome map” that was elaborated by the ex-ante evaluation of the Interreg Europe programme⁴⁸.

What does the theory of change show and how should it be understood?

The visual representation of this theory of change (see: figure 8 and version for “black-and-white” printing in Annex X) shows the links between phase 1 and 2 project activities and the outcomes they achieve at different stages of the change process (●—●—◆—◇), as well as the causal chain that connects all outcomes to the specific or general objectives of Interreg Europe (—►). Outcomes at a lower level of the causal chain are always preconditions for outcomes above them.

Outcomes are necessary changes in the conditions of people, institutions or the state of the wider environment (e.g. behaviour, attitude, knowledge, skills, a policy or law etc.), which have to occur at different stages of the implementation process so that the final programme objectives are actually achieved.

For better illustrating how policy changes are actually achieved under Interreg Europe, the theory distinguishes **three types of outcomes with specific prefixes (i.e. impact, influence and leverage)**⁴⁹.

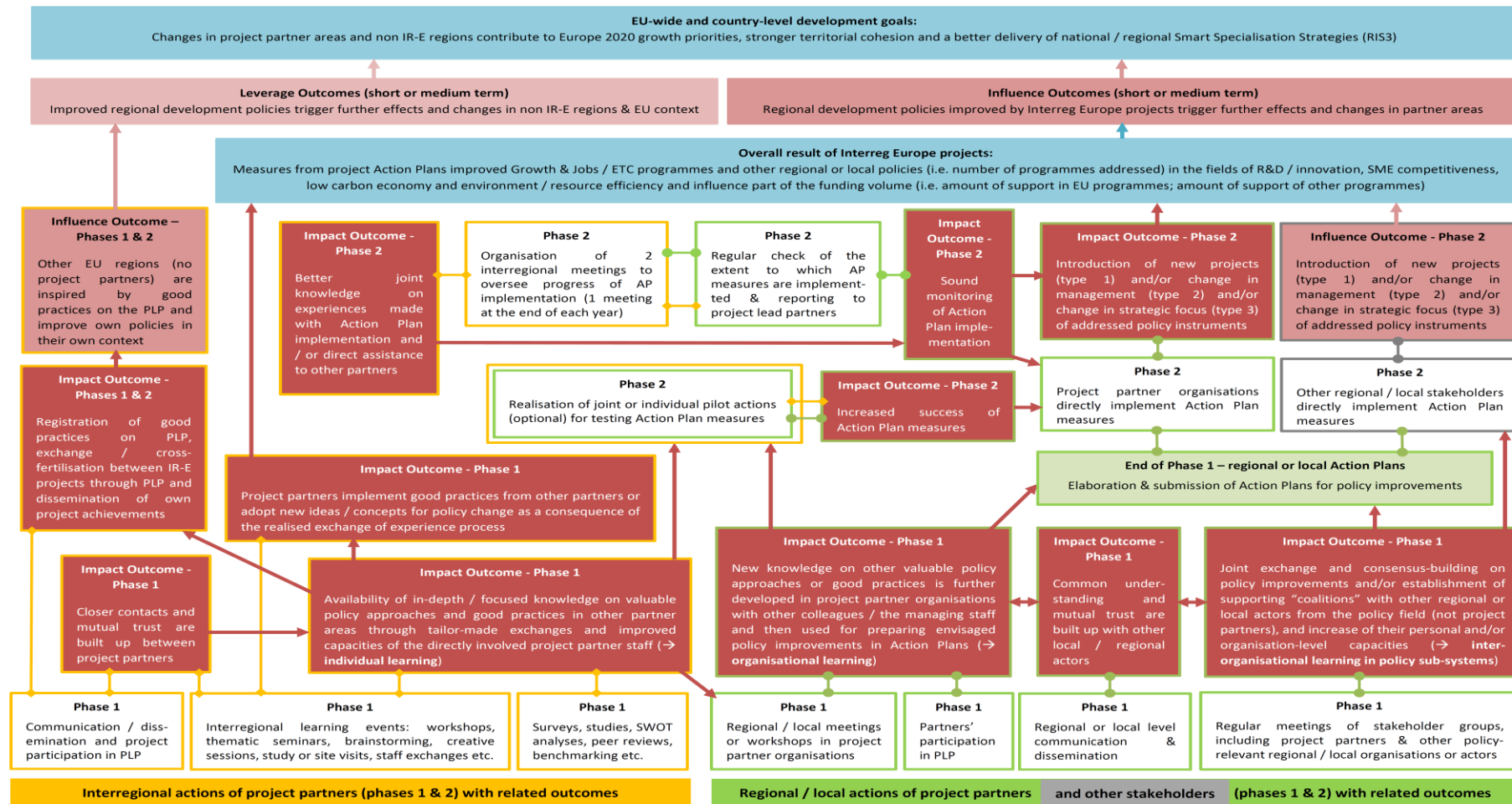
⁴⁶ The focus group took place on 20th July 2018 in Lille and involved the evaluators as well as a larger number of JS staff members from the team responsible for advising / assessing / monitoring the currently running cooperation projects.

⁴⁷ The currently weak evidence base on realised policy changes was also explicitly acknowledged by the terms of reference.

⁴⁸ Interreg Europe (2017): Evaluation plan – extracts. Revised version, 20 November 2017

⁴⁹ Other theories of change simply distinguish between early, intermediate or final outcomes. However, this is not very helpful in case of the Interreg Europe evaluation, as the key issue is to exactly determine “where” improved policies are actually coming from (i.e. from the direct effect of project activities or from external contributions or from a combination of both factors).

Figure 8 - Comprehensive “theory of change” for evaluating the impact of approved Interreg Europe projects (covering all SOs)



(1) Impact outcomes are changes emerging solely from the direct effects of interregional and regional / local project activities. They can therefore be credibly attributed to this type of intervention supported by Interreg Europe⁵⁰. Examples for relevant changes are an increased capacity of individual staff members from project partner organisations and other regional / local stakeholder organisations or of these organisations as a whole (i.e. effect of the phase 1 policy learning process), but also a more successful and sound realisation of policy improvements during phase 2 (i.e. effects of optional pilot actions, a monitoring of action plan implementation and an introduction of action plan measures).

(2) Influence outcomes differ from impact outcomes in that they are changes achieved through a combined effort of project activities and other external contributions. The latter mostly emerge from phase 2 policy improvement measures that are realised by other local / regional stakeholder organisations not being project partners. External contributions are also short or medium term “knock-on effects” in project partner regions triggered by the fully completed policy improvements, which then may contribute to delivering the Europe 2020 Strategy and national/regional RIS 3 or help reducing EU-wide territorial disparities. Within an influence outcome, the direct effects emerging from realised project activities are therefore always part of a wider “causal package” but still influence the achieved changes. The main challenge for impact evaluations is thus to determine the respective shares of direct project effects and external contributions within an influence outcome.

(3) Leverage outcomes are short or medium term changes occurring in other EU regions not connected to Interreg Europe projects or even in the wider national and EU-level policy context. Different from impact and influence outcomes, leverage outcomes are not any longer including direct effects of project activities. Nevertheless, the approaches adopted for achieving policy change in other contexts can be still traced back to outcomes that were previously achieved by projects. Leverage outcomes are therefore not affecting the overall result to be achieved by Interreg Europe projects, but they do contribute to achieving other EU-wide or country-level development goals that Interreg Europe should also support (i.e. Europe 2020 growth goals; territorial cohesion, delivery of national/regional RIS 3).

As the above-shown causal relations are indeed rather complex, **a simplified “so that chain” is developed for summarising the theory’s overall line of thoughts. This chain argues from the bottom upwards:**

- Phase 1 activities of approved projects establish a policy learning process that increases awareness / knowledge on regional policies in different thematic fields (SOs) and improves the capacity of the directly involved project partner organisations and other relevant regional-level actors ...
- ... so that project partners and other regional / local actors can undertake further activities in phase 2 for improving their regional / local policies and Growth and Jobs/ETC programmes...

⁵⁰ Impact outcomes cover direct effects emerging from the expected project outputs (i.e. as stated in the application forms) and from other unexpected or additional but policy-relevant project achievements that are not necessarily captured by the programme’s monitoring indicators. The latter are often qualitatively reported in the projects’ progress reports and need to be taken into consideration by the impact evaluation as well.

- ... so that more and better results are achieved by the actually improved regional / local policy instruments and programmes of EU Cohesion Policy ...
- ... so that the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy as well as EU-wide territorial cohesion or other country-level development goals are better delivered.

In the following, it is explained in more detail how outcomes at different stages of this pathway of change are achieving the overall result of Interreg Europe and also contributing to other EU-wide and country-level development goals.

Phase 1 impact outcomes contributing to the overall result of Interreg Europe projects

The broad range of interregional and partner-specific project activities realised in phase 1 generates a series of **impact outcomes** that **most often do not yet have a direct effect on the overall result of Interreg Europe** (i.e. actual change of regional / local development policies or ESIF programmes in the different themes addressed by the SOs). However, these impact outcomes directly create favourable pre-conditions that are needed for successfully realising other project activities (phase 1 and phase 2) and also support a number of parallel phase 1 impact outcomes.

One important pre-condition is the increased capacity of individuals and organisations (i.e. changed routines or processes; new support tools, techniques, models or plans etc.), which emerges from the wider policy learning process encompassing individual and organisational learning as well as inter-organisational learning in the wider local/regional policy sub-system. The crucial role this capacity increase plays in preparing and fully realising policy improvements during the following stages of the change process was shown by our previous analysis of the online survey (see: section 2.3.2).

Another relevant pre-condition is the up-building of mutual understanding and trust among project partners and other policy-relevant regional/local actors, as this facilitates the establishment of specific policy networks or advocacy coalitions that are often needed for achieving of policy change. Also this aspect was clearly confirmed by survey respondents commenting on the relevance of established regional / local stakeholder groups (see: section 2.3.1).

Nevertheless, **there is a phase 1 impact outcome having a clear direct effect on the overall result of Interreg Europe**. This change emerges when a project partner organisation or a local/regional stakeholder organisation implements a policy improvement inspired by a good practice or a new idea / concept from another partner area, which was identified as a direct consequence of the ongoing exchange of experience process⁵¹.

The previously realised effectiveness evaluation at the level of the six SOs has shown that some of the 130 examined projects from the 1st and 2nd calls have already achieved such early policy improvements (see: section 2.2).

⁵¹ Although the transfer of knowledge and practices is mainly prepared through the drawing up of the action plans, the Programme Manual highlights (p.45) that this can already occur during the exchange of experience phase of a project.

Phase 2 impact and influence outcomes contributing to the overall result of Interreg Europe projects

Phase 2 is focussed on a pre-testing of certain action plan measures (optional), on monitoring the implementation of action plans and on actually realising the planned policy improvements in project partner regions. This phase has therefore a more local / regional character, though interregional cooperation activities still remain an important element. Empirical evidence that may illustrate already achieved phase 2 outcomes is not yet available, as only a few of the currently running projects have started their phase 2 implementation processes.

Many of the realised phase 2 project activities generate **impact outcomes that do not yet have a direct effect on the actual improvement of regional / local development policies** in the fields addressed by the six SOs (i.e. overall result). This is the case for an individual or joint realisation of optional pilot actions aimed at testing the feasibility of action plan measures as well as for the local/regional and interregional activities dedicated to monitoring an implementation of the approved action plans. Both activities primarily create favourable pre-conditions for realising other phase 2 activities (i.e. pilot actions ensure that measures are realised more successfully; monitoring ensures that action plans are implemented in accordance with what was agreed) and are also reinforcing parallel phase 2 impact outcomes.

An implementation of measures foreseen in the approved local / regional action plans⁵² is the only activity in phase 2 that generates a direct contribution to the overall programme result. Our previous analysis of survey results (see: section 2.3) has shown that this may involve an introduction of new projects and/or a change in the management of a policy instrument and/or a change in the strategic focus of a policy instrument. However, these measures can be realised by project partner organisations directly or by other local/regional stakeholder organisations not having a project partner status. This distinction of the implementing agents is important, as it determines whether **introduced policy improvements have to be considered an “impact outcome” or an “influence outcome”** (see: box 13).

Box 13 – Assumptions for determining the nature of outcomes in relation to policy improvements

When action plan measures are implemented by project partner organisations being directly responsible for a policy instrument, then the associated policy improvements are an “impact outcome”. For changing a regional / local policy instrument, project partner organisations can draw on a range of previous or parallel impact outcomes that are achieved through project activities realised in phase 1 and 2. They can use their increased personal and/or organisational capacities achieved through the phase 1 policy learning process and also ensure a more “self-committed” and proactive steering of action plan implementation through their direct involvement in individual and joint monitoring activities during phase 2. Moreover, if project partner organisations realise optional pilot actions funded by Interreg Europe for testing the feasibility of certain action plan measures, they also ensure a more successful implementation of policy improvement measures. The

⁵² We indeed acknowledge that an implementation of action plan measures always takes place without funding from Interreg Europe, irrespectively of which type of actor is charged with an implementation of measures. In theory of change thinking, however, a financing of improvements is not the sole and decisive criterion for generating impacts. Also measures that most often do not require substantial support from external funding sources (e.g. changed administrative organisation or procedural routines; modified regulations / laws or policy concepts) are fundamental for achieving policy improvements.

sum of these “inputs” shows that the introduced policy improvements can be credibly attributed to the project and are therefore a final impact outcome at the end of the causal chain.

When action plan measures are implemented by other policy-relevant organisations being directly responsible for a policy instrument but not having a project partner status, then the associated policy improvements are an “influence outcome”. Other regional / local organisations may indeed draw on previously increased personal and/or organisational capacities for changing policy instruments, but this strongly depends on how actively they were involved in the stakeholder groups during phase 1. As non-project partner organisations are also not directly involved in phase 2 activities for monitoring an implementation of action plans, the realisation of measures is much more at the discretion of these other organisations. Project partner organisations have mainly an observer role and can, through the monitoring process, only to some extent influence an upholding of initial implementation commitments. It thus becomes clear that policy improvements are achieved more indirectly and with the help of a substantial “project-external” contribution, which nevertheless still comprise direct effects linked to realised project activities.

