Final Evaluation Report
prepared by
Metis GmbH and MultiContact Consulting Kft.
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Operational Evaluation of the Danube Transnational Programme

Client

Ministry of National Economy (from 18 May 2018 Ministry of Finance)

1051 Budapest, József nádor tér 2-4

Official representative: Janos Imre Csalagovits, Head of Department

Contractor

Metis GmbH

Austria, 1030 Vienna, Marxergasse 25 | www.metis-vienna.eu

Andreas Resch, resch@metis-vienna.eu

Isabel Naylon, naylon@metis-vienna.eu

Hildegard Oraze, oraze@metis-vienna.eu

Nicole Hauder, hauder@metis-vienna.eu

Gabriel Alvarez, gabriel.alvarez@gmx.com

MultiContact Consulting Kft.

1115 Budapest, Bartók Béla út 105-113 | www.multicontact.eu

Péter Kolossa (team leader), pkolossa@multicontact.eu

Éva Magyar, emagyar@multicontact.eu

Marcell Borbély, mborbely@multicontact.eu

Content

List of abbreviations

AA	Audit Authority
CA	Certifying Authority
CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 (Common Provisions Regulation)
DSP	Danube Strategy Point
DTP	Danube Transnational Programme
EC	European Commission
eMS	Electronic Monitoring System
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EoI	Expressions of Interest
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
FLC	First Level Control
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent (personnel)
HU-RO	Interreg Hungary-Romania Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HU-SK	Interreg Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HUSKROUA ENPI CBC	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HU-SRB IPA CBC	Interreg - Hungary-Serbia Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance Cross-border Cooperation Programme
IP	Investment Priority
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MNE	Ministry of National Economy (of Hungary), renamed Ministry of Finance on 18 May 2018
MS	Member State
NC	National Committee
NCP	National Contact Point
PA	Priority Axis
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator
QA	Quality assurance
SEE	South East Europe
SMF	Seed Money Facility
SO	Specific Objective
ToR	Terms of Reference

1 Executive Summary

Overall performance

The Danube Transnational Programme has started very ambitiously to implement calls and related events. Although the commitment rate of the programme was slightly below the weighted average of other transnational programmes at the end of 2017, it is now relatively high with the approval of the 2nd call projects. In terms of interim payments received from the Commission, which is based on financial progress, DTP is currently in the fourth best place amongst transnational programmes. Implementation is in line with the target values of the performance framework for end 2018, and n+3 targets have been met.

There are, however, persistent difficulties to find projects in the SOs 1.2, 2.4, 3.2 that meet the high DTP selection standards. In addition, a long development process of EUSDR-related projects in SO 4.2 can be observed. A particular challenge is the implementation of the ENI funding instrument.

Programme management

MA/JS established a functioning integrated management structure and proved to fulfil the assigned tasks. Bottlenecks in MA/JS staff capacity and lacking capacity building can lead to reduced effectiveness, in particular in the 2nd implementation phase. Appropriate countermeasures to update the management structure and capacity are under implementation, and some further actions are recommended in this report.

The Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority are operational and fulfil their tasks. Overall coordination with MA/JS is good. The CA is restricted by the eMS, which is of limited usability for financial management.

Despite its complex composition, the MC has proven its ability to work and to fulfil its functions. The MC, however, underutilizes its function as a strategic body and devotes too much time on operational aspects of programme implementation, which should be left in the hands of the MA/JS. The majority of the MC members are satisfied with the support by MA/JS, which acts as the secretariat of the MC. Some members, however, state a lack of sound information policy in various fields. The low participation of the MC members in the online survey is an indication that many members occupy an observer position.

Almost all NCPs contribute to the programme implementation within the given framework conditions with good support provided by MA/JS. Weak points are the access of NCPs to project data, lacking NCP capacities to disseminate project results and poor exchange activities within the NCP bodies and with EUSDR actors and other Interreg programmes.

The national controllers in 12 partner states succeeded to verify expenditures in the first and second reporting period. However, there are less well performing FLC systems that are currently unable to meet the 60-day verification of expenditures deadline. A systematic flaw in the system is caused by the fact that although FLC is a core process, MA / JS have little scope to intervene in the process, since the FLC system is an individual responsibility of the partner states.

The DTP takes the support for EUSDR very seriously and provides substantial funds and support. For legal reasons, however, the tools that the programme can offer are not well suited for the funding of institutional support. Also, EUSDR support binds a lot of work resources from MA / JS.

Support for applicants and beneficiaries

The applicants are mostly satisfied with the support for project generation and application. The weak point is usually the support provided by the NCPs. Big national differences in the capabilities of NCPs exist which cannot be influenced by the DTP. Therefore, the main responsibility for support and consultation lies with MA / JS. The tools for support provided by MA/JS should be continuously developed and improved. MA / JS should apply modern communication tools such as skype (or similar software) and live Webinars (going beyond YouTube videos) to better advise applicants on a daily basis in a resource-efficient manner.

The application process works and is very well supported by MA / JS. The assessment criteria are transparent for applicants. The relevance filter introduced in the 2nd call helped the MA/JS to better allocate their scarce staff resources and select programme-relevant proposals. Challenging is the lack of support by NCPs to applicants, whereby major national differences can be noted. The application form has room for improvement. The assessment criteria are over-complex and difficult to communicate to all assessors. A stepwise selection process favours the result orientation and is fair to applicants.

Overall, the support for project implementation is adequately organised and works well for most of the beneficiaries. Two points need more consideration by the programme: the flexibility for project changes is very limited; and so far in many cases the timeframe for expenditure verification until the payment is too long.

Reducing the administrative burden for project implementation is on the long-term agenda of all Interreg-programmes to allow beneficiaries to redeploy their personal resources from administration to content development. However, this depends mainly on the legal framework conditions, which can hardly be influenced by the programme.

Electronic information system

After two failed public procurement procedures, eMS was deployed in the DTP as “Plan B”. eMS has limited ambitions and does not offer everything that programme management may need, but what it promises it does fairly well and for no licensing fee. It provides a simple web interface which allows all applicants, beneficiaries and programme management bodies to interact with the system, and provides the basic functionality of a monitoring system.

eMS, however, does not provide necessary support for financial and administrative procedures. Importantly, its poor reporting functionality poses the biggest challenge for the programme management bodies. The use of custom-made scripts to produce desired reports can make up for much of the missing functionality, but the MA/JS does not have the necessary in-house skills for this and relies on the Hungarian State Treasury instead.

The user interface provided by eMS is economical for simple, basic tasks, but insufficient for the complex management tasks often required by DTP. Missing functionalities include interfaces with other established IT systems, a workflow system, and e-signature functionality. Before making a decision on whether to implement possible improvements in eMS, the reduction in HR costs, decrease in risks of human errors and other benefits likely to result from such improvements should be compared to the cost of software development and maintenance.

Communication

Staff resources for communication at programme level are very scarce and communication is not fully embedded as a horizontal issue in MA/JS. Despite this fact, the communication strategy and the annual work plans are well developed.

All planned communication instruments have been implemented (except the automatic transfer of information from eMS to project websites) and work well. Ongoing improvement is needed in some points. A weakness is the low numbers of website traffic for some countries, which indicates lacking promotion. In addition, lead partner seminars in 2017 were judged critically. The project related communication instruments pose a specific challenge.

So far, the target indicator values of the communication strategy have been achieved largely. The performance control of the communication tools works in most cases.

The NCP resources and their knowledge to communicate project achievements actively to national stakeholders and national public are very limited. The DTP cannot fill this resource gap by increased TA funds spent on NCPs. Therefore, the role of NCPs as described in the programme communication strategy needs redefinition in a realistic way.

Qualified communication manager and sound communication plan are in place in most of the projects. The communication officer provides effective support to the (currently limited number of) projects to support them in their communication tasks.

The hosted standardised project websites can be easily monitored by MA/JS and other stakeholders and are a time- and-cost efficient solution for projects. Many projects, however, underutilise the options offered by the system and so many websites lack attractiveness.

The progress in achieving the expected programme results

76 projects with an average funding volume of 1.8 million EUR were selected in the 1st and 2nd call.

It can be expected that the projects selected in the 1st and 2nd call contribute to a large extent to the planned programme results. The screening confirms the selection of projects with a high potential to contribute to the expected programme results – 93% of programme results are addressed. The high selectivity of the calls should be maintained. A stepwise application process contributes to higher-quality applications.

In SOs 1.2, 2.4 and 3.2, there is a very low potential for suitable projects in the programme area. It cannot be expected that this potential will improve in the short term. The programme should consider to tackle the absorption problems by a combination of re-allocation of funds and activation measures (e.g. top-down initiative to foster project generation).

Currently it is not possible to net out the CP-effects on the change in the programme specific result indicators (focusing on cooperation intensity), since the change is not observed and mirrored on the project level. On basis of that it will be very difficult to conduct a meaningful impact evaluation as required by EC guidance and the evaluation plan.

2 Intervention description

The Danube Transnational Programme 2014-2020 (DTP) supports transnational cooperation projects between partners that promote economic, environmental and social development by elaborating joint solutions, concrete outputs and results enabling further implementations such as further initiatives and investments.

Geographically, the Danube Transnational Programme area overlaps with the territory addressed by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) comprising 14 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany – Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine – partly) and comprising also the Danube river basin. It is the most international river basin in the world. The area makes up one fifth of the EU's territory and has more than 100 million inhabitants. The variety of natural environment, the socio-economic differences and cultural diversity of the various parts of the area may be perceived as major challenges but actually represent important opportunities and unexploited potential.

The programme is focusing on four thematic priorities:

1. Innovative and socially responsible Danube Region (foster eco-innovation, knowledge transfer, cluster policy, social innovation and skilled entrepreneurship including technological and non-technological innovation aspects, research and development)
2. Environment and Culture responsible Danube Region (preserve and manage the diversity of natural and cultural assets, maintain major ecological corridors along river systems, disaster prevention and disaster management)
3. Better connected Danube Region (improve regional connectivity to the TEN-T network, environmentally-friendly transport systems, regional energy planning and –coordination)
4. Well governed Danube Region (strengthen multilevel- and transnational governance in areas with major societal challenges, more effective governance of the EUSDR and complex transnational project development)

Target groups are regional and local authorities, development agencies, universities and research institutes, chambers of commerce, innovation centres and other relevant actors in the field of innovation, economic development, environment, transport, energy and institutional capacity as well as governance of the EUSDR.

The Danube Transnational Programme applies three different funding instruments for

- ERDF partners (EU-Member States)
- IPA / Instrument for the Pre-Accession Assistance partners (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and
- ENI / The European Neighbourhood Instrument partners (Moldova and parts of Ukraine)

More information about the Danube programme is available in the following link: http://www.interreg-danube.eu/.

3 Evaluation purpose and tasks

The purpose of the "operational evaluation" of the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) is to understand the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme management system, as well as to set the ground for the future direction of the impact evaluations to be carried out after 2018. Based on the outcomes of the evaluation and the recommendations of the evaluation team, the programme bodies should be able to correct/ improve/ modify/ develop the programme management and implementation in order to be efficient, effective and capable of reaching the programme results (see ToR).

The target groups of the operational evaluation are:

- Programme bodies (MC, MA/ JS, FLC, NCPs, CA, AA, EC)
- Programme beneficiaries (project partners, PACs, DSP, etc.)
- Programme stakeholders (national, regional, and local authorities, EUSDR National Coordinators, EUSDR Steering Groups members, etc.)

The operational evaluation addresses five evaluation tasks:

- Task A: Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme management structures;
- Task B. Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the entire project cycle;
- Task C: Monitoring System: analysis of the functionality and effectiveness of the programme monitoring system;
- Task D: Analysis of the implementation of the Communication Strategy;
- Task E: Analysis of progress in achieving the results of each specific objective, including potential bottlenecks and capacity of each Specific Objective to generate projects (no in depth impact analysis).

The evaluation was conducted between December 2017 and July 2018. For each task a set of evaluation questions (EQs) were formulated in the terms of reference (in total 30 EQs) related to the effectiveness and efficiency criterion (see annexed list of EQs). The evaluators and the MA/JS held an inception meeting on the 7th December 2017 to discuss the scope of the evaluation and the proposed methodology. The EQs were clustered by the evaluator in consultation with the MA/JS. The final inception report was approved by end of January 2018.

The **draft evaluation report** was delivered in February 2018 and covered all of the five evaluation tasks. The preliminary evaluation findings were based on 20 pilot interviews and document analysis. The picture at this time was not complete, because some of the research and a comprehensive online survey was still missing. The preliminary findings were presented and discussed at the 7th Meeting of the Danube Transnational Programme Monitoring Committee on the 22 March 2018 in Podgorica.

In April and May 2018 the analysis was completed by a survey on the entire population of project applicants and project partners, National Contact Points and Monitoring Committee members. In addition, all project websites of the 1st call and project applications of the 1st call and 2nd call were screened.

The draft **final evaluation report** delivered end of May 2018 reviewed and amended the previous draft report. Recommendations are distinguished along the timeline between short-term recommendations (implementation ASAP or at least during the current programming period) and long-term recommendations (learnings to be included into the programming exercise for the next period). The final report was delivered in July 2018.

4 Evaluation methodology

The operational evaluation follows a methodological design which is largely determined by the Terms of Reference (evaluation questions, time frame, deliverables), employing a mix of techniques - mostly qualitative - that enables an assessment of management and implementation practices.

In the mix of methods, the evaluators proposed a happy medium between representativeness (online survey covering the whole population of actors) and explanatory power in terms of in-depth inquiries (face to face interviews, analysis at the project level, comparison with other cases).