Influence and leverage outcomes contributing to EU-wide and country-level development goals

The theory of change also includes influence and leverage outcomes that contribute to achieving EU-wide or country-level development goals explicitly addressed by Interreg Europe (i.e. Europe 2020 Strategy, territorial cohesion, national / regional smart specialisation strategies). These outcomes can emerge in a short or medium term period, but their very nature is strongly depending on where changes occur and how changes are induced.

Changes emerging in project partner regions as a consequence of the actually improved regional / local development policies or EU funding programmes are “influence outcomes”. An analysis of completed INTERREG IVC projects during a pre-test of the theory has shown that further changes in the socio-economic or environmental situation of territories covered by project partners do emerge after the end of the project funding period, being often also quite substantial. These territorial changes are again coming along in form of a “causal package”, as they include both a direct effect from the realised activities of Interreg Europe projects (i.e. conceptualisation and realisation of policy improvements) as well as a contribution from external factors (i.e. “knock-on-effects” triggered by the improved policies). This cross-relation amongst completed policy improvements and newly induced external influences enables Interreg Europe projects to make also contributions to other country-specific objectives (i.e. better delivery of national / regional RIS3) and EU-wide development goals (i.e. Europe 2020 Strategy, territorial cohesion).

Changes emerging from the projects’ mandatory involvement in the Policy Learning Platform (PLP) are partly an “influence outcome” and partly a “leverage outcome”. Our previous analysis of the PLP has shown that approved projects are an important part of the wider PLP community and also participate more or less actively in PLP services or events (see: sections 3.3 and 3.4). An important aspect is that projects are continuously contributing to up-building this EU-wide one-stop-shop reference portal for knowledge on regional development policies. This mainly happens through a submission of suggestions for good practices that, after a prior validation by the JS / the PLP-experts, are then included into the PLP-database on good practices. That is the direct effect projects are holding in the influence outcome emerging from an EU-wide multiplication of policy-

relevant knowledge through the PLP, but also from the projects' own communication / dissemination activities. A leverage outcomes emerges when other EU regions not involved in Interreg Europe use good practices or policy-relevant knowledge from the PLP for realising own policy improvements. Once the latter are completed, they induce changes in these other EU regions that will contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy and to national/regional smart specialisation strategies or to territorial cohesion.

4.3 Exploring the likely overall impact of projects on regional or local policy change

This first part of the theory's empirical test explores to which extent policy changes are solely emerging from the direct effects of project activities (i.e. impact outcome) or are coming about as a product of direct project effects and contributions from external factors (i.e. influence outcome).

The 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd call currently work on improving close to 900 policy instruments, of which more than 80% are related to Investment for Growth and Jobs or ETC programmes⁵³. The remaining instruments are related to “other local, regional and national policies” that are implemented on the territories covered by project partners. All of these regional / local policy improvements contribute to achieving the overall result of Interreg Europe, but the impact of projects is only the sum of all direct effects on policy improvements that can be credibly attributed to realised project activities.

In order to get an impression about the likely extent of the overall impact projects will have on policy change, the respective size of the two main components determining this impact has to be examined more closely. The first component covers the two impact outcomes of phase 1 and 2 that include only direct effects of projects on actual policy improvements at regional or local levels, while the second covers the share that direct effects of project activities hold within the influence outcome achieved at the end of phase 2. The addition of both components then reveals the overall impact of Interreg Europe projects.

This apparently simple “equation” is now empirically tested by a quantitative analysis of information from the 130 examined projects indicating which types of actors are bearing responsibility for actually improving the 898 addressed policy instruments⁵⁴. This test aims to achieve the following two objectives: (1) developing a tentative concept for measuring the overall impact of projects on policy change and (2) classifying projects according to outcomes achieved in regard to policy change.

⁵³ See for this the infographic at: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/about-us/stats/>

⁵⁴ This analysis uses the total number indicated in the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-05-14 Overview Policy Instruments” (898 instruments) that also includes information on the status of the responsible implementing organisations. However, more recent information from iDB indicates that projects only address a total of 888 policy instruments in September 2018 (see: Annex II, tables 2 and 3). As the difference between values is only small and because the more recent information source does not allow linking planned improvements to the responsible implementing agents, we decided using here the older source of May 2018.

A tentative concept for measuring the overall impact of projects on policy change

The tentative concept is based on our earlier assumptions about the nature of outcomes relating to an achievement of policy improvements (see: section 4.2). It measures the volume of policy improvements directly realised by project partner organisations and explores ways how to determine the share direct effects of project activities are having within policy improvements realised by other regional / local organisations that are not project partners.

Out of the 898 policy instruments that the 130 Interreg Europe projects are currently improving, 333 instruments are in the direct responsibility of organisations being project partners (i.e. Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies or other public organisations at national, regional or local level). This means that **37% of all policy improvements will be “impact outcomes”**. 30% of these 333 policy improvements focus on SO 1.2 (100 instruments), while around 23% are related to SO 3.1 (77 instruments) and 22% to SO 2.1 (72 instruments). Policy improvements with an impact outcome are at around 10% under both SO 4.1 (34 instruments) and SO 4.2 (33 instruments), and at 5% in case of SO 1.1 (17 instruments).

For further quantifying (measuring) this part of the overall project impact at a later stage of the programme implementation process, one has simply to add up the contributions these individual improvements are making to the corresponding programme-level result indicators⁵⁵. This also allows presenting aggregated project impacts for the individual SOs.

From the above-said also follows that **the remaining 63% of the policy improvements will be “influence outcomes”**. This percentage covers the policy improvements implemented by other local / regional public bodies or organisations not being formal partners in a project. Nevertheless, each improvement still includes a variable direct effect originating from previously realised project activities that has to be captured as well. There are two important points of reference for identifying and assessing this direct effect of projects within the influence outcome.

The first point of reference is the theory’s phase 1 impact outcome that emerges from regular meetings of the local/regional stakeholder groups (see: figure 8 in section 4.2). It assumes that other local / regional public bodies or organisations are becoming stronger committed to planned policy improvements and also increase their own personal/organisational capacities. Sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 of this report have clearly shown that both direct effects indeed emerge from former project activities. Therefore, these effects should be thoroughly analysed at a later stage⁵⁶ while combining adequate qualitative and quantitative information sources (see: box 14).

⁵⁵ No. of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes influenced; No. of other regional policy instruments influenced; Amount (EUR) of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs and/ or ETC) influenced; Amount (EUR) of other funds influenced

⁵⁶ This analysis does not make sense at the moment, as information is only available for a few projects with a finalised phase 1.

Box 14 – Sources for analysing the direct effect of projects within the influence outcomes on policy improvement

A first qualitative information source can be evidence from the projects' progress reports, which shows how intensively the concerned other regional / local public bodies or organisations were involved during phase 1 within the established stakeholder groups. Should this information be weak or not sufficiently precise, an online survey focussed on this particular target group should be carried out later for retrieving more robust information.

Another quantitative information source is the existing output indicator “number of people with increased professional capacity”. As figures for each project are based on detailed and previously validated information indicating who exactly has increased his/her professional capacity (i.e. name of persons and organisations), this information can be used for analysing the extent to which other local / regional organisations being responsible for policy improvements were actually concerned.

Unfortunately, Interreg Europe has no specific indicator capturing the capacity increase of project partner organisations and other regional / local stakeholder organisations involved in the phase 1 policy learning process. However, information on this capacity increase is important for determining more closely the theory's phase 1 impact outcome. Due to this, further information should be produced either by widening the projects' reporting requirements at the end of phase 1 or, if this is not possible, by retrieving information through an online survey.

The second point of reference is the regional-level and interregional monitoring of action plan implementation and the related phase 2 impact outcomes (see: figure 8 in section 4.2). This monitoring process also covers project-external actions realised by other local / regional organisations in charge of the addressed policy instruments. Both impact outcomes therefore assume that this process can affect or influence the way how policy improvements are delivered by these organisations. However, there is no programme-level indicator dedicated to capturing information on this monitoring process and also knowledge about potential qualitative information (i.e. in the relevant reporting section in the projects' progress reports) does not yet exist because only some projects have started their phase 2.

Classifying projects according to their outcomes achieved in regard to policy change

This part looks at impact in a project-wide perspective, by classifying projects according to the overall outcome they will achieve in regard to regional or local policy change. For realising this classification, we calculated for each project the share of project partner organisations being directly responsible for improving the addressed policy instruments (i.e. number of directly responsible project partners / number of all project partners). However, we wish to point out that **this classification of projects does in no way imply a judgement on the effectiveness of their activities and/or the rationale underlying the envisaged improvements of regional or local policy instruments.**

The classification comprises three different groups (see: Annex XI) specifying whether projects will achieve regional / local policy change in form of an impact outcome (group 1) or an influence outcome, with the latter including either still significant direct effects of projects (group 2) or only low direct effects (group 3). The main features characterising each group can be summarised as follows.

- **Only in case of 5 out of the 130 examined projects** (i.e. *CREADIS3*; *P2L2*; *OptiTrans*; *TRAM*; *TANIA*), **the overall policy change will be an “impact outcome”**. This means that all or nearly all of the policy instruments addressed by these projects⁵⁷ are directly improved by project partner organisations. Projects with an impact outcome are found in four out of the six SOs (SO1.1, SO 1.2, SO 3.1, SO 4.2) and a clear 100% impact outcome only exists in case of the project P2L2.
- **In case of 52 projects (40% of all projects examined), the overall policy change will be an influence outcome that still includes a medium-high direct effect originating from previously realised project activities**. Around 37% of these projects are found under SO 1.2 (19 projects), while the rest is rather evenly spread among five other SOs (except SO 1.1 with 2 projects). The direct effect mainly emerges from the substantial proportion of addressed policy instruments that are improved by project partner organisations (i.e. between 41% and 79%). Moreover, the external contribution to this influence outcome (i.e. 21% - 59%) also includes organisation-level or behavioural changes of other regional / local actors that were induced by their previous involvement in the stakeholder groups (phase 1) and by a monitoring of the project’s action plan implementation during phase 2.
- **Within the influence outcome of 73 projects (56% of all examined projects), however, direct effects from previously realised project activities on the overall policy change will be low**. This is mainly due to the fact that a substantial proportion of the projects’ policy improvements are realised by other organisations not involved in projects as partners (i.e. between 60% and 100%). In case of 12 projects, even none of the envisaged policy improvements will be directly realised by a project partner organisation (i.e. *BUILD2LC*; *CD-ETA*; *CRinMA*; *ecoRIS3*; *ENHANCE*; *EPICAH*; *HoCare*; *IMPACT*; *INTRA*; *RATIO*; *SPEED UP*; *SUPPORT*). Around 60% of these 73 projects are implemented under SO 2.1 and 3.1 (in total: 44 projects), while the remainder are distributed fairly evenly across the other four SOs. But also here, the strong external contributions to policy improvements still include organisation-level or behavioural changes of other regional or local actors. They were induced by the actors’ previous involvement in stakeholder groups (phase 1) and/or by the projects’ activities on monitoring the implementation of action plan (phase 2).

Overall, this classification shows that **the overwhelming majority of project-wide outcomes on regional/local policy change will come about as a “causal packages”** at the end of phase 2. **This also has major implications for an operational steering of project implementation**, both at the level of the concerned project partners and also at the level of the Interreg Europe programme as a whole (i.e. but in particular the JS):

⁵⁷ The applied classification threshold “80% - 100%” might suggest that still a number of policy instruments are improved by other regional / local stakeholder organisations (i.e. an external influence). In practice, however, the difference to the total number of addressed instruments is in all cases very low (always 1 instrument).

Partners of projects where policy changes will come about as influence outcomes (esp. those of group 3) need to undertake all possible measures for ensuring an “impact-oriented” steering of the projects’ implementation process. Of particular relevance is an intense and regular interaction with other regional / local stakeholders being in charge of the policy instruments to be changed. This interaction concerns not only phase 1 where it is already more or less compulsory, but it should also happen during phase 2. Projects should realise a pro-active and participatory monitoring of the action plan implementation, instead of realising this monitoring passively and by adopting a “wait-and-see” attitude.

Interreg Europe should explore ways how other regional / local organisations realising improvements of policy instruments can become actively involved in the regional or local monitoring processes of action plan implementation. Furthermore, the programme should gather additional information on aspects needed for adequately determining the scope of direct project effects within influence outcomes. The focus should be laid on better capturing (1) organisation-level learning / capacity increase in project partner and other stakeholder organisations as well as (2) the direct influences exerted through a monitoring of the action plan implementation process.

4.4 Exploring the likely contribution to EU-wide and country-level development goals

This second part of the empirical test looks at the influence outcome in the upper part of the theory of change and explores in what ways completed policy improvements under the six thematic SOs (i.e. achieved results) will contribute to EU-wide and country-level development goals that Interreg Europe is also expected to support. The analysis is carried out qualitatively on ground of an in-depth review of relevant projects and assumes the following causal relationship underlying this contribution.

A concrete application of already improved regional development policies triggers immediate knock-on-effects of various kinds (e.g. a more effective tackling of territorial, sector-related or target group-specific needs; a more effective and efficient use of public funding etc.), which then also induce positive changes of the socio-economic or environmental situation of territories covered by project partners (i.e. in a short or medium term perspective). Knock-on-effects will enable project partners making stronger contributions to the Europe 2020 Strategy and better delivering national or regional RIS3, while the induced short or medium term territorial changes will primarily support the EU-wide goal of territorial cohesion. The afore-mentioned effects and changes are usually “influence outcomes”, as they will emerge from external contributions (i.e. concrete application of improved policies) as well as from the direct effects of the previously realised projects.

The way how and the extent to which projects will contribute to these EU-wide and country-level development goals is however variable. It depends on whether policy improvements were achieved in phases 1 or 2 as impact outcomes (i.e. possible direct contribution; indirect contribution with still

strong project effects) or in form of an influence outcome (i.e. only indirect contribution with medium or low project effects).