The evaluation used the following information sources:

- Stocktaking and analysis of programme documents provided by the programme;
- Pilot interviews (semi-structured) with programme bodies and beneficiaries. In total 20 interviews were conducted in January and February 2018;
- Analysis of FLC data for the 1st and 2nd reporting period 2017;
- Workshop at 7 May 2018 with project officers, financial officers and head of MA and head of JS to reflect on the implementation of joint procedures and overall management;
- Online-survey on project partners covering rejected proposals and approved projects and addressing LP and PP of the 1st and 2nd call, Lead applicants for the 1st call (2nd step), Lead applicants for the 2nd call (1-step), PACs (1st PAC call), and Lead applicant of the SMF call.
- Screening of 54 projects and project websites of the 1st call for proposals;
- Survey on MC members and on National Contact Points (NCPs);
- Meetings with MA/JS on the 26 January, 18 April and 2 July 2018 in order to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation processes and to discuss the evaluation findings.

The surveys served to capture stakeholder views and were conducted in May 2018. The questions were agreed with MA/JS and interested partner states. The addressees had around two weeks' time to answer the questionnaire.

- The high response rate of NCPs with 79% demonstrates their commitment to the programme.
- 38 full and 30 substitute MC members were contacted (in total 68 people). We received an answer from 16 MC members including EC. MC responses cover most of the partner states (9 out of 14 partner states or 64% responded) and may therefore be considered representative. A number of 1 to 3 MC members responded per partner state.
- The project partners addressed include also applications in process and rejected applications. Against this background, the response rate of 28% is good. 80% of the 290 responding project partners stem from the first call.

Table 1. Response rate by target group

Survey target group	Total number of contacts addressed	Response	Response rate
NCPs	14	11	79%
MC members	68	16	24%
Applicants/Beneficiaries for rejected and approved projects	1,050	290	28%
of this: (some project partners participated in more than 1 call, so shares exceed 100%)	1st call (2nd step)	232 (80%)	
	2nd call	103 (36%)	
	1st PAC call	16 (5%)	
	SMF call	17 (6%)	

Source: Metis

Methodological explanation on how the results of the online survey were evaluated

The actual number of respondents per question is shown with the results per question-block as it can differ from the total number of respondents. This fluctuating number of replies results from two reasons. First, which is the case for all target groups, the addressees were free to skip questions. Therefore, not all respondents answered all the questions. Second, the applicants/beneficiaries were forwarded to different versions of the questionnaire, depending on their answers on the first page of the survey. While rejected and not yet decided projects (applicants) received only the first part of the questionnaire (which was identical for all applicants/beneficiaries), the approved projects (beneficiaries) received the longer version of the survey.

The full results of the surveys (including all tables, graphs and comments) have been sent to the client in separate documents. The present report includes summaries of the outcomes, which are mainly depicted in the form of weighted averages (= weighted arithmetic mean). This statistical term allows an easy comparison of answers/satisfaction between the different topics and questions. The range of the weighted average usually (when there are 4 answer categories) is between 1 and 4, with 4 being the best (e.g. not at all helpful = 1, not so helpful = 2, somewhat helpful = 3, very helpful = 4). The names of the categories differ between the questions; however, the weights used are the same, the higher the weighted average, the better the result. Or, in terms of the bar graphs, the longer the bar, the better the result.

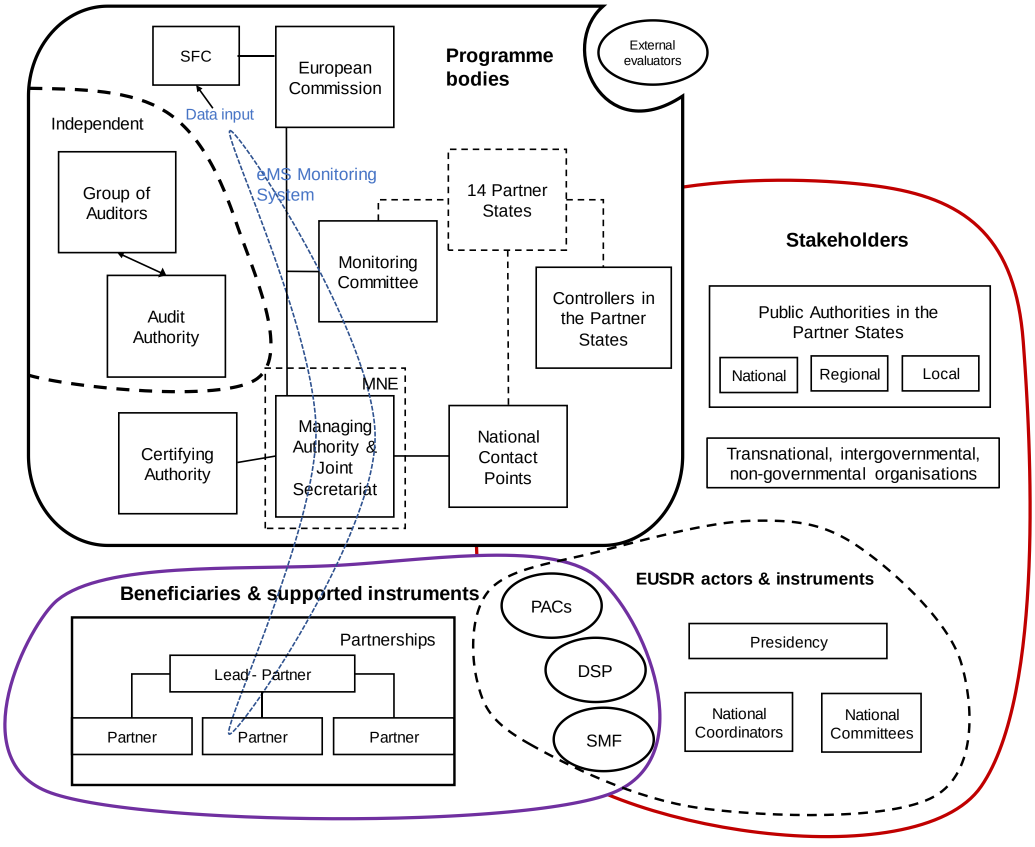
Open comments of the respondents are very valuable for a better understanding of the ratings as well as to receive suggestions for improvement. The comments have been qualitatively analysed and are presented in a compacted form. In some cases, where very little comments have been received (which is mainly the case for the NCP and MC members), the comments can be individual opinions and doesn't necessarily reflect the view of the whole target group. The entire and unabridged comments are included in the separate documents.

5 Introduction to the CP management structure and status of CP implementation

5.1 Overall programme management structure, stakeholders and instruments

The management and implementation of the cooperation programme involves a wide range of actors and a complex and highly differentiated set of processes to achieve the stated results. The “ecosystem” of actors is described in a simplified way in the illustration below.

Figure 1. Stylised ecosystem of actors (and instruments) to manage and implement the DTP



Source: Metis, based on the distinction of different actors made in the ToR on page 8; Remark: It is difficult to make a distinction between beneficiaries and stakeholders as one institution can fulfil both functions.

Programme bodies: The cooperation programme has defined its management structure. Each body has specific functions and responsibilities, which are widely determined by the regulatory requirements and specified by cooperation programme documents. The designation process of the programme authorities and delegated bodies was completed in 2017.

- The Monitoring Committee (MC) – consisting of representatives of each participating country (up to 3) – is a strategic body and supervises the implementation of the DTP and selects projects to be financed (see CP complement, p 9). Its overall task is to ensure the quality and effectiveness of programme implementation supported by the MA/JS. Also representatives with an observer status and no right to vote may participate: Representatives of the European Commission, the Audit Authority, Certifying Authority, Transnational, intergovernmental and/or non-governmental organisations, national contact points, EUSDR National Coordinators. National Committees or other formal/informal fora are organised prior to the MC meetings to discuss the applications and pave the way for approval of applications.

- The Managing Authority (MA), integrated into a single structure with the Joint Secretariat (JS), hosted by the Ministry of Finance in Hungary, is the operationally responsible body for the overall programme implementation. The JS will be the central contact point for potential project applicants and Lead Partners of selected/running operations. The counterparts for the MA with the coordination role on the territory of the participating countries will in the first instance be the MC members representing the Member States responsible for the DTP.
- The Certifying Authority (CA), among other functions, is responsible for drawing up and submitting certified statements of expenditure and applications for payment to the Commission and receiving payments from the Commission. The CA shall use the payments received from the Commission to reimburse the Lead Beneficiaries. The Hungarian State Treasury is responsible for implementing the CA tasks.
- The Audit Authority (AA) ensures that audits are carried out on the management and control systems, on an appropriate sample of operations and on the annual accounts. The AA will be assisted by a Group of Auditors (GoA) comprising of representatives from responsible bodies of each Partner State. The Directorate General for Audit of EU-Funds, Hungary takes over the independent AA function.
- National Contact Points (NCPs) are set up by each participating country to complement transnational activities of the MA and the JS by involving stakeholders from the national level as well as to contribute to the national and transnational programme management. The NPCs are very differently resourced but their workload (number of projects, partners behind) is also very different.
- First Level Controllers are designated by each Partner State to ensure the compliance of expenditure incurred by the national project partners with EU and national rules, by carrying out appropriate verifications, covering administrative, financial, technical and physical aspects of operations. Controllers are nominated in line with the national provisions of each Partner State. Each country participating in the DTP is responsible for verifications carried out on its territory.

Electronic information system: The DTP uses the eMS software as information system of the programme. The software was developed by Interact for the benefit of Interreg programmes and is free of license fees. The electronic data exchange system is used for management and monitoring of programme and project level implementation including the first level control tasks as well. eMS collects data based on which information can be transferred to SFC by manual input, but does not provide an interface.

EUSDR actors and instruments: The DTP developed a cooperation framework with the macro-regional EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). EUSDR related issues are discussed in the MC with the active involvement of the National Coordinators. The Danube Transnational Programme directly supports the EUSDR governance with extensive funds in many respects:

- Support to Priority Area Coordinators
- Seed Money Facility, a support tool to allow for the preparation of strategic projects in line with the 12 Priority Areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.
- Support to Danube Strategy Point

Also the DTP capitalisation strategy involves the Priority Area Coordinators.

Beneficiaries (lead partner and project partner): The lead partners (LP) located in one of the Danube EU Member States is designated by all the beneficiaries participating in a project to assume responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire operation (including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid); furthermore for ensuring that the expenditure presented by other beneficiaries has been incurred and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the beneficiaries, that it has been verified by a controller, and that the other beneficiaries receive the total amount of the contribution from the funds. Lead partner and project partner have extensive reporting obligations.

Stakeholders: Stakeholders are those parts of the public who are familiar with the respective policy fields of the cooperation programme and who are particularly interested in further developing the respective policies. These are experts, multipliers etc. from state and non-governmental and transnational organizations. It is difficult to make a distinction between beneficiaries and stakeholders as one institution can fulfil both functions.

Organisation of processes

How processes are organised is not a matter of right or wrong, but of finding the most suitable and effective procedures within the specific context of the cooperation programme and the given legal and budgetary framework.

Finding suitable processes stresses the importance of organisational learning for effective and efficient management and implementation.

The experience of programmes is that the development of effective programme management, project generation, project selection, financial management, monitoring and evaluation systems takes time, with the evolution of administrative practice over successive programme periods and different according to the different territories involved.

Investing in institutional capacity and in the capacity of governmental and non-governmental actors is vital for the effective management of cooperation programmes.

5.2 Status of implementation of the cooperation programme

5.2.1 Calls for proposal

In the period from 2015 to May 2018 the Danube Transnational Programme launched 5 calls with 2 not yet completed.

The following table provides an overview on launched call and planned ones.

Table 2. Call for proposals

Call	Procedure, specifics	Application time	No. of applicants	Selected projects	Timeframe	Max. project duration
1. Call 76 Mio € ERDF 7.5 Mio € IPA	1st step Website-application	23.09.2015-03.11.2015	576	100 (17%)	4.5 months (22.03.2016)	30 months
	2nd step Website-application	29.03.2016-09.05.2016	91	54 (59%)	7 months (1) (08.12.2016) Contracting finalised 1. quarter 2017	
1. PAC call (4.2) 3.6 Mio € ERDF, IPA, ENI	1-step Website-application	12.09.2016.-21.10.2016	12 (all PACs) Resubmission of 3 applications	12 (100%)	~ 2 months (12.2016) Contracting 2017	36 months
2. Call 50.8 Mio € ERDF 4.4 Mio € IPA 4.7 Mio € ENI	1- step (incl. Moldova + Ukraine; SO4.1 closed) Website-application	09.05.2017-06.06.2017	119	22 (18%) 85 (71%) failed the relevance assessment	11.5 months (MC decision 24 May 2018)	36 months
1. SMF Call (4.2) 1.5 Mio € ERDF, IPA, ENI	1-step eMS application	02.10.2017-07.12.2017	65		In process	12 months
DSP call (4.2)	1 step eMS application	08.05.2018 - 11.06.2018			In process	December 2021
3. Call	Planned for 2019 (re-scheduled for autumn 2018 to drive forward the commitment rate)					
2. PAC Call	Planned for 2019					
2. SMF Call	Planned for 2020					

Source: AIR 2016, interviews, DTP-website; (1) deadline for application was 09.05.2016 – decision in MC was on the 08.12.2016

The different implementation status of the calls has consequences for the evaluation of the project cycle:

- for project generation, application and selection all calls can be addressed (including SMF);
- for project implementation the 1st call and PAC call can be addressed.