Contribution to smart growth and to the EU 2020 headline target on R&D investments

Interreg Europe will contribute substantially to smart growth, as many of the planned or already realised policy improvements aim at supporting the development of an economy based on knowledge and innovation. This contribution will mainly emerge from improved policies supporting innovation infrastructures (SO 1.1) and innovation delivery processes (SO 1.2), but to some extent also from improved policies strengthening the innovation capacity of SMEs (SO 2.1).

Annex I shows that a total of 40 projects are currently implementing SO 1.1 and SO 1.2, while a further 6 projects are implementing SO 2.1 (i.e. *TRINNO*, *INNOGROW*, *KISS ME*, *Design 4 Innovation*, *GROW RUP*, *Innova Foster*). Their policy improvements address a variety of smart growth related sub-topics such as sector- or territory-specific innovation (SO 1.1 and SO 1.2), the innovation capacity of SMEs (SO 1.2 and SO 2.1), open innovation or other forms of innovation (SO 1.2) and, most visible under SO 1.1 and SO 1.2, a variety of aspects directly focussing on research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (i.e. governance, infrastructure, sector-specific aspects and clusters, see also below).

As the projects' policy improvements under these SOs are also complementary, further and more wide-ranging secondary economic effects are likely to emerge in the concerned territories. An improved policy supporting more effectively innovation infrastructures may as well have positive implications for innovation delivery processes making use of such infrastructures, with both aspects then creating better framework conditions allowing SMEs to deliver more innovative actions.

Several projects from SO 1.1 and SO 1.2 have already realised policy improvements that also influenced R&D-related funding under the addressed instruments (e.g. *Smart Pilots*, *ITHACA*, *ERUDITE* etc.). However, it should be noted that contributions to the EU 2020 target of "3% of EU gross domestic product invested in R&D" emerge only from those policy improvements which are effectively increasing R&D funding under the ESIF programmes or other national / regional / local instruments addressed. This is obviously not the case when funding is "only" shifted between different R&D- or innovation-related measures and when the overall amount of support remains unchanged.

Interreg Europe will in general contribute indirectly to the EU 2020 headline target on R&D, as the huge majority of the currently planned policy improvements are coming about as influence outcomes (see above, section 4.3). Still, there might be cases where policy improvements are directly contributing to the EU 2020 headline target. This happens when project partners realise improvements that will also lead to a clear increase in R&D funding. Thereby, a new and theme-specific impact outcome will be generated that is not yet shown in our general theory of change covering all SOs. However, the characteristics of examined policy improvements show that this situation has so far not occurred.

Contribution to research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3)

Research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) are a key requirement to develop Europe's innovation systems and play a crucial role in the EU's cohesion, research and innovation policies. Interreg Europe will also substantially contribute to these national or regional RIS3 by providing a space for experimentation, learning and identification of good practices that helps better delivering these strategies (e.g. improved contents and governance or implementation mechanisms).

This contribution will mainly emerge from projects under SO 1.1 and SO 1.2 that improve regional public interventions relating to RIS3. However, the extent of this contribution will depend on how many projects under both SOs are addressing topics relevant for RIS3. Annex I shows that among the 40 projects currently implementing SO 1.1 and SO 1.2, a total of 21 projects are focussing on various aspects directly related to RIS3 (i.e. governance, infrastructures, clusters, sector-specific focus)⁵⁸. Moreover, available information shows that most policy improvements under the 31 projects currently implementing SO 2.1 are also more or less directly related to national or regional RIS3⁵⁹.

As a large number of theme-related policy improvements were realised in form of an influence outcome, Interreg Europe will most often contribute indirectly to enhancing a delivery of national or regional RIS3. An indirect contribution emerges when improved policy instruments under ESIF programmes or other domestic programmes will support new or more focussed measures that implement existing RIS3. The same holds true for RIS3 focussed improvements (considered here as a policy instrument) that are realised by organisations not being partners in an Interreg Europe project.

However, Interreg Europe can also directly improve national or regional RIS3 and thereby create a new and theme-specific impact outcome that is not yet shown in our general theory of change covering all SOs. This is the case when RIS3 are improved by organisations being partners in an Interreg Europe project. Concrete examples for direct RIS3 improvements⁶⁰ can be found under the projects *Beyond EDP* (4 improvements), *P2L2* (4 improvements), *S3Chem* (3 improvements) and *BRIDGES* (2 improvements) as well as under several other projects realising one direct improvement (i.e. *CircE*, *CLUSTERS3*, *Inside Out EU*, *MANUMIX*, *MARIE*, *MONITORIS3*, *NMP-REG*, *REBORN*, *REMIX*). Most of these projects are implemented under SO 1.1 and SO 1.2, but some also under SO 2.1 (i.e. *Inside Out EU*, *REBORN*) and even under SO 4.2 (*CircE*).

The two different ways how Interreg Europe may contribute to better delivering national or regional RIS3 can be illustrated by already realised phase 1 policy improvements of 5 projects that are implemented under SO 1.2 (see: box 15). Most of these improvements are indirect contributions to RIS3 (i.e. *HIGHER*, Lombardy region in case of *S3Chem*, Romanian partner INMA in case of *Clusterix*

⁵⁸ This is done by 21 projects in total. Under SO 1.1 these are only 3 projects (i.e. *BRIDGES*, *INNO INFRA SHARE* and *CREADIS3*). Under SO 2.1 these are in total 18 projects (i.e. *Clusterix 2.0*, *ClusterS3*, *RUMORE*, *ClusterFY*, *ELISE*, *STRING*, *HIGHER*, *INKREASE*, *Beyond EDP*, *MONITORIS3*, *RELOS3*, *ecoRIS3*, *P2L2*, *S3Chem*, *S34GROWTHSTEPHANIE*, *REMIX* and *MANUMIX*).

⁵⁹ See: Interreg Europe Excel file "2018-05-14 Overview Policy Instruments"

⁶⁰ See: Interreg Europe Excel file "2018-05-14 Overview Policy Instruments"

2.0), but some are also directly improving RIS3 (i.e. Walloon region in case of *S3Chem*; Regional Development Agency Centru in case of *Beyond EDP*).

Box 15 – RIS3-related projects under SO 1.2 having achieved first policy improvements⁶¹

The RIS3 sector-focussed projects *S34Growth* and *S3Chem* identify different ways for better implementing RIS3 in specific segments of their partners' regional economies. *S34Growth* supports the renewal of Europe's industry and competitiveness through industrial innovation and is seeking out new approaches to co-specialisation in smart specialisation which can be replicated across the EU and in different industrial domains. *S3Chem* is focusing on chemical related topics and realised two regional policy improvements.

Since the beginning of *S3Chem*, Wallonia has established a Regional Innovation Stakeholder Group (RISG) focussing on the chemical sector. A second working group was created more recently, involving relevant administrations that monitor ERDF-funded chemical projects. The organised meetings of both groups involve all policy-relevant stakeholders (i.e. competent administrative directorates, sector federations, clusters, research centres etc.) and establish a coherent process for generating and financing regional projects.

In the Italian Region Lombardy, the regional stakeholder group of *S3Chem* includes representatives of clusters, academia and industry. The outcome of joint discussion has influenced the revision of the bi-annual work programme for the regional RIS3. The revised 2017/2018 work programme, which defines topics that will be subsequently funded by ongoing and forthcoming project calls related to research and innovation, now gives greater importance to sustainable chemistry and bio refineries in the topics identified. Moreover, region-level activities of *S3Chem* have also influenced the mid-term review of the entire RIS3 for Lombardy. In the reviewed RIS3 that was formally adopted in November 2017, topics related to bioeconomy, sustainable chemistry and green chemistry have been further developed and some "Specialisation Areas" were deeper articulated in development themes (i.e. circular economy, sustainable chemistry and bioeconomy).

The RIS3 governance-focussed projects *HIGHER* and *Beyond EDP* exchange experiences and analyse good practices on the characteristics of mechanisms for implementing RIS3. *HIGHER* aims to achieve innovative models of public private partnerships suitable for mobilising investment in related smart specialisation areas and fostering an entrepreneurial discovery process. *Beyond EDP* aims to strengthen the entrepreneurial discovery process in Europe by developing new creative environments, where businesses and institutes can continually raise ideas and find out which ones have the most potential.

The Romanian project partner of *Beyond EDP* (Regional Development Agency Centru) has previously coordinated the design of the Centru RIS3 and succeeded in further improving the RIS3 governance process. This was achieved by setting up a new body responsible for implementation and monitoring ("Regional Consortium for Innovation"). This new regional association started working at the end of 2016 and in March 2017, it endorsed the regional portfolio of letters of intent for future projects aiming to accelerate the technology transfer under the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020.

The RIS3 cluster-related project *Clusterix 2.0* improves regional innovation policies by making better use of clusters, notably by looking forward into new models of innovation that are needed because globalisation and digitalisation cause rapidly changing value chains and business models. *Clusterix 2.0* is also an inspiring example demonstrating how interregional knowledge exchange has resulted in a national policy change in Romania.

Based on the close collaboration between the participating regions and insights gained from cluster policy benchmarking, peer reviews and staff exchanges, *Clusterix 2.0* contributed to the implementation of a new funding scheme for Romanian cluster management organisations. Through an interregional staff exchange, a cluster manager from the lead partner organisation in Lower Austria visited the Romanian project partner INMA (National Institute of Research – Development for Machines and Installations designed to Agriculture and Food Industry). At this visit, also in-depth discussions with several cluster managers, companies' representatives as well as members of Ministries about cluster strategies, funding schemes and cluster mapping took place. These discussions, together with lessons learnt from the Flemish Cluster Programme, convinced the Romanian Ministry for Research and Innovation to establishing a new funding scheme financed by the Romanian national RDI Plan. Equipped with a budget of close to EUR 900,000 for the 24 months of the first implementation phase,

⁶¹ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file "2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results" and in case of Clusterix 2.0 from https://www.interregeurope.eu/index.php?id=23&no_cache=1&tx_tevnewssevents_newssingle%5Bnews%5D=4111

the national programme supports mature clusters in elaborating their research-development-innovation strategies and increasing their service offer for cluster members. The first call was launched 2017 and the 12 proposals receiving support were selected in May 2018.

Contribution to inclusive growth and to the related EU 2020 headline targets

Interreg Europe will only indirectly contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy's inclusive growth priority. This contribution emerges if completed policy improvements establish new projects or funding measures that will immediately affect the groups of persons mentioned by the two relevant EU 2020 headline targets (i.e. "75% of the 20-64 year-old population to be employed" and "at least 20 million fewer people in or at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion").

Short or medium term employment effects can emerge in the partner regions when improved policy instruments are actually applied and related funding is also appropriately used by the targeted end-beneficiaries. This is very likely to happen under SO 2.1 (i.e. new jobs created in SMEs), but possibly also under some other SOs (e.g. SO 1.1 and SO 1.2: new R&D or innovation related jobs; SO 4.1: new tourism related jobs). While for the latter SOs it is rather difficult to identify projects with policy improvements inducing employment effects, this is much easier for SO 2.1. Several projects have already improved policy instruments supporting SMEs in general (i.e. *ESSPO*, *SIE*, *UpGradeSME*, *FFWD EUROPE*) or SMEs in a specific sector (i.e. *Destination SMEs*) and stimulating entrepreneurship or an access of SMEs to finance (i.e. *ATMforSMEs*, *iEER*). Some examples show that policy improvements can indeed create jobs by better supporting start-ups or through helping SMEs in stronger internationalising and accessing foreign markets (see: box 16).

Box 16 – Examples for policy improvements under SO 2.1 having job creation potentials⁶²

In Poland, the project *ESSPO* contributed to designing a new instrument providing support services to start-ups through incubators that was included into the Wielkopolskie Regional Operational Programme (sub-measure 1.3.1.). The Polish lead partner, Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation - Poznan Science and Technology Park, agreed with the Managing Authority that the ESSPO Regional Stockholder Group would work out the detailed model of the service provision, including the quality requirements. The objective was to ensure transparency and quality of the support to the start-ups and the contribution to the region's smart specialisation strategy. The Poznan Science and Technology Park used experiences from the ESSPO partnership as well as good practices found in the EU to inspire the work with the stakeholders. The quality assurance model worked out makes clear reference to an ESSPO document that was also included in the call for proposal regulations, announced on the 5th of September 2017.

The project *UpGradeSME* has realised two improvements of regional / local policy instruments in the Netherlands and Spain, which both aim at raising awareness among SMEs on issues relating to internationalisation and export. In case of the Basque region, for example, the project partner "San Sebastian Socio-Economic Development Agency" introduced in 2017 a new support programme for SMEs that want to internationalise and access foreign markets. The Agency has improved its tools to adapt them better to the needs of these SMEs. This was done on ground of the learning from other project partners and their respectively launched programmes (esp. with STEINBEIS and their programmes), which took place in the interregional meetings and workshops of the project. In 2018, San Sebastian Socio-Economic Development Agency will launch other specific support lines for this topic.

⁶² Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file "2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results"

An indirect contribution to **reducing the number of people in or at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion** will in contrast be rather limited. Positive effects for both target groups will only emerge from improved policies that will fund concrete measures supporting social enterprises or strengthening social responsibility. Currently, these matters are addressed by 3 projects under SO 2.1 (i.e. *SOCIAL-SEEDS*, *Road-CSR*, *RaiSE*) and only *SOCIAL-SEEDS* has achieved a policy improvement in phase 1 that is already described in section 2.2.2.

Contribution to sustainable growth and the related 20-20-20 headline targets

Many policies that will be improved under the six SOs of Interreg Europe promote either explicitly or implicitly a more resource efficient, competitive and greener economy and thereby indirectly contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy's sustainable growth priority.

The most relevant and visible contribution to the three headline targets on “20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions”, “20% of energy from renewable sources” and “20% increase in energy efficiency” it is expected come from projects implementing SO 3.1. However, this contribution will always be indirect and only emerge when improved policies finance projects or measures that actually change the stated targets positively.