5.2.2 Events (call and non-call related)

The following events were conducted by MA/JS at programme level: The number of conducted events was massively increased since 2015. 9 programme events were implemented in 2017.

Table 3. Events

Event	2015	2016	2017
Programme related			
Annual Events	• Kick-off event: A stream of cooperation (Budapest, 23-24/09) **496 participants**	Annual Event 'Blue Danube' (Bucharest, 29/09) **260 participants**	• Co-organisation of the 6th EUSDR Annual Forum (Budapest, 18-19/10) **1,000 participants**
NCP-JS meetings	• NCP-JS meeting (Belgrade, 23/04)	• NPC-JS meeting (Sarajevo, 23/03) • NPC-JS meeting (Budapest, 9/12)	• NCP-JS meeting (Vienna, 28/09)
Project related			
Lead applicant seminars		• Lead applicant seminar 1st call (Budapest, 11/04) **134 participants** • Lead applicant seminar PAC call (Budapest, 07/09) **46 participants**	• Lead Applicant seminar 2nd call (Budapest, 09/02) **144 participants**
Lead partner seminars			• LP seminar PAC call (Budapest, 24/01) **41 participants** • LP seminar 1st call (Budapest, 25/01) **147 participants** • LP seminar 1st call and PAC call (Budapest, 28/06) **134 participants**
Others			• Communication training 1st call approved projects communication officers (Budapest, 26/01) **78 participants** • Seed Money Facility launch event (Vienna, 27/09) **120 participants**

Source: Programme documents, interviews

Info days organised by the NCPs at the national level

In order to support potential applicants in the preparation of their 1st and 2nd call proposals, 32 Info days were organised by the NCPs up to end 2017 (see task A3).

5.2.3 Financial implementation, fulfilment of performance framework targets

Overall rate of commitments and expenditures

Financial implementation is demonstrated by the ratio between allocated funds according to the financing plan in the CP and approvals / expenditures occurred.

As of May 2018, 69% of ERDF funds and 76% of IPA funds have been approved following the 1st and 2nd call (see table on the financial implementation). The approval rate of ENI funds for MD and UA is around 18%.

The expenditure rate of ERDF and IPA funds is around 8% of allocated funds. The expenditure rate in relation to approved (contracted) funds is around 12%.

Commitment rate of the 1st and 2nd call

127 million EUR ERDF (72% of funds for normal calls) were allocated for the 1st and 2nd call. 99% of the planned budget was utilized through selected projects (126 million ERDF were approved in the 1st and 2nd call) which demonstrates overall a successful call implementation. The ERDF budget for the 1st call was over-utilized (76 million EUR planned vs. 91 million approved) whereas the 2nd call was under-utilized (51 million planned vs. 35 million approved) despite of a higher success rate of applications (10% vs. 18% in the 2nd call).

Commitment rate by specific objective

A comparably **high commitment rate** is given in the following 7 specific objectives covering around 66% of total funds:

- SO1.1 - Improve framework conditions for innovation
- SO2.1 - Strengthen transnational water management and flood risk prevention
- SO2.2 - Foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources
- SO2.3 - Foster the restoration and management of ecological corridors
- SO3.1 - Support environmentally-friendly and safe transport systems and balanced accessibility of urban and rural areas
- SO4.1 - Improve institutional capacities to tackle major societal challenges (closed after the 1st call)
- SO5.1 - Technical Assistance

A comparably **low commitment rate** is given in the following 4 specific objectives covering around 34% of total funds:

- SO1.2 - Increase competences for business and social innovation (most critical one because of its high allocation)
- SO2.4 - Improve preparedness for environmental risk management
- SO3.2 - Improve energy security and energy efficiency
- SO4.2 - Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR

The persistent difficulties to find projects in the SOs 1.2, 2.4, 3.2 that meet the high DTP selection standards and the long development process of SO 4.2 related projects posed a challenge in achieving a balanced commitment rate across SOs.

Most of the unused ERDF funds (in total 61 million EUR) remain in the SO 1.2 (13 million EUR), SO 2.4 (10 million) and SO 4.2 (11 million).

In order to further increase the commitment rate the MC re-scheduled the 3rd Call for proposals planned originally for 2019 to autumn 2018.

Performance framework and N+3 targets are met

The target values of the performance framework for 2018 and 2023 were defined with utmost caution in the CP. As of end of February 2018, the DTP fulfils all the milestone targets set in the performance framework for 2018 (Source: Report on programme and projects monitoring March 2018 p 5).The programme also fulfils the N+3 target, referred to the 2015 commitment according to the financing plan in the CP:

- Cumulative N+3 spending obligation by end 2018 for 2015 commitment is 24.7 million ERDF and 2.4 million IPA;
- Cumulative total ERDF spending (projects and TA) including pre-financing received by the EC amounts to 28.3 million ERDF and 2.6 million IPA.

Comparative analysis with other transnational programmes - slight lagging behind at approvals, but one of the best payment rates

When compared to the status of financial implementation of other transnational programmes in the 2014-2020 programming period on 31 December 2017, DTP's approval rate of 53.7% was slightly below the average of 55% (see Table 5).

However, it is important to note that these data apply to a reference date of 31 December 2017, and therefore do not include the results of the 2nd call.

Considering the payment rate by 29 June 2018 (EU payments) DTP is the fourth best programme under the transnationals (see table 6).

DTP shows the best payment rate of all Interreg programmes with HU involvement (see table 7).

Table 4. Status of financial implementation by priority axis and specific objective (May 2018)

PA	IP	SO	ERDF allocated (Financing Plan in the CP)	IPA allocated (Financing Plan in the CP)	ERDF approved 1st & 2nd CfP	IPA approved 1st & 2nd CfP	ERDF expen-diture	IPA expen-diture	Approved ERDF in % allocated	Approved IPA in % allocated	ERDF ex-penditure in % of allocated	IPA ex-penditure in % of allocated	ERDF ex-penditure in % of approved	IPA ex-penditure in % of approved
			1	2	3	4	5	6	3/1	4/2	5/1	6/2	5/3	6/4
Calculation per Specific Objective														
PA1	1b	SO1.1	28.293.357	2.659.095	21.210.570	2.524.676	3.006.784	277.803	75%	95%	11%	10%	14%	11%
PA1	1b	SO1.2	28.293.357	2.659.095	15.505.956	1.560.174	539.684	63.456	55%	59%	2%	2%	3%	4%
PA2	6b	SO2.1	11.452.073	1.076.064	11.774.783	999.911	578.853	63.942	103%	93%	5%	6%	5%	6%
PA2	6c	SO2.2	30.314.311	2.847.472	22.282.122	2.530.638	2.203.938	172.580	74%	89%	7%	6%	10%	7%
PA2	6d	SO2.3	11.452.073	1.076.064	12.103.319	1.403.912	879.935	58.087	106%	130%	8%	5%	7%	4%
PA2	6d	SO2.4	11.452.073	1.076.064	1.434.758	243.780	514.309	63.070	13%	23%	4%	6%	36%	26%
PA3	7c	SO3.1	28.293.357	2.657.112	23.087.172	1.608.447	2.937.919	139.794	82%	61%	10%	5%	13%	9%
PA3	7e	SO3.2	14.146.678	1.328.556	6.272.127	1.072.403	961.333	126.850	44%	81%	7%	10%	15%	12%
PA4	11a	SO4.1	12.125.724	1.138.196	12.127.417	1.918.366	2.574.202	354.008	100%	169%	21%	31%	21%	18%
PA4	11b	SO4.2	14.146.678	1.328.556	3.184.481	239.425	299.055	0	23%	18%	2%	0%	9%	0%
PA5	TA	SO5.1	12.125.724	1.982.919	11.294.438	1.044.650	2.389.053	271.010	93%	53%	20%	14%	21%	26%
Total			**202.095.405**	**19.829.192**	**140.277.144**	**15.146.382**	**16.885.064**	**1.590.601**	**69%**	**76%**	**8%**	**8%**	**12%**	**11%**
Aggregation per Priority Axis														
PA1			56.586.713	5.318.189	36.716.526	4.084.849	3.546.468	341.259	65%	77%	6%	6%	10%	8%
PA2			64.670.530	6.075.664	47.594.983	5.178.241	4.177.034	357.680	74%	85%	6%	6%	9%	7%
PA3			42.440.035	3.985.668	29.359.299	2.680.850	3.899.252	266.644	69%	67%	9%	7%	13%	10%
PA4			26.272.403	2.466.751	15.311.898	2.157.791	2.873.257	354.008	58%	87%	11%	14%	19%	16%
PA5			12.125.724	1.982.919	11.294.438	1.044.650	2.389.053	271.010	93%	53%	20%	14%	21%	26%
Total			**202.095.405**	**19.829.192**	**140.277.144**	**15.146.382**	**16.885.064**	**1.590.601**	**69%**	**76%**	**8%**	**8%**	**12%**	**11%**

Source: MA/JS, Titles of the specific objectives are explained in the annex; Remark: ENI funds are not part of the Financing Plan in the CP

Table 5. Status of financial implementation of transnational programmes on 31 December 2017, ordered by approval rate

Transnational programme	Programme budget	Approved amount	Approval rate	Expenditure amount	Expenditure rate
Interreg V-B - Balkan-Mediterranean	33 640 617 €	32 306 842 €	96,00%	0 €	0,00%
Interreg V-B - Baltic Sea	322 978 690 €	242 765 671 €	75,20%	30 581 926 €	9,50%
Interreg V-B - Central Europe	298 987 026 €	212 384 127 €	71,00%	17 453 280 €	5,80%
Interreg V-B - Northern Periphery and Arctic	78 636 424 €	52 636 820 €	66,90%	10 790 936 €	13,70%
Interreg V-B - Atlantic Area	185 366 492 €	119 785 257 €	64,60%	0 €	0,00%
Interreg V-B - Mediterranean	264 898 514 €	158 233 238 €	59,70%	13 725 459 €	5,20%
Interreg V-B - Alpine Space	139 751 456 €	82 007 363 €	58,70%	13 809 653 €	9,90%
Interreg V-B - North Sea	328 773 520 €	182 839 904 €	55,60%	7 168 656 €	2,20%
Interreg V-B - Danube	239 661 376 €	126 353 686 €	52,70%	6 063 498 €	2,50%
Interreg V-B - Adriatic-Ionian	99 460 682 €	45 563 399 €	45,80%	0 €	0,00%
Interreg V-B - South West Europe	141 879 979 €	60 763 646 €	42,80%	7 045 322 €	5,00%
Interreg V-B - North West Europe	648 572 895 €	254 191 999 €	39,20%	20 623 818 €	3,20%
Interreg V-B - Caribbean Area	85 723 873 €	31 855 485 €	37,20%	0 €	0,00%
Interreg V-B - Indian Ocean Area	74 302 827 €	23 711 783 €	31,90%	5 886 493 €	7,90%
Interreg V-B - Amazonia	27 838 098 €	7 812 602 €	28,10%	40 321 €	0,10%
TOTAL	**2 970 472 469 €**	**1 633 211 822 €**	**55,00%**	**133 189 362 €**	**4,50%**

Source: Open Cohesion Data, ESIF 2014-2020 Finance Implementation Details, European Commission. Note that the above figures only include ERDF contribution and the national co-financing attached to it; i.e. they exclude IPA and ENPI funding and the attached national co-financing. Reference date for all data is 31 December 2017; last updated on 29 June 2018.

Table 6. Financial progress of TN programmes – payment rate by 29 June 2018 (EU payments)

Programme name	ESI Fund Budget EUR	Accumulated payments EUR	Initial pre-financing EUR	Annual pre-financing EUR	Interim payment EUR	Payment rate% (All Payments / Budget)	Place	Payment rate% (Interim Payments / Budget)	Ranking
Northern Periphery and Arctic	50 209 899	12 088 813	1 506 297	1 380 772	9 201 744	24,1%	1	18,3%	1
Baltic Sea Region	263 830 658	52 695 939	7 914 920	7 255 343	37 525 676	20,0%	2	14,2%	2
Alpine Space	116 635 466	17 629 638	3 499 064	3 207 475	10 923 099	15,1%	3	9,4%	3
Danube	**202 095 405**	**26 817 047**	**6 062 862**	**5 557 624**	**15 196 561**	**13,3%**	**4**	**7,5%**	**4**
Indian Ocean Area	63 157 387	7 588 139	1 894 722	1 736 828	3 956 589	12,0%	5	6,3%	5
North Sea Region	167 253 971	17 873 321	5 017 619	4 599 484	8 256 218	10,7%	6	4,9%	6
South West Europe	106 810 523	11 342 757	3 204 316	2 937 289	5 201 152	10,6%	7	4,9%	7
Mediterranean	224 322 525	22 744 259	6 729 676	6 168 869	9 845 714	10,1%	8	4,4%	8
North West Europe	396 134 342	35 278 857	11 884 030	10 893 694	12 501 133	8,9%	9	3,2%	9
Central Europe	246 581 112	18 340 680	7 397 433	6 780 981	4 162 266	7,4%	10	1,7%	10
Amazonia	18 899 049	1 200 333	566 971	519 724	113 638	6,4%	11	0,6%	11
Atlantic Area	140 013 194	8 374 725	4 200 396	3 850 363	323 966	6,0%	12	0,2%	12
Adriatic-Ionian	83 467 729	4 799 395	2 504 032	2 295 363	0	5,8%	13	0,0%	13
Balkan-Mediterranean	28 330 108	1 628 981	849 903	779 078	0	5,7%	15	0,0%	13
Caribbean Area	64 292 905	3 696 842	1 928 787	1 768 055	0	5,7%	14	0,0%	13