At the moment, 31 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls are implementing SO 3.1 and 9 projects have already realised first policy improvements in phase 1. Most of these improvements focus on sustainable mobility (i.e. *RESOLVE*, *TRAM*, *CISMOB*, *REGIO-MOB*, *OptiTrans*) and energy efficiency (i.e. *ZEROCO2*, *LOCARBO*, *REBUS*), but only in one case on renewable / more sustainable energy production (i.e. *BIO4ECO*) and not yet on low carbon strategies. More detailed information on what was actually improved is only available for two projects in the relevant source from Interreg Europe. The policy improvement under *LOCARBO* was already described in section 2.2.2 and the improvement under the 2nd call project *OptiTrans* is presented below (see: box 17).

Box 17 – Policy improvement achieved by the project “OptiTrans”⁶³

The Spanish project partner in the Province of Granada (Granada Energy Agency) has significant influence on the Provincial Council's sustainable energy policy. Technicians of Granada Energy Agency have taken part in working meetings with Provincial Council technicians that were preparing ERDF funding calls for new investments the region. Representatives of the Agency also presented *OptiTrans* and suggested potentially interesting measures relating to sustainable urban mobility that were inspired by specific lessons learned within the project. Meanwhile, the provincial government succeeded to get EUR 25 million of ERDF funding from the national call on “integrated sustainable urban development strategies”, with parts of this funding also being invested on sustainable mobility related matters. The Agency will start working soon with the provincial government on the final application of the two co-financed integrated sustainable development strategies for the urban agglomeration of Granada and also define specific mobility-related measures to be applied.

⁶³ Information from the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-09-19 Policy Instrument Results”

5 ANNEXES

5.1 Annex I – Main features of the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls

SO	Sub-topics addressed	1st call projects	2nd call projects	Total
SO 1.1 Improving innovation infrastructures policies	Sector- or area-specific innovation	SmartPilots, RESET	INNOTRANS, Urban M	4
	RIS3 (governance, infrastructures, sector)	BRIDGES	INNO INFRA SHARE, CREADIS3	3
	Total SO 1.1	3	4	7
SO 1.2 Improving innovation delivery policies	Innovation capacity of SMEs	RATIO	Islands of Innovation, P-IRIS	3
	Innovation in sector	NICHE, TITTAN, HoCare, HELIUM, NMP-REG	FoodChains 4 Europe, ITHACA	7
	RIS3 (clusters)	Clusterix 2.0, ClusterS3	RUMORE, ClusterFY, ELISE, STRING	6
	RIS3 (governance)	HIGHER, INKREASE, Beyond EDP	MONITORIS3, RELOS3, ecoRIS3	6
	RIS3 (in sector)	P2L2, S3Chem, S34GROWTH	STEPHANIE, REMIX, MANUMIX	6
	Open innovation and other innovation	InnoBridge, OSIRIS, ERUDITE, SUPER	MARIE	5
Total SO 1.2	18	15	33	
SO 2.1 Competitiveness of SMEs	Sector-specific support	CRE:HUB; SME ORGANICS; Destination SMEs; RuralGrowth	RCIA; CLIPPER; BRANDTour	7
	Entrepreneurship & access to finance	ATMforSMEs; SPEED UP; iEER;	Rural SMEs; REBORN; SOCENT SPAs;	6
	Innovation capacity of SMEs	TRINNO; INNOGROW	KISS ME; Design 4 Innovation; GROW RUP; Innova Foster	6
	Support to SMEs	ESSPO; SIE; UpGradeSME; COMPETE IN; INTRA; PURE COSMOS; SKILLS+	FFWD EUROPE; EIS; Inside Out EU; STOB regions	11
	Social enterprises & social responsibility	SOCIAL-SEEDS	Road-CSR; RaiSE	3
Total SO 2.1	17	16	33	

SO 3.1 Low-carbon economy	Energy efficiency	SET-UP; ZEROCO ₂ ; BUILD ₂ LC; SOCIALGREEN; REBUS; LOCARBO; FINERPOL	EMPOWER; CLEAN; VIOLET; ENERSELVES	11
	Low carbon strategy	PASSAGE	Green Screen; MOLOC	3
	Mobility	LAST MILE; RESOLVE; REGIO-MOB; TRAM; SMART-MR; CISMOB	PROMETEUS; OptiTrans; SCHOOL CHANCE; InnovaSUMP; REFORM; DEMO-EC; EV ₄ CityNRG; CYCLEWALK MODE	14
	Renewable / sustainable energy	BIO ₄ ECO	COALESCCE; SUPPORT	3
	Total SO 3.1	15	16	31
SO 4.1 Improving natural and culture heritage policies	Natural and cultural heritage	CD-ETA	EPICAH	2
	Natural heritage and biodiversity preservation	HERICOAST; IMPACT; SWARE; BID-REX	PERFECT; Land-Sea; Night Light	7
	Cultural heritage & sustainable tourism	CHRISTA	CRinMA; Cult-RInG; Green Pilgrimage; SHARE	5
	Total SO 4.1	6	8	14
SO 4.2 Improving resource-efficient economy policies	Circular economy	RETRACE; CESME; SYMBI; TRIS	BIOREGIO; CircE;	6
	Waste management & soil pollution	INTHERWASTE	ECOWASTE ₄ FOOD; COCOON; TANIA	4
	Resource efficiency & green public procurement	-	ENHANCE; GPP ₄ Growth	2
	Total SO 4.2	5	7	12

5.2 Annex II – Output and result achievement of the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls

Table 1 – Output achievement of 1st and 2nd call projects at the end of September 2018

Indicator	Performance measure (*)	Total, all SOs	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 2.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.2
Outputs achieved by the 130 projects of the 1st and 2nd calls								
No. of Policy Learning Events organised	Achieved	3.753	170	1.059	1.054	830	375	265
	Target value of projects	7.468	384	1.852	2.160	1.684	715	673
	% of achieved in project target	50,3%	44,3%	57,2%	48,8%	49,3%	52,5%	39,4%
No. of Good Practices identified	Achieved	1.809	60	302	573	565	161	148
	Target value of projects	3.425	146	812	817	929	278	443
	% of achieved in project target	52,8%	41,1%	37,2%	70,1%	60,8%	57,9%	33,4%
No. of appearances in media	Achieved	4.822	121	1.110	1.073	1.269	577	672
	Target value of projects	8.103	265	2.479	2.006	1.651	822	880
	% of achieved in project target	59,5%	45,7%	44,8%	53,5%	76,9%	70,2%	73,4%
Outputs achieved by the 19 projects having finalised their phase 1 (**)								
No. of people with increased professional capacity	Achieved	1.760	95	569	167	680	194	55
	Target value of projects	3.068	95	885	1.140	634	204	110
	% of achieved in project target	57,4%	100%	64,3%	14,7%	107,3%	95,1%	50%
	Target value for 2023	12.000	1.000	2.000	3.000	3.000	1.500	1.500
	% of achieved in 2023 target	14,7%	9,5%	28,5%	5,6%	22,7%	12,9%	3,7%
No. of Action Plans developed	Achieved	131	5	53	18	30	14	11
	Target value of projects	133	5	53	18	32	14	11
	% of achieved in project target	98,5%	100%	100%	100%	93,8%	100%	100%
	Target value for 2023	910	76	144	230	230	115	115
	% of achieved in 2023 target	14,4%	6,6%	36,8%	7,8%	13%	12,2%	9,6%
<p>(*) Target values for 2023 were only defined for the 2 output indicators “No. of people with increased professional capacity” and “No. of Action Plans developed”.</p> <p>(**) The following 19 projects have finalised their phase 1: <i>SmartPilots</i> (SO 1.1); <i>CLUSTERS3</i>, <i>ERUDITE</i>, <i>HoCare</i>, <i>NICHE</i>, <i>P2L2</i>, <i>RATIO</i> and <i>S34GROWTH</i> (SO 1.2); <i>iEER</i> and <i>SME ORGANICS</i> (SO 2.1); <i>CISMOB</i>, <i>FINERPOL</i>, <i>PASSAGE</i>, <i>REGIO-MOB</i> and <i>ZEROCO2</i> (SO 3.1); <i>CHRISTA</i> and <i>IMPACT</i> (SO 4.1); <i>CESME</i> and <i>RETRACE</i> (SO 4.2).</p>								

Table 2 – Result achievement of the 130 projects from the 1st and 2nd calls at the end of September 2018

Indicator	Performance measure (*)	Total, all SOs	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 2.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.2
No. of Structural Funds instruments influenced	Achieved	34	1	12	11	6	0	4
	Target value of projects	729	43	208	200	156	63	59
	% of achieved in project target	4,7%	2,3%	5,8%	5,5%	4,0%	0%	6,8%
	Target value for 2023 (**)	423	26	81	106	106	52	52
	% of achieved in 2023 target	8,0%	3,8%	14,8%	10,4%	5,7%	0%	7,7%
Amount of Structural Funds influenced, in €	Achieved	263.878.995	3.720.000	12.678.160	60.948.388	186.489.115	0	43.332
	Target value of projects	4.296.152.336	106.176.887	1.655.612.548	1.296.210.889	806.050.465	261.431.547	170.670.000
	% of achieved in project target	6,1%	3,5%	0,8%	4,7%	23,1%	0%	0,03%
	Target value for 2023	768.000.000	48.000.000	144.000.000	192.000.000	192.000.000	96.000.000	96.000.000
	% of achieved in 2023 target	34,4%	7,8%	8,8%	31,7	97,1%	0%	0,5%
No. of other instruments influenced	Achieved	13	0	3	2	5	0	3
	Target value of projects	159	4	30	33	51	24	17
	% of achieved in project target	8,2%	0%	10%	6,1%	9,8%	0%	17,7%
Amount of other Funds influenced, in €	Achieved	4.143.805	0	3.920.000	140.000	0	83.805	0
	Target value of projects	459.688.951	7.300.000	151.066.000	53.899.351	180.453.600	41.070.000	25.900.000
	% of achieved in project target	0,9%	0%	2,6%	2,6%	0%	0,2%	0%

(*) Target values for 2023 were only defined for the 2 result indicators “No. of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes influenced” and “Amount of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC funding influenced”.

(**) For the indicator “no. of Growth & Jobs and/or ETC programmes influenced”, the originally assumed general reference base was 322 programmes. Specific percentages were indicated for each SO, leading to different SO reference values: 8% for SO 1.1 = 26 programmes; 25% for SO 1.2 = 81 programmes; 33% for SO 2.1 and SO 3.1 = 106 programmes; 16% for SO 4.1 and SO 4.2 = 52 programmes.

Table 3 – Other quantitative information relevant for the project-level evaluation

Indicator	Total, all SOs	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 2.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.2
Size of the project portfolio (1st and 2nd call projects)	130	7	33	33	31	14	12
Total no. of involved lead partner and project partner organisations	1,012	53	278	252	232	100	97
Share of projects from the 2nd call in the project portfolio, in %	50,8%	57.1%	45.5%	48.5%	51.6%	57.1%	58.3%
Total number of policy instruments addressed by 1st and 2nd call projects (*)	888	47	238	233	207	87	76
Total number of policy instruments already improved in phase 1	47	1	15	13	11	0	7
No. of approved pilot actions for phase 2 and name of concerned projects with finalised phase 1	11	0	5 (NICHE)	1 (iEER)	1 (CISMOB)	3 (CHRISTA)	1 (CESME)
Total amount of funding allocated to approved pilot actions for phase 2, in €	622.737	0	204.281	144.631	98.219	125.711	49.895
(*) The total number of addressed instruments (status September 2018, see table 2 above) is lower by 10 than the total number indicated in the Interreg Europe Excel file “2018-05-14 Overview Policy Instruments” (898 instruments).							

5.3 Annex III – Background information on the online survey realised for Lot 2

The Interreg Europe programme evaluation realised a combined online survey covering lots 1 and 2 that was running from 28th of June until 3rd of August 2018. This survey collected information on a larger number of questions addressing specific target groups under each lot.

Set up of the online survey and level of response

The lot 2 part of the combined online survey focussed on six specific topics and addressed only the 43 most advanced Interreg Europe projects.

Four topics assessed whether the new cooperation requirements for projects are relevant and sufficient for achieving the projects' objectives⁶⁴, while two topics explored to which extent an increased capacity of persons and organisations involved in projects is actually able to influencing the addressed policy instruments⁶⁵.

The projects addressed by the survey were selected on ground of objective criteria, while also ensuring that the specific objectives of Interreg Europe are covered in a fairly balanced way (see: table). With a focus on the 43 most advanced projects, we wanted to ensure that answers to survey questions are only based on practical experiences and are not given on ground of speculative expectations.

Table – The 43 projects from the 1st call covered by the online survey

SO	19 projects with finished phase 1	12 projects with phase 1 finished end of September 2018	12 projects with advanced phase 1 implementation
SO 1.1 Improving innovation infrastructures policies	SmartPilots	-	BRIDGES; RESET; INNO-INFRA SHARE
SO 1.2 Improving innovation delivery policies	NICHE; RATIO; HoCare; ERUDITE; ClusterS3; P2L2; S34GROWTH	TITTAN; HELIUM; OSIRIS; HIGHER	FoodChains4Europe
SO 2.1 Improving SMEs competitiveness	iEER; SME ORGANICS	CRE:HUB; RuralGrowth	ESSPO; RaiSE
SO 3.1 Improving low carbon economy policies	ZEROCO2; FINERPOL; PASSAGE; REGIO-MOB; CISMOB	BUILD2LC; LOCARBO; LAST MILE; BIO4ECO	-
SO 4.1 Improving natural and culture heritage policies	IMPACT; CHRISTA	HERICOAST; SWARE	Night Light; Green Pilgrimage; CD-ETA; Land-Sea
SO 4.2 Improving resource-efficient economy policies	RETRACE; CESME	-	SYMBI; ENHANCE

⁶⁴ Relevance of (1) regional / local stakeholder groups, (2) of action plan elaboration, (3) of phase 2 monitoring of action plan implementation and (4) of pilot action implementation.

⁶⁵ (1) Types of foreseen policy improvements and (2) levels of learning required for policy improvement.

Responses were received from lead partners and partners involved in 41 of the 43 targeted projects. In total 27 lead partners and 100 project partners have replied to the survey questions. Considering the total target audience addressed by the survey (i.e. 364 lead and project partners), **the overall response rate to the survey was at 35%**. However, not all respondents provided answers to the six topics addressed by the survey.

The number of answers given for each of the six topic and the corresponding response rates are as follows: relevance of regional / local stakeholder groups (124 responses, 34%), relevance of action plan elaboration (117 responses, 32%), relevance of phase 2 monitoring of action plan implementation (i.e. 116 responses, 32%), relevance of pilot action implementation (i.e. 116 responses, 32%), types of foreseen policy improvements (i.e. 112 responses, 31%) and levels of learning required for policy improvement (i.e. 118 responses, 32%).

Cross-analysis of survey data on topics (5) and (6)

For carrying out a cross-analysis of the types of foreseen policy improvements (topic 5) and the levels of learning required for policy improvement (topic 6), survey data had to be further processed because respondents previously indicated their planned policy improvements through selecting either a single policy improvement type or a combination of types (multiple choices) and also assessed the importance of learning levels only in general terms. This data processing allowed establishing a direct relationship between both topics and also made information about the importance / intensity of learning under each approach for policy improvement comparable (see: box).

Box – Data processing approach adopted for ensuring interrelation and comparability of survey information

In a **first step**, weighting levels with a corresponding numeric value were defined for learning: these are “very important” (value: 4), “important to some extent” (value: 3), “rather not important” (value: 2) and finally “not important at all” (value: 1). Then, a total value was calculated for each improvement type or combination of improvement types and the respectively required learning level. This can be illustrated by a concrete example. 14 respondents indicated to only foresee type 2 improvements in their action plan. From these 14 respondents, 13 assessed organisational learning as “very important” and 1 respondent indicated organisational learning as “important to some extent”. According to the above weighing, the combination of improvement type and related learning reaches a total value of importance at 55.

Subsequently, for making these total values of importance comparable across the different types of policy improvements, an average has been calculated by type of policy improvement. This was done by dividing the total value of importance by the total number of respondents only foreseeing type 2. In case of the above mentioned example, the average is at 3.93 (i.e. 55 /14). For all types of policy improvement, the actual average values that were calculated from the survey data range from 3.30 to 3.93.

Lastly, a scaling has been developed for grouping the calculated average values and achieving a more simplified presentation of the result within an overview table. This scaling has three levels: low importance with “+” (i.e. values from 3.30 to 3.44), medium importance with “++” (i.e. values from 3.45 to 3.78) and high importance with “+++” (i.e. values from 3.79 to 3.93). The lower and upper intervals were deliberately kept narrower but with the same distance between values in order to increase selectivity. In case of the above mentioned example the average of 3.93 thus corresponds to “+++”, which means that respondents assess organisational learning to be of high importance for them when implementing type 2 policy improvements.

5.4 Annex IV – Policy improvement approaches adopted by respondents to the online survey

Adopted approach	Project acronym and number of respondents (in brackets)						Total respondents
	SO 1.1	SO 1.2	SO 2.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.2	
Implementation of new projects (type 1)	BRIDGES (1) RESET (5)	FoodChains 4 EU (2) TITTAN (2) HoCare (1)	CRE:HUB (3) RaiSE (2) iEER (1) RuralGrowth (1)	REGIO-MOB (2) LOCARBO (2) LAST MILE (1)	CD-ETA (3) CHRISTA (1) P2L2 (1) IMPACT (1) SWARE (1)	CESME (1) SYMBI (1)	32
Change in the management of policy instruments (type 2)	-	RATIO (1)	-	BIO4ECO (3) ZEROCO2 (1)	CD-ETA (1) IMPACT (1) Night Light (1) PASSAGE (1)	ENHANCE (2) SYMBI (2) RETRACE (1)	14
Structural change of policy instruments (type 3)	-	FoodChains 4 EU (1) HELIUM (1) RATIO (1)	CRE:HUB (1)	FINERPOL (1) LOCARBO (1) REGIO-MOB (1)	-	CESME (1) ENHANCE (1)	9
New projects (type 1) + change in the management (type 2)	INNO INFRA SHARE (1) BRIDGES (1)	HoCare (2) OSIRIS (2) HELIUM (1) RATIO (1)	ESSPO (2) RuralGrowth (1)	CISMOB (2) REGIO-MOB (1) ZEROCO2 (1) BUILD2LC (1) BIO4ECO (1)	P2L2 (2) ENHANCE (1) CHRISTA (1) CD-ETA (1)	CESME (1)	23
New projects (type 1) + structural change (type 3)	BRIDGES (1) RESET (1) SmartPilots (1)	HELIUM (1) NICHE (1)	SME ORGANICS (1)	LAST MILE (2) BUILD2LC (1)	CD-ETA (2) PASSAGE (3) Green Pilgrimage (1) Land-Sea (1)	RETRACE (1)	17
Change in the management (type 2) + structural change (type 3)	-	S34Growth (1) CLUSTERS3 (1)	SME ORGANICS (1) iEER (1)	REGIO-MOB (2) FINERPOL (1)	Land-Sea (1) P2L2 (1)	CESME (1)	10
Type 1+type 2+type 3	-	CLUSTERS3 (1) HELIUM (1)	iEER (1) SME ORGANICS (1)	ZEROCO2 (1)	CHRISTA (1)	P2L2 (1)	7

5.5 Annex V – Summary of learning processes under the 19 projects with a finalised phase 1

Project improving innovation infrastructures policies (SO 1.1): *SmartPilots*

SmartPilots has been a successful project in a number of areas. First, it has seen active partner involvement and participation, including through teleconferences, face-to-face partner meetings as well as through the organisation of study visits and guided tours. The attendance of partners and stakeholders has been high throughout. Progress in this domain has been seen most notably through the high levels of trust that has been established between the partners, which has been important as it has helped the individual and organisational learning processes by enabling particularly open discussion on the respective organisational experiences of the partners. The main challenge seen in these meetings has been linked to the compiling and processing of information into a comprehensive document. Stakeholder involvement has been high overall, with engagement including events such as international study visits and interregional seminars. In addition to attending these events, stakeholders have actively participated in discussions. The Flemish project partners (PP1, PP2) in particular have been very successful at engaging regularly with stakeholders. Some project partners have reported policy improvements in their respective areas. The Flemish partners (PP1, PP2) have been approached to align more closely with a cluster in view of establishing an internationalisation strategy. In Finland, PP4 has also started to influence the strategies guiding regional development and financing. Other project partners have not yet seen policy changes: this was the case for a variety of reasons, including changing roles and responsibilities within partners (PP6) and problematic macro-economic situations (PP3).

Projects improving innovation delivery policies (SO 1.2): *RATIO, NICHE, HoCare, ERUDITE, ClusterS3, P2L2 and S34GROWTH*

RATIO has established strong working relationships between its project partners, who have been active in exchanging experiences (learning similarities, challenges, and opportunities). The deep involvement and active participation of the partners has resulted in a level of individual and organisational learning. In particular, in addition to the project's activities, two partners have also signed a collaboration agreement to promote mutual collaboration in innovation within EU programmes and initiatives for their local entities. The policy learning process with stakeholders has been especially noteworthy and has progressed even better than what was originally planned. Intense engagement has resulted in the establishment of strong partnerships with regional stakeholders. They have showed an interest in participating and keeping updated with project developments. In terms of its output targets, the RATIO project has exceeded its targets for most of its indicators, or is very close to achieving them. The project has not yet succeeded in influencing policy improvements. However, significant headways are being made from a number of project partners, most notably by partners in Aragon where efforts have resulted in the publication of regulatory bases and the launch of new VET degrees.

NICHE is progressing well during phase 1 and its partners have showed a solid commitment to the project. During the roll-out of the project, the project partners have delivered significant added value. Their involvement has been displayed through the high rates of attendance and engagement at joint events. The exchange of experience process has intensified as the project implementation has progressed. Particularly interesting for the partners have been the good practices from Ireland and Northern Ireland, where the interregional learning process opened new cooperation opportunities for the two regions. The partners from Derry and Donegal started to work more closely together in order to achieve maximum benefits for innovation in both council areas and share best practices in the whole cross-border area. Stakeholder engagement within the project started and remained high. By progress report 4, stakeholders were playing a significant role in local action plans. Continuous involvement has been ensured by holding regular meetings and establishing a permanent contact between the partners and stakeholders. The project has not yet resulted in successful policy changes or improvements but is moving favourable towards achieving all of its output targets. Although policy improvements have not yet occurred, positive signals are apparent, especially in the creation of new contacts, knowledge and lessons learned from different countries which has opened up new cooperation possibilities for stakeholders.

HoCare has been particularly successful although it had a two-month implementation delay due to a change of partners. The main reason for this success has been the enthusiasm and dedication shown by the partners. For example, whilst one partner from the Autonomous Region of Madeira (PP7) was relatively inexperienced in comparison to the others, they showed great motivation to learn – the valuable support and guidance of the lead partner then allowed PP7 to make up the difference. Partners, in coordination with the lead partner, have learned best practices on how to achieve the biggest impact possible on their respective policy instruments. The HoCare project is a remarkably interesting partnership since, within the partners, there is a variety of different but complementary areas of specialisation, be it on the implementation, research, business, or ICT phases of project delivery. Combining different perspective in this manner has resulted in several interesting outcomes and increased the interest of partners in learning from each other. Organisational learning has therefore been particularly apparent, especially in order for the partners to better understand each other and strengthen their cooperation. In addition to making good progress on achieving its output targets, HoCare has also managed to report a policy improvement through its partner in the Czech Republic (DEX Innovation Centre). This partner has managed to change the evaluation procedure of a major operational programme in two major fields.

ERUDITE has been particularly successful thanks especially to the heightened involvement of project partners in three areas: their participation in partnership events, their sustained contribution to project capacity building, as well as in the local-level implementation of SEROI+ digital service development process. This has enabled and encouraged a process of policy learning. Progress in this domain has been both good, with the active and full participation of all partners, as well as increasingly intense with, for example, one-to-one learning through bilateral meetings and practical partnership events. Those at the local level have played a major role in accelerating and deepening the policy learning and exchange process. Project partners and stakeholders have been working and learning together, co-designing and creating the service and applying lessons learned directly to the local context in a process which has showed individual, organisational, and inter-organisational learning. Although the level of stakeholder involvement has varied between the partners in terms of the number of stakeholders engaged, stakeholders have been proactively engaged, firstly at the local level in regional stakeholder groups, but also in project partnership events. This policy learning process has also resulted in a significant number of policy improvements already being reported. The most visible policy change occurred in Slovenia, where the Ministry of Public Administration (PP6) and the University of Ljubljana (PP5) have successfully placed the FabLab network in the implementation plan of the operational programme for an implementation of European cohesion policy. In Ireland, ERNACT (PP4) has also secured funding for the implementation of the Digital Innovation Hub, a plan which is being inspired by and making use of experiences from other ERUDITE partners. A further policy improvement has also taken place in Italy (City of Venice)

ClusterS3 has succeeded in reaching or exceeding all of its output targets. The involvement of its project partners has been encouraging, with all the partners showing a high interest in the project and being particularly cooperative and positively engaged. An initial workshop between the partners in Bilbao allowed partners to further develop a shared understanding of each partner's responsibilities. Subsequent peer review exercises have also facilitated a process of inter-organisational learning. These provided the partners with an external view of the strengths and weaknesses of the support in addition to recommendations for improvement. In addition, partners have witnessed not only the diversity of each region's situation, but also the complementarity and possibilities to exchange practices and experiences that feed the action plans. Stakeholders in all regions are informed / kept "in-the-loop" by the respective partners and also participated regularly in project meetings. Project partners in the Basque region (PP1, PP2) started policy improvements aimed at modifying programme calls or establishing new requirements regarding the composition of the membership of cluster management organisations. In particular, ClusterS3 has been of particular added value as the partners drew from experiences from another partner (PP4 – Piedmont) as well as the peer-review exercises to influence its activities.

Within **P2L2**, partners were actively involved in the policy learning process from the start of the project. This was remarkable considering several difficulties which confronted the project, including the reorganisation of the French regions which affected PP4. Despite several intense periods for the partners, the exchange of experiences has been particularly good, especially during meetings. Stakeholder participation has been ensured principally through study visits. Stakeholders in all of the regions have been well informed by their respective partners. The organisation of a bilateral stakeholder event between Bremen and the Piedmont enabled a one-to-one learning process between partners. P2L2 is making good progress on its output targets and although it has not yet reported any policy improvements, it has made significant strides in working towards these, by focusing on exchanges of experiences. In Bremen, the partners have decided to follow the example of Nouvelle Aquitaine in France, highlighted as an example within the P2L2 project. In this sense, Bremen will place a stronger focus within its aerospace R&D funding programme on key enabling technologies rather than specific sectors.

S34Growth experienced some slight issues at its inception on the side of some partners. Project partners nevertheless felt confident that the collaboration was working well. This was principally thanks to the efforts of the lead partner, who has continued throughout the project to facilitate the cooperation and collaboration of all members, emphasising the usefulness of them serving as lead partner. The learning process has evolved and become better as time has progressed. In particular, this can be seen in the On-Site Deep Dives (“OSDDs”), where the exchange of experiences has proved especially useful. Stakeholder engagement has been good through the establishment of Regional Stakeholder Groups. Some stakeholders have also attended OSDDs, which has facilitated efforts focused on the establishment of regional action plans. In terms of its outputs, some target indicators far from being met. That being said, several policy improvements can already be noted. For example, the Basque Government (PP3) used its experience within the project to further internationalise its regional innovation policy, which had previously been criticised for being too inward-looking. Another example is Portugal’s National Innovation Agency (PP7), which managed to change the financial instruments of demonstration projects using its experience within S34Growth to better outline the instrument’s collaborative components.