Source: * Data from the Commission's website: https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/countries/TC; Note: payments are cumulative figures, represent the amount approved by the EC

Table 7. **Financial progress of Interreg programmes with HU involvement - payment rate by 29 June 2018 (EU payments)**

Programme name	ESI Fund Budget EUR	Accumulated payments EUR	Initial pre-financing EUR	Annual pre-financing EUR	Interim payment EUR	Payment rate% (All Payments / Budget)	Place	Payment rate% (Interim Payments / Budget)	Ranking
Danube	202 095 405	26 817 047	6 062 862	5 557 624	15 196 561	13,3%	1	7,5%	1
Slovenia-Hungary	14 795 015	1 504 911	443 850	406 863	654 198	10,2%	2	4,4%	2
Romania-Hungary	189 138 672	11 636 148	5 674 160	5 201 313	760 675	6,2%	3	0,4%	3
Hungary-Croatia	60 824 406	3 497 403	1 824 732	1 672 671	0	5,7%	6	0,0%	4
Austria-Hungary	78 847 800	4 533 753	2 365 436	2 168 317	0	5,8%	4	0,0%	4
Slovakia-Hungary	155 808 987	8 959 017	4 674 270	4 284 747	0	5,8%	5	0,0%	4
Hungary-Serbia (IPA)	65 124 000	0	0	0	0	0,0%	7	0,0%	4

Source: * Data from the Commission's website: https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/countries/TC; Note: payments are cumulative figures, represent the amount approved by the EC

6 Task A. Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme management structures

Short introduction

Task A addresses the overall management system of the programme and is divided into five specific evaluation topics A1 to A5.

6.1 A1. Effectiveness of the co-operation of the programme authorities (Managing Authority/ Joint Secretariat, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority) to fulfil their programme management tasks and their relation with the EC

6.1.1 Evaluation questions A1

This point addresses the interplay of the central administrative bodies in the programme. Each authority has specific functions and responsibilities which are determined by the regulatory requirements and specified in the cooperation programme (CP), in the CP complement and in the description of the management and control system. The designation of functions was already completed and is not subject to the evaluation. The main focus is on the effective workflow and information flow between the programme authorities which is a key element of a successful programme implementation.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How the interactions between the programme bodies are and are their functions and responsibilities clearly established?
- Are the programme management system and related structures set up in an effective and efficient way?
- Have the MA and JS sufficient capacities for fulfilling their tasks?
- How is the hosting body of the MA/JS effectively ensuring the implementation of the related tasks?

6.1.2 Evaluation findings A1

Roles, responsibilities and tasks in brief

Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat established an integrated management structure with separate functions within its organisation. The MA/JS is a department of the former Ministry for National Economy (MNE) and its successor the Ministry of Finance[1] and coordination with the hosting body is required (hereinafter the hosting body will be referred to as MNE). The MA/JS, as the central management hub, works closely together with the Certifying Authority (HST) and supports the Audit Authority (DGAEF) and the Group of Auditors in their activities; and furthermore coordinates and supervises the control systems and control activities.

The Department (MA/JS) is coordinated by the Head of Managing Authority. He is responsible for the overall management of the department and directly co-ordinating the task related to the central function of the Managing Authority.

There are two units established within the MA/JS: Programme Management Unit (PMU) and Financial Management and Administration Unit (FMAU) ensuring the separate but co-ordinated management of the project content and finances. Head of the Secretariat

[1] The legal status is as follows: Act V of 2018 established the Ministry of Finance on 18 May 2018. According to Government Regulation 94/2018 of 22 May 2018, effective on 23 May 2018, the Ministry is established with the renaming of the previous Ministry of National Economy and is the legal successor thereof.

ensures the co-ordination of the daily work of the two units, but at the same time acts as a Head of the PMU. In addition to a content-related project management unit, a separate financial unit coordinated by the Head of FMAU is established.

MA/JS elaborated a joint procedures manual (with around 100 pages) along with further documents and manuals to coordinate the work within MA/JS. Planning of tasks is done through a yearly work plan and further detailed planning for internal use.

Framework conditions offered by the hosting body (Ministry for National Economy) for MA/JS

The partner states designated the Hungarian Ministry for National Economy (MNE) to act as the MA. The Ministry has over 2,000 employees. The MA/JS is a separate unit operating within the organisation of the ministry.

The MA/JS staff is employed according to Hungarian Labour Code. The Head of MA is the only civil servant (due to signing /representing responsibility); he has full employment rights over employees except establishing or terminating labour contracts.

The MNE provides the office infrastructure, free telephone service and back-office services to the MA/JS:

- Public procurement/legal services (all tenders go through the MNE Legal Department. There are 2 to 3 DTP related tenders per year).
- Human Resources, Finance, and IT.

The Ministry has made agreements with the Hungarian State Treasury (operating eMS) and with the National Infocommunications Service (NISZ) which is the IT provider in the public sector in Hungary (equipping MA/JS with IT-infrastructure and computers).

As the practice shows, the Ministry offers the MA/JS an overall good working environment. The merger of MA/JS on a single site in the ministry allows shorter communication ways on a daily basis compared to the previous SEE Programme. In the 2007-2013 programming period, MA was located within the government (National Development Agency Hungary), and JS was in VÁTI Hungarian Nonprofit Limited Liability Company.

Interviewees mentioned some weaknesses of the host environment, such as complex procurement and contracting procedures (resulting from Hungarian law), and paper based governance. Introduction of more electronic based procedures and workflow is to be considered and would be welcome.

Currently, no IT tool is available for the programme bodies to manage the workflow[2]. Interviews indicated that also the IT equipment for MA/JS is mostly not prepared for higher requirements, but the magnitude of this problem is not known by the evaluator.

For reasons of data security imposed by the hosting ministry (as it is the regular case in the public sector), MA/JS employees are restricted in using modern communication tools at their working places for the ongoing communication with clients, such as Skype, or live webinars (going beyond static YouTube webinars). There is a modern video system

[2] eMS is the main limiting factor; the government has an electronic signature system. eMS is a programme monitoring system and not a system which coordinates activities of the programme bodies and the input of resources. IT support for managing the workflow could be implemented within eMS as extra functionality; or in another IT system which is then interfaced with eMS; or with a number of other possible solutions in between these two. The MA/JS is currently considering possible solutions to offer IT support for managing the workflow.

available in the Ministry that can be booked, but, according to interviewees, it is not suitable for daily communication. Possible bottlenecks in IT equipment and the actual need for modern communication tools should be further explored.

Resources, capacitates and management of MA/JS to fulfil the assigned tasks

The Management and Control System in its 12 July 2017 version defines 18 positions in the MA/JS department (see chart 2, p 13).