Projects improving policies for enhancing SME competitiveness (SO 2.1): iEER and SME ORGANICS

For actually impacting local/regional policies, the real challenge of **iEER** is to engage local stakeholders, such as higher education institutions, business support services, local authorities and young enterprises such as start-ups to take part in project learning. Partners have been actively involved in this task, through the organisation of workshops and meetings. The learning in the iEER has been facilitated through these activities as well as through a collection of regional baseline works, learning camps and peer studies. Learning camps have proved of particular use in the learning process, especially through the participation of partner regions’ local stakeholders. Stakeholders brought local grassroots knowledge to the events and ensured that the conclusions of each camp were brought back to the regions. In practice, these camps resulted in the development of good practices which were of outstanding quality. Although no policy improvements have yet been reported, important steps have been made in changing the institutional mentalities surround young entrepreneurs, even if these have not resulted in practical changes. That being said, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council (PP1) and Laurea University of Applied Sciences (PP10) in Finland are working with an ERDF-funded EU programme and have adapted their call for projects to take account of iEER’s report by supporting young entrepreneurs and supporting the development of the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

SME ORGANICS experienced numerous setbacks that complicated the delivery of its objectives. The participation of all partners in the group was not always assured. One partner did not attend two out of the three scheduled field visits and there were also difficulties experienced with the lead partner. That being said, this situation improved remarkably over time. More recently, however, an intense period of work has started. This was needed and led to high levels of participation and involvement of partners to a highly satisfactory level. The relationships between partners also improved over time, which facilitated the exchange of lessons learned through the development of good practices, examples and experiences gathered in the visits to the eight regions. Stakeholder engagement was high and stakeholders not only

attended, but also participated in the design and organisation of meetings and dissemination events. While there have not been any policy improvements reported as of yet, there are encouraging signs emerging especially in case of the project partners from Navarra / Spain (PP1, PP2 2, PP12) and from Finland (Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, PP8).

Projects improving policies for a low carbon economy (SO 3.1): CISMOB, FINERPOL, ZEROCO₂, REGIO-MOB and PASSAGE

Individual learning in **CISMOB** has happened as the interregional events organised had a clear focus on learning, sharing experience and discussion on the use of ICT in the low carbon mobility. In addition to the workshops, staff exchange and study visits took place to ensure the individual learning. As far as the inter-organisational learning is concerned, the joint development of the framework and the conceptual basis on the role of ICT in the low carbon economy prove that this type of learning took place in a cooperation environment. Partners contributed all to the Baseline Assessment Report, and share a common platform to disseminate their regional knowledge and good practice. The involvement of stakeholders took place mainly at regional level. While the learning at the partners' level seemed stable during the lifetime of the project, the involvement of stakeholders was not equal in all partner regions. In general, the authorities responsible for the policy instruments are now more aware of the use and benefits of ICT in the low carbon public transport. In Romania, project partners have organised local stakeholder meetings and convinced the Managing Authority of the Regional Programme in Romania to change award criteria for transport projects. This change has already been accepted, leading to a widened eligibility of integrated regional ticketing systems in larger functional metropolitan areas of cities (previously, only projects limited to the geographical limits of a city could be financed).

FINERPOL makes a clear monitoring of the learning process in its 4 levels (individual, organisational, of stakeholders and external). As regards the individual and organisational (i.e. partners) level, the learning increased as the project activities (technical workshops, interregional events and study visits) were progressing. As far as the stakeholders' learning is concerned, their involvement is closely monitored by the project (number of participants to the various interregional and local events, personal contacts established on those occasions), and a stakeholder network has been created to facilitate their engagement. In events, stakeholders are also participating actively by exchanging on good practice during events and study visits, and by receiving increased professional capacity in those occasions. In two cases, the interregional events took place in areas outside the partnership (Tartu, Gdansk), in which also the local stakeholders participated. Only in the case of Climate Protection and Energy Agency (CPEA) of Baden-Württemberg, participation in the project learning activities and stakeholder involvement has not taken place. All this intense learning has had a clear effect on the policy developments. The Province of Trento started influencing the provincial legislative framework on financial instruments, but all other partners (except for CPEA) are still in the process of participating in the regional debate either to prepare financial instruments, to implement national strategies on energy efficiency or to influence calls for proposals in this field.

The activities of **ZEROCO₂** started with a compilation of the respective regional situations in energy efficiency, which was followed by a compilation of regional good practices. This led to an identification of the available and newest technologies that are used for local/regional renewable energy production. Finally, each partner drafted the own action plan based on the previous compilation of information and good practice. This also involved individual and organisational learning processes. The exchange of the experience and learning process also involved other local/regional stakeholders. This involvement took place on two levels. (1) Inside the regions, as stakeholders were actively participating in the collection of regional information (also by involving experts in the newest technologies) and the preparation of the action plans. Only in the case of the lead partner the stakeholder involvement did not take place, as it was not able to engage its Ministry of Infrastructure. (2) Inter-regionally, as some external stakeholders were invited by the project partners to several study visits (Campobasso, Crete, Lapua). Also a broad inter-organisational learning process took place on the occasion of the elaboration of the final action plans. As the plans include good practice examples from other regions, draft versions were shared among

the project partners for learning purposes. But also a previous exchange with local/regional stakeholders took place on the contents of the action plans. Moreover, an interregional meeting in Lapua (Finland) dealt with the transferability of actions, and how to integrate them into the addressed policy instruments. This exchange happened among the partners of the project and a selection of regional stakeholders. Thermopolis, the Finnish project partner, is until now the only one reporting a real change in policy: it affected the update of the Regional Strategy of South Ostrobothnia. The rest of the partners (except for the lead partner) participate in the regional debates on energy efficiency, and some expect to have a real influence in the near future.

In the context of **REGIO-MOB**, the exchange and learning process has evolved over time. At the outset, partners had very different understandings on how to identify and assess a good practice on new transport solutions. The first months of the project focused on agreeing on a common methodology to identify and transfer good practice, and when these aspects were clarified, the exchange and learning via interregional workshops and study visits progressed smoothly. Also some changes in the partnership occurred during the project implementation, which affected the individual learning of new partners, but not of the rest of them. Since Anci Lazio (Italy) took over the lead partner role in **REGIO-MOB**, also the effectiveness of the learning process increased and related work was closely monitored with all partners. This ensured that the preparation phase of each workshop was carefully followed and that it could also count on the involvement of local stakeholders. Every partner established a local stakeholders group, and at least two meetings per partner took place. Besides the participation in local and interregional events, stakeholders have also supported in the process of identifying good practice on new transport solutions. Their involvement in the meetings allowed verifying the feasibility of new transport solutions, which brought a very specific added value to the learning process (i.e. 'furthering the multilevel absorption that has been consolidated throughout the project lifetime'). In addition, the project has even created a sense of 'Regio-mob community' that connects the local stakeholders strongly. As stated in the progress reports, 'the success of the learning process also depends on a space for action to materialise and for change to take place', and the partners paved the way for the change during the last semester of activity under phase 1. First policy changes took place in the case of Romanian South-West Oltenia Regional Development Agency, who succeeded in changing some aspects on the call for proposals of the regional OP. In the case of the rest of the partners, contacts with policy-relevant authorities are established and outcomes may be visible in the near future.

The **PASSAGE** project partnership is organised in cross-border blocks, as the addressed policy instruments are a number of Interreg CBC (maritime) programmes and action plans are designed with respect to each CBC area. Overall, the individual and organisational learning was satisfactory, even though there was always one partner or the other absent in the thematic seminars organised, who could nevertheless catch up in the upcoming meetings. Besides the project partners, the learning also benefitted local stakeholders and a new category: the local cross-border stakeholders. Specific meetings were organised for both types of local stakeholders and they were also fully involved in the selection of best practice in their regions (i.e. according to the best practice selection process approved by the project). In addition, a selection of stakeholders from partners' territories participated in the interregional learning events. The combination of all learning levels was visualised in a presentation of the Dover Strait Action Plan held at the 4th stakeholder meeting, which proves the success of the stakeholder involvement in the learning process. So far, no changes on the targeted CBC programmes have happened. However, a number of influences have taken place. They range from raising awareness to the specific evaluation of low-carbon economy projects, and to the consideration of the **PASSAGE** outcomes for the future programming period. In addition, the partners answered an EC Consultation on the revision of the policy on monitoring, reporting and verification of CO₂ emissions from maritime transport, and they are involved in the Interact network 'Knowledge of the Seas', which has a potential to influence the future programming period.

Projects improving natural and culture heritage policies (SO 4.1): *IMPACT* and *CHRISTA*

In **IMPACT**, an identification of and joint learning about good practice is at the core of the learning processes. These processes strongly rely on the active work of the stakeholder groups. They identify good practices and are actively involved in discussions, they bring ideas for improving policy instruments and they are the places where experiences are shared and learning from/between different organisations takes place. The stakeholder groups are well organised by categories, they have a system to assess the good practice and they participate both in the learning processes at regional level and at interregional level (interregional meetings and study visits). Project partners are organising and coordinating the stakeholder groups and working groups, they monitor the progress of the learning and make sure the information is shared in the partnership. Therefore, individual and inter-organisational learning mainly happens thanks to the active work of and learning within the stakeholder groups. Identified good practices are actively shared with all project partners (i.e. via discussions at interregional meetings and study visits) and also posted in the Interreg Europe website. So far, only meetings with the Managing Authorities of the Regional Programmes have taken place in this context, but concrete effects on policy instruments are only expected in the future (i.e. phase 2).

CHRISTA has developed a comprehensive learning package that allows its project partners and regional/local stakeholders to exchange and gain knowledge on cultural heritage and sustainable tourism at various levels. The interregional thematic workshops have been designed in two parts to allow for the exchange among partners and stakeholders and also to share the experience with the external world. Study visits and staff exchanges have been planned from the beginning to ensure that individual and organisational learning are ensured. Stakeholders are also involved in a structured way both at local and interregional level, they are monitored by the project and the best practice identified is reported with the rest of the contents of the policy learning of the project. The policy learning guidelines on industrial heritage are a good example of the structured learning process in Christa. As regards the addressed policy instruments, no improvements have yet taken place. However, one partner shows how the action plan has already changed the focus on thematic objective 6 of the regional operational programme by extending funding possible for activities under that thematic objective (i.e. Region of Central Macedonia), while other partners indicate that some influence on regional policies has taken place: they identified cultural heritage elements for inscription on the UNESCO list or created an association to promote dialogue between regional and local authorities about cultural heritage.

Projects improving policies for a resource-efficient economy (SO 4.2): *RETRACE* and *CESME*

RETRACE partners were especially active in the several field visits organised each semester, in the regional and interregional dissemination events and in the interregional publications on the circular economy. These activities allowed for individual and organisational learning: the interregional field visits were the occasions to exchange on good practice and the dissemination events had more participants than expected. An elaborated methodology to identify and assess good practice was implemented including a peer review process, ensuring that a good practice identified was policy-related. This methodology formed a stable basis for the individual and organisational learning process. The projects' publications (i.e. Retrace Method Guide for Policymaking and the Good Practice Guide) are the outcomes of the entire interregional policy learning process so far. The partners also engaged a number of other policy-relevant stakeholders at the regional and interregional level. Their identification followed a systematic process by using a stakeholders' map indicating the benefits they bring to the project. Stakeholders were part of the system to identify good practice, they revised the project publications and the regional policy gaps identification, and they were briefed by the respective partner in case they were not able to join a field visit. These elements indicate an intense stakeholder involvement and that inter-organisational learning was an essential part of the project. **RETRACE** partners made special efforts in disseminating the project activities in social media and they participated in a large number of specialised external events to allow for a learning of project-external bodies. **RETRACE** even engaged territories outside the partnership in the identification and exchange on good practice. Two of the policy instruments targeted by **RETRACE** were positively influenced: the calls for projects of two regional ESIF programmes in Italy (Regione Piemonte) and Romania (North East Regional Development Agency) were changed thanks to the contribution of **RETRACE**, which allowed fine-tuning the programmes in view of the

conclusions of the Interreg Europe project.

CESME started by setting the basis for the individual and organisational learning process: it elaborated a project manual for the partnership included guidelines for the exchange of experience among the partners during the project. At the kick-off meeting, partners were asked to outline the state of play of the circular economy in their regions, their expertise, the challenges and their expectations. All the subsequent interregional meetings were conceived as learning events, for which documents and good practice examples were shared well in advance to allow for a correct preparation. Each meeting had a specific focus and objective. In addition, the identification of good practice was divided in two types: good practice of practical aspects and good practice at policy level. Considering all these aspects, it can be concluded that structured individual and organisational learning had been given an optimal environment. Interaction with other local/regional stakeholders was organised by each partner, and some of their representatives participated actively in the interregional events and contributed to the CESME toolkit developments, too. At regional level, partners reflected on how the interregional learning would be implemented in the territory (by means of the Action Plan). This proves active stakeholder involvement and also the existence of an inter-organisational policy learning process. CESME did not yet lead to policy changes. However, in three occasions, it started influencing relevant measures of ESIF programmes (Emilia-Romagna and Central Macedonia) or other regional policy instruments (South Ostrobothnian regional strategy 2018-20) relating to circular economy.

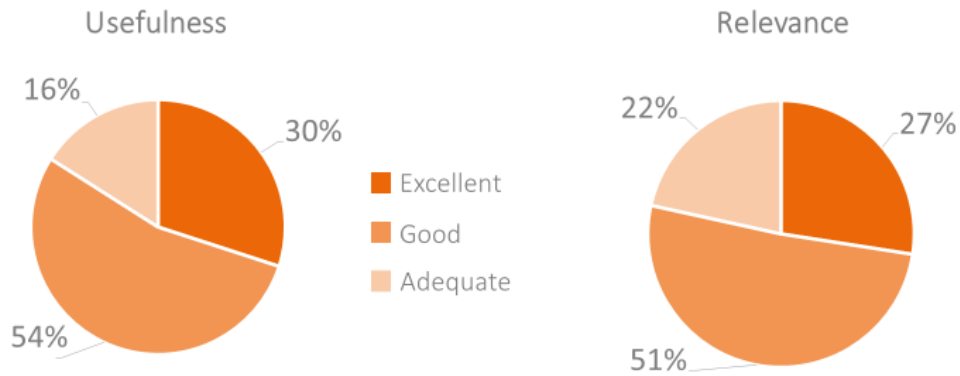
5.6 Annex VI – PLP monitoring data for output and result indicators

Indicator	Target value for 2023	Achieved by end of January 2018	Achieved by end of July 2018
I. Pre-defined output indicators at programme level			
Share of all European regions (NUTS 2) registered to PLP (%)	ca. 17%	81% (*)	58,6%
Number of policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP	406	6	12
II. Other output indicators related to policy learning (see: Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy)			
Number of participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP	7.500	470	652
Number of people receiving policy advice and support through the PLP Helpdesk	1.120	10	18
III. Other output indicators related to communication (see: Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy)			
Number of registered users, also broken down per target group i.e. MA/IBs, IR-E projects, other public authorities, others	10.000	1.372	4.381
Share of MA/IBs of SF among the registered users (%)	10% (70%)	22%	22,85%
Monthly average number of sessions to PLP website pages (**)	500	1.800	2.631
Monthly average number of interactions (i.e. likes, shares, comments) on social media posts about PLP	100	N/A	N/A
Number of views in the Good Practices webpages (**)	10.000	2.062	14.057
Share of Good Practices “followed” by registered users (%)	10%	N/A	76%
Number of presentations of the PLP in external (non IR-E) events	280	13	15
Estimated number of participants reached through PLP presentation at external (non IR-E) events	14.000	2.500	2.970
IV. Pre-defined result indicators at programme level (see: Programme Manual)			
Share of growth and jobs or ETC programmes represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented (%)	10%	0	N/A
Amount of Structural Funds (from Growth & Jobs and ETC) influenced by the PLP	EUR 35 bn (from 350 bn)	0	N/A
Share of other policy instruments represented in the platform by registered users where measures inspired by the platform were implemented (%)	10%	0	N/A
Amount of other funds influenced by the PLP	EUR 20 bn	0	N/A
V. Other result indicators (see: Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy)			
Share of satisfied participants in the policy learning events (online and offline) organised by the PLP (%)	80%	4% (***)	100% (****)
Share of people satisfied with the services received from the PLP Helpdesk (%)	80%	N/A	N/A
Share of visitors satisfied with the online information on the PLP website pages www.policylearning.eu (%)	80%	N/A	N/A
Share of registered users stating that they consider the PLP as an EU reference portal for stakeholders involved in regional development in the 4TOs covered (%)	75%	N/A	N/A
Share of registered users with increased professional capacity due to their participation in activities of the PLP (%)	60%	N/A	N/A
(*) The early approach also counted users who do not represent a NUTS2 region in the community and was corrected for the 2nd reporting period. (**) Values only for the respective reporting periods September-December 2017 and January-July 2018. (***) Share in the online community of approximately 12,000 members. (****) Share in all questionnaires submitted at already organised PLP policy learning events.			

5.7 Annex VII – Participants’ feedback on organised PLP policy learning events

Figure 1 –Thematic PLP workshops organised in 2017

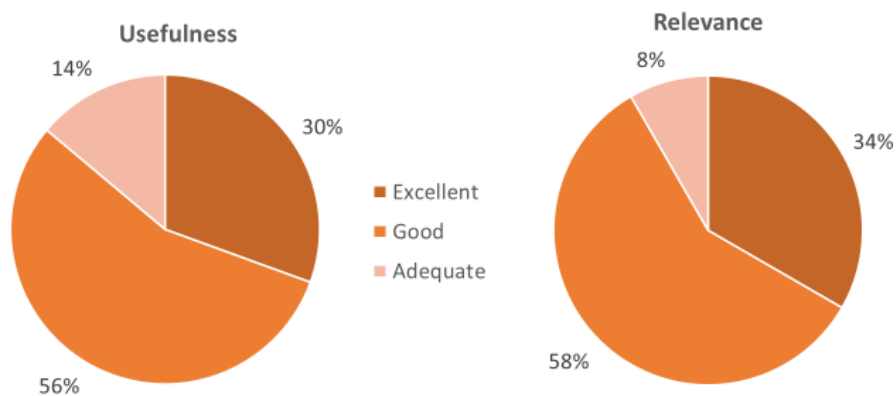
Feedback from thematic workshops



Source: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, 12 January 2018, p.7

Figure 2 –Thematic PLP workshops organised in 2018

Feedback from thematic workshops



Source: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Evaluation Report, 07 September 2018, p.7

5.8 Annex VIII – Participation of projects in the four thematic PLP sections

Table 1 – Pattern of project participation in the PLP section on “Research & Innovation” (TO 1)

SO	Sub-topics addressed	21 projects of the 1st call	19 projects of the 2nd call	Total
SO 1.1 Improving innovation infrastructures policies	Sector- or area-specific innovation	SmartPilots, RESET	INNOTRANS, Urban M	4
	RIS3 (governance, infrastructures, sector)	BRIDGES	INNO INFRA SHARE, CREADIS3	3
SO 1.2 Improving innovation delivery policies	Innovation capacity of SMEs	RATIO	Islands of Innovation, P-IRIS	3
	Innovation in sector	NICHE, TITTAN, HoCare, HELIUM, NMP-REG	FoodChains 4 Europe, ITHACA	7
	RIS3 (clusters)	Clusterix 2.0, ClusterS3	RUMORE, ClusterFY, ELISE, STRING	6
	RIS3 (governance)	HIGHER, Beyond EDP, INKREASE,	MONITORIS3, RELOS3, ecoRIS3	6
	RIS3 (in sector)	P2L2, S34GROWTH, S3Chem,	STEPHANIE, MANUMIX, REMIX,	6
	Open innovation and other innovation	InnoBridge, ERUDITE, SUPER, OSIRIS,	MARIE	5

Red = no participation ; blue = low participation ; green = regular participation

Box 1 – Projects participating most intensively in the PLP section on “Research & innovation”

RATIO: The project attended the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME Competitiveness (Milan) and the PLP presentation at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities (Brussels). Related conclusions and notes were distributed to other project partners. Self-learning is stimulated through documents on PLP and an exchange of knowledge with other projects took place in PLP groups and a webinar.

TITTAN: The project attended the PLP thematic workshop on investing in health and wellbeing, also involving Commission representatives (Brussels, 2017), and participated in the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME competitiveness (Milan, 2017). The latter allowed sharing ideas or networking with peers and also gave the opportunity to learn from good practices and approaches stemming from other projects.

HoCare: The project initiated a PLP sub-group with projects having in common the topic “Silver Economy” (i.e. HELIUM and TITTAN, with the 2nd call project ITHACA being added later this sub-group). There is an ongoing information exchange, resulting in the realisation of a PLP thematic workshop on investing in health and wellbeing in Brussels. The project attended the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME Competitiveness (Milan, 2017) and the PLP presentation at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities.

OSIRIS: The project attended the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME competitiveness (Milan, 2017). Project partners registered at the PLP and actively use its services (incl. support & expertise, sharing knowledge, community) for cooperating with other projects and increasing the visibility of own project outcomes.

Clusterix 2.0: The project launched an exchange of experience with the thematically related “sister project” CLUSTERS3 and intensified this bilateral exchange (reciprocal participation in project meetings). The project attended the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME competitiveness (Milan, 2017), allowing to exchanging views with peers from all over Europe and to promoting the project as good practice for interregional learning.

Table 2 – Pattern of project participation in the PLP section on “Competitiveness of SMEs” (TO 3)

Sub-topics addressed	17 projects of the 1st call	16 projects of the 2nd call	Total
Sector-specific support	CRE:HUB; SME ORGANICS; Destination SMEs; RuralGrowth	RCIA; CLIPPER; BRANDTour	7
Entrepreneurship & access to finance	ATMforSMEs; SPEED UP; iEER	Rural SMEs; REBORN; SOCENT SPAs	6
Innovation capacity of SMEs	TRINNO; INNOGROW	KISS ME; Design 4 Innovation; GROW RUP; Innova Foster	6
Support to SMEs	ESSPO; SIE; UpGradeSME; COMPETE IN; INTRA; PURE COSMOS; SKILLS+	FFWD EUROPE; EIS; Inside Out EU; STOB regions	11
Social enterprises & social responsibility	SOCIAL-SEEDS	Road-CSR; RaiSE	3
Red = no participation ; blue = low participation ; green = regular participation			

Box 2 – Projects participating most intensively in the PLP section on “Competitiveness of SMEs”

INNOGROW: All project partners are registered to the PLP and share good practices / experience / tools. Several partners attended various webinars planned by the JS and participated at the 4th thematic PLP workshop on SME competitiveness, which allowed exchanging views with peers and connecting with the thematic PLP experts. The project attended the policy learning event “Research & innovation and SME competitiveness” (Milan, 2017), which allowed jointly exploring good practices from other areas and engaging into joint learning.

CLIPPER: The project attended the PLP thematic workshop on SMEs internationalisation (Brussels, 2017) and the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME competitiveness (Milan, 2017). Both events have allowed an exchange of experience with other projects and presented interesting aspects being relevant for future project activities. Articles available on the PLP were explored and the possibility to organise workshops with the intervention of an expert are envisaged to support the just started project implementation.

UpGrade SME: The project attended the 1st PLP event for SME competitiveness (Brussels, 2017) where own project experiences were presented and sharing of information about the results of the event with other project partners was possible. The project attended the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME competitiveness (Milan, 2017), which allowed a sharing of results with other project partners. The project also analyses good practices in the database, which supports individual learning and also joint learning.

INTRA: The project attended the PLP thematic workshop on SMEs internationalisation (Brussels, 2017) and the policy learning event on research & innovation and SME competitiveness (Milan, 2017).

Table 3 – Pattern of project participation in the PLP section on “Low-carbon economy” (TO4)

Sub-topics addressed	15 projects of the 1st call	16 projects of the 2nd call	Total
Energy efficiency	SET-UP; ZEROCO2; BUILD2LC; SOCIALGREEN; REBUS; LOCARBO; FINERPOL	EMPOWER; CLEAN; VIOLET; ENERSELVES	11
Low carbon strategy	PASSAGE	Green Screen; MOLOC	3
Mobility	LAST MILE; RESOLVE; REGIO- MOB; TRAM; SMART-MR; CISMOB	PROMETEUS; OptiTrans; SCHOOL CHANCE; InnovaSUMP; REFORM; DEMO-EC; EV4CityNRG; CYCLEWALK MODE	14
Renewable / sustainable energy	BIO4ECO	COALESCCE; SUPPORT	3

Red = no participation ; blue = low participation ; green = regular participation

Box 3 – Projects participating most intensively in the PLP section on “Low-carbon economy”

ZEROCO2: Several project partners attended the Low-Carbon Economy policy learning event (Seville, 2017). All project partners are registered to PLP and read available good practices / information and documents on projects especially on the Low-Carbon Economy, with the policy briefs being of most interest.

SET-UP: The project participated in the Low-Carbon Economy policy learning event (Seville, 2017) with a large delegation of partners (5 partners). This allowed to exchange views and experiences with representatives of other projects and contributed to interregional learning process around energy-related topics. Partners have also presented potential good practices at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels.

REGIO MOB: All partners are registered to and using the PLP (12 persons in total), while involving also colleagues who joined the community and use the platform as well. The PLP is used for promoting project activities, checking other good practices, updating information on the platform and also for sharing their good practices on sustainable mobility with others. Good practices were also presented at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities (Brussels).

EV4CityNRG: The project participated in the Low-Carbon Economy policy learning event (Seville, 2017) and in the PLP presentation at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels. Project partners are using the PLP in different ways, namely (1) for consolidating their knowledge on different topics by watching the different webinars provided by the JS which has resulted in a better understanding of the required input to the platform and (2) for policy exchange with a view to get additional knowledge from other community members or from projects' findings by consulting the platform frequently.

Table 4 – Pattern of project participation in the PLP section on “Environment & resource efficiency” (TO 6)

SO	Sub-topics addressed	11 projects of the 1st call	15 projects of the 2nd call	Total
SO 4.1 Improving natural and culture heritage policies	Natural and cultural heritage	CD-ETA	EPICAH	2
	Natural heritage and biodiversity preservation	HERICOAST; IMPACT; SWARE; BID-REX	PERFECT; Land-Sea; Night Light	7
	Cultural heritage & sustainable tourism	CHRISTA	CRinMA; Cult-RInG; Green Pilgrimage; SHARE	5
SO 4.2 Improving resource-efficient economy policies	Circular economy	RETRACE; CESME; SYMBI; TRIS	BIOREGIO; CircE	6
	Waste management & soil pollution	INTHERWASTE	ECOWASTE4FOOD; COCOON; TANIA	4
	Resource efficiency & green public procurement	-	ENHANCE; GPP4Growth	2

Red = no participation ; blue = low participation ; green = regular participation

Box 4 – Projects participating most intensively in the PLP section on “Environment & resource efficiency”

SYMBI: The project attended the 1st policy learning event in Brussels, allowing to discover thematic synergies with other projects (RETRACE, TRIS and ENHANCE). Closer ties were forged with TRIS and a new contact was established with ENHANCE. The event also allowed the project to benefit a lot in terms of content as regards the fields of circular economy, industrial symbiosis, secondary raw material market etc. The project also attended the policy learning event on energy and resource efficiency (Seville, 2017) and participated in related side-events (breakout session 'Sustainable industrial networks and the role of business'; different discussion groups). Participation in the PLP is overall beneficial, especially since contacts were established with similar projects and because learning about other good practices and networking with peers took place.

BIOREGIO: The project attended the 1st policy learning event in Brussels, allowing the participants to exchange knowledge and to establish networking with other similar projects (esp. ECOWASTW4FOOD, to certain extend with INTERWASTE). The project also attended the policy learning event on energy and resource efficiency (Seville, 2017) and presented with presentation of one good practice and continued exchange of knowledge and networking.

CircE: The project attended the 1st policy learning event (Brussels, 2017) and at the policy learning event on energy and resource efficiency (Seville, 2017), with both events allowing participants to discover more about other tools or initiatives connected with eco innovation and to exchange experiences on how other areas are dealing with similar difficulties.

CD-ETA: The project team constantly follows updating of information on the PLP. Articles and publications in the section “Knowledge Hub” (i.e. experts' analysis) are a valuable resource that triggered debate during local stakeholder group meetings in Tuscany and gave inspiration to stakeholders both on the technical and on the fund raising side. The uploading of own good practice not only motivated partners to better exploit the PLP within the project / the local stakeholders, but dissemination of own good practices also triggered a valuable feedback from other stakeholders and companies on their potentials for being implemented.

PERFECT: The project was strongly featured in the policy learning brief produced under the environment and resource efficiency PLP section, which provided additional support for the partners' project engagement. The project actively participated in the PLP presentation at the 2017 European Week of Regions and Cities. This gave the opportunity for promoting project work to a wider audience and for gathering information and ideas inspiring the development of the project's own good practice database (MAGIC - Multi-Advantages of Green Infrastructure in Cities).

ECOWASTE4FOOD: The project attended the first policy learning event on circular economy opportunities for regions. This allowed discussions with managing authorities and projects from other regions that helped - understanding how project partners can cope with similar challenges regarding ERDF investment priorities. The project also attended the policy learning event on energy and resource efficiency (Seville, 2017), giving the possibility of mutual networking and information exchange as well as a discussion of needs of cities and regions to improve the efficiency of resource use. The event also allowed further deepening the project's relationship with BIOREGIO on bio-waste collection.

5.9 Annex IX – Short introduction into theory of change thinking

Popularised in the 1990s, the “theory of change” (ToC) approach has become increasingly influential in programme design, monitoring, and evaluation. A ToC is an outcomes-based causal model articulating the assumptions underlying planned social or political change that is expected to emerge from interventions at any level (e.g. an event, a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy or an entire organisation).

A ToC is not a logical model (i.e. a LogFrame matrix), as both approaches are characterised by different features. A logical model is descriptive, as it shows at one glance the components of an intervention (i.e. inputs, activities, outputs results and objectively verifiable indicators) that are needed for achieving the desired objectives. A ToC is explanatory and based on critical thinking, as it develops a pathway linking activities and outcomes to show how the desired change is expected to come about (i.e. by articulating assumptions about why something will cause something else) and also illustrates why an intervention works or will not work.

The central idea of theory of change thinking is that these assumptions, acting as a set of “rules of thumb” influencing the choices of individuals and organisations, need to be checked to see if they are guiding us to act in ways that are optimal for actually reaching the changes and goals that we are seeking to achieve (*Vogel, 2012, p.26*).

Outcomes are the building blocks of a ToC and represent changes in condition of some kind (e.g. a policy, law, behaviour, attitude, knowledge, state of the environment) among people, institutions, and environments. Outcomes may in some case occur sequentially, while other times they occur simultaneously. Outcomes may also occur independently from each other or be highly interrelated. Outcomes may result from a single strategy or action or from multiple ones. They may lead to common goals or separate ones (*AECF, 2004, p.12*)

A ToC models outcomes in an “outcomes pathway”, which means that outcomes are ordered and connected through a causal chain. Outcomes at a lower level of this pathway are always preconditions to outcomes above them (i.e. early outcomes must be in place for intermediate outcomes to be achieved; intermediate outcomes must be in place for the next set of outcomes to be achieved and so on). This outcomes pathway defines what has to change if the ultimate goal is going to be achieved and the specific connections between outcomes represent the change logic underlying an intervention (*Taplin/Clark/Collins/Colby, 2013, pp 2, 5*).

A ToC is both process and product. The process of working out a ToC usually involves **group sessions with practitioners and stakeholders** concerned by an intervention that are led by a capable facilitator. This group process often entails thinking through all the steps along the path towards a desired change, identifying the preconditions that will enable each step, listing the activities that will produce those conditions, and explaining why those activities are likely to work (*Mackinnon/Amott/McGarvey, 2006, p.3*), but also includes the building of consensus. **The product**

of that process is an elaborated and commented ToC model. A graphic usually visualises the pathway of change (or causal chain), by illustrating the relationship between actions and outcomes and also by showing how outcomes are related to each other over the lifespan of an intervention. Yet, there are many different ways for visualising a ToC (see for example: *Anderson, 2012; Rogers, 2014; Taplin/Clark/Collins/Colby, 2013; AECF, 2004*). The visual representation of a ToC can map the causal chain top-down (from early outcomes to long-term outcomes) or bottom-up (from long-term outcomes to early outcomes), be linear or show a causal sequence, although change is typically more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship. A natural companion of this visual representation of a ToC is a narrative that summarises the theory: it explains the overall logic, highlights major assumptions, and presents a compelling case as to how and why the intervention is expected to work (*Taplin/Clark/Collins/Colby, 2013, p.8*).

A ToC can be used for strategic planning or programme/policy planning, but it **is also a building block for impact evaluations** that can support such processes in several ways. It can identify (1) specific evaluation questions, especially in relation to those elements of the theory of change for which there is no substantive evidence yet, (2) relevant variables that should be included in data collection, (3) intermediate outcomes that can be used as markers of success in situations where the impacts of interest will not occur during the time frame of the evaluation, (4) aspects of implementation that should be examined and (6) potentially relevant contextual factors that should be addressed in data collection and in analysis, to look for patterns (*Rogers, 2014, pp.3, 4*).

Recommended further reading:

AECF - Annie E. Casey Foundation (2004): Theory of Change: A practical tool for action, results and learning. Prepared by Organizational Research Services (ORS), Seattle, Washington.

Anderson, A. A. (2012): The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change. A practical guide to theory development. The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. New York.

Bours, D. / McGinn, C. / Pringle, P. (2014): Guidance note 3: Theory of Change approach to climate change adaptation programming. February 2014.

Mackinnon, A. / Amott, N. / McGarvey, C. (2006): Mapping Change: Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation. GrantCraft series (Ford Foundation).

Organizational Research Services (2004): Theory of Change: A Practical Tool For Action, Results and Learning.

Rogers, P. (2014): Theory of Change, Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 2, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

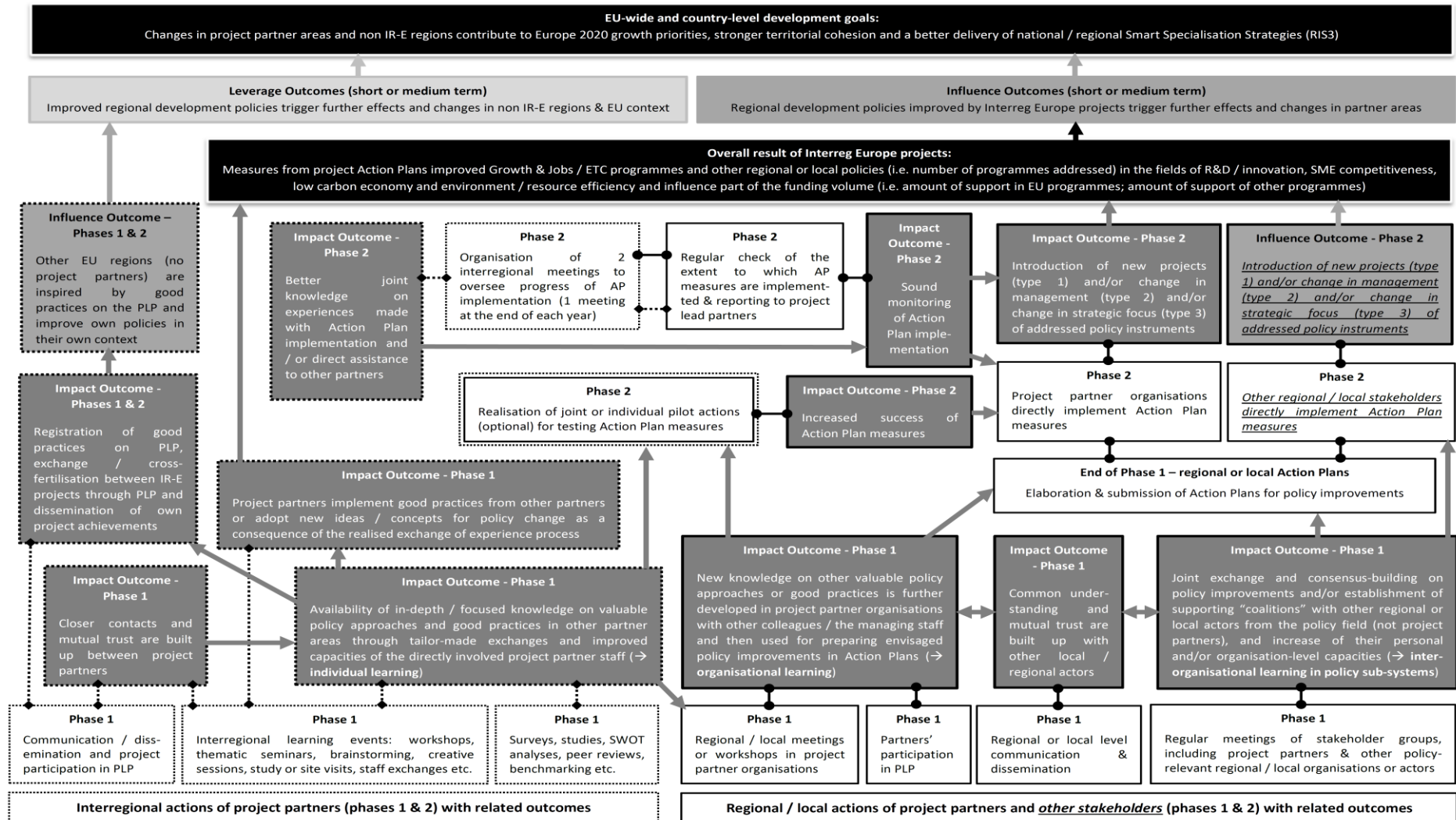
Taplin, D. H. / Clark, H. / Collins, E. / Colby, D.C. (2013): Theory of Change - Technical Papers. A series of papers to support development of theories of change based on practice in the field. New York, April 2013.

Taplin, D. H. / Clark, H. (2012): Theory of Change Basics. A primer on Theory of Change. New York, March 2012.

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Yordy, Ch. (2012): Rigour in Methods and Evaluation for Community Engagement. Ottawa, Ontario, November 2012.

5.10 Annex X – Figure representing the theory of change (for “black-and-white” printing)



5.11 Annex XI – Classification of projects according to their outcomes achieved in regard to policy change

SO	Impact outcome (*)	Influence outcome ...	
		... including a medium-high direct effect of projects on achieved policy improvements (**)	... including a low direct effect of projects on achieved policy improvements (***)
SO 1.1	CREADIS ₃	BRIDGES; INNOTRANS	INNO INFRA SHARE; RESET; SmartPilots; Urban M
SO 1.2	P ₂ L ₂	MONITORIS ₃ ; RUMORE; Beyond EDP; CLUSTERS ₃ ; ERUDITE; INKREASE; InnoBridge; Islands of Innovation; ITHACA; MANUMIX; MARIE; NICHE; NMP-REG; OSIRIS; P-IRIS; RELOS ₃ ; S ₃ Chem; STEPHANIE; STRING	Clusterix 2.0; FoodChains 4 EU; HELIUM; S ₃ 4GROWTH; ClusterFY; ecoRIS ₃ ; ELISE; HIGHER; HoCare; RATIO; REMIX; SUPER; TITTAN;
SO 2.1	-	BRANDTour; Inside Out EU; CRE:HUB; EIS; Innova Foster; iEER; RCIA; SIE; SOCENT SPAs; UpGradeSME	GROW RUP; SME ORGANICS; ATMforSMEs; CLIPPER; COMPETE IN; Design 4 Innovation; Destination SMEs; ESSPO; FFWD EUROPE; INNOGROW; INTRA; KISS ME; PURE COSMOS; RaiSE; REBORN; Road-CSR; Rural SMEs; RuralGrowth; SKILLS+; SOCIAL-SEEDS; SPEED UP; STOB regions; TRINNO
SO 3.1	OptiTrans; TRAM	BIO4ECO; CYCLEWALK; School Chance; ENERSELVES; FINERPOL; LOCARBO; REBUS; REFORM	CISMOB; DEMO-EC; InnovaSUMP; PROMETEUS; RESOLVE; VIOLET; BUILD ₂ LC; CLEAN; COALESCCE; EMPOWER; EV Energy; Green Screen; LAST MILE; MOLOC; PASSAGE; REGIO-MOB; SET-UP; SMART-MR; Social Green; SUPPORT; ZEROCO ₂
SO 4.1	-	Land-Sea; Green Pilgrimage; Cult-RInG; BID-REX; CHRISTA; HERICOAST; PERFECT; SHARE;	SWARE; CD-ETA; CRinMA; EPICAH; IMPACT; Night Light
SO 4.2	TANIA	ECOWASTE 4 FOOD; CESME; CircE; RETRACE; SYMBI	TRIS ; BIOREGIO; COCOON; ENHANCE; GPP4Growth; INTHERWASTE
Total	5	52	73

(*) Between 80% and 100% of envisaged policy improvements are directly realised by project partner organisations (no or very low external contribution of other local / regional actors).
(**) Between 41% and 79% of envisaged policy improvements are directly realised by project partner organisations (external contribution of other local / regional actors: 21% - 59%).
(***) Between 0% and 40% of envisaged policy improvements are directly realised by project partner organisations (external contribution of other local / regional actors: 60% - 100%).