According to the perception of interviewed stakeholders, the MA/JS is competent with an experienced staff and does a proper job ("goes beyond what is obligatory"). There is very little fluctuation of staff, which indicates a certain level of employee satisfaction.

Bottlenecks in staff capacity - a reinforcement is planned

The DTP MA/JS, however, operates with a smaller staff as compared to other transnational programmes and is faced with capacity problems in several areas through a (single) resignation, a maternity leave and lacking positions to take over intensified programme implementation in the 2nd phase.

The following table demonstrates that, compared to other transnational programmes and considering the complex tasks, DTP has very scarce personal resources.

Table 8. Personnel resources of DTP MA/JS in comparison to other programmes

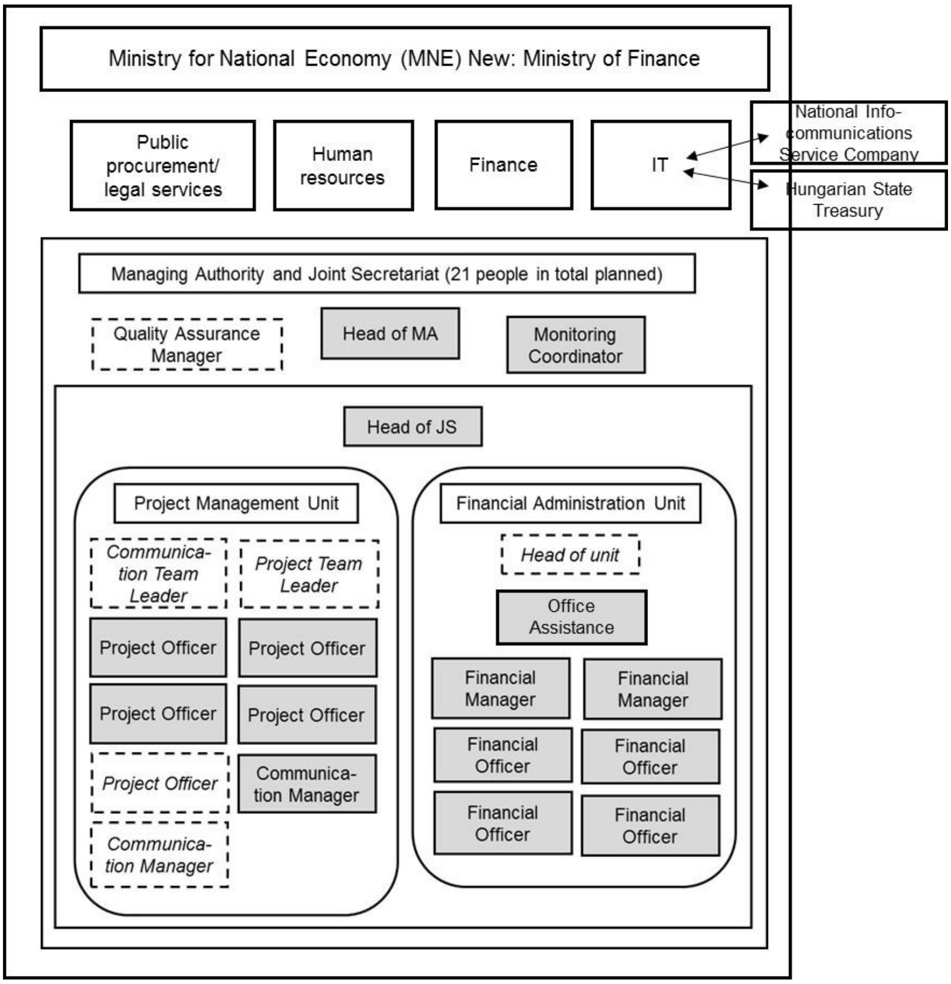
Cooperation programme	Total programme budget	FTE MA & JS	Challenges
DTP (14 countries)	263 Mio EUR (ERDF, IPA, ENI)	18 MA/JS (21 envisaged by end 2018)	Support for the EUSDR Integration of ENI and IPA
Central Europe (9 countries)	299 Mio EUR (ERDF)	22-23 (19-20 JS + 3 MA) (1)	
Alpine Space (7 countries)	140 Mio EUR (ERDF)	15 (10 JS + 5 MA)	
Baltic Sea Region (11 countries)	333 Mio EUR (ERDF, ENI)	31 MA/JS	Support for EUSBSR strategy Integration of ENI
Mediterranean (13 countries)	265 Mio EUR (ERDF, IPA)	22 JS	Integration of IPA
North West Europe (8 countries	370 Mio EUR (ERDF)	21 JS	

Source: CP, interviews; (1) Operational evaluation CENTRAL EUROPE Programme p 16 (29 June 2017); www.alpine-space.eu; www.interreg-baltic.eu, https://interreg-med.eu/, http://www.nweurope.eu/

The analysis of the staff capacity problems which requires thorough background knowledge is part of the management tasks of MA/JS. In this respect, MA/JS reviewed the staff capacities at the end of the 1st phase of the programme implementation (see the document on the assessment and planning of staff capacities as part of Human Resource Plan) and presented a document of the DTP management structure and staffing during the MC in Vienna on the 28-29 November 2017.

It is planned to increase the staff capacity by end 2018 to 21 full time employees through new positions and recruitment of missing positions. In particular, it is planned to enhance coordinating and horizontal roles in the management system besides the increase in capacity. The planned structure is shown in the figure below. The increase in MA/JS staffing capacity must be approved by the MNE as the ministry is the employer. This has not happened yet. The MA / JS currently negotiates a Human Resource Plan with the MNE. Also an updated version of the management and control systems description needs to be prepared and submitted to the AA in 2018.

Figure 2. New organisational chart of MA/JS (with the open positions indicated) in its hosting environment



Source: Metis on basis of information provided by MA/JS on the 2 July 2018

Bottlenecks in capacity building – establishment of a training plan for 2018 and 2019

At present, training and team building for the staff is not fully implemented yet at a regular basis.

As part of the Human Resource Plan, MA/JS plans to establish a knowledge management system in 2018 after adoption of the HR plan. Also measures on internal cohesion, exchange of experience and trainings are planned and should be implemented in 2018. The elimination of staff shortages should create room for the staff to participate in the activities.

To manage the flow of information within MA/JS staff, weekly meetings were introduced one and half year ago. It is envisaged to ease the staff´s participation at the meetings through reduction of the overload with other tasks. Also the planned team leaders will have an important role in further improving the flow of information and coordination.

Fulfilment of tasks by the Certifying Authority (HST) and interplay with MA/JS

There are around 50 employees in the Hungarian State Treasury (CA body); of this, 5 are delegated to DTP (not full time, dealing with other programmes as well). CA is financed partly through DTP TA.

Overall cooperation with MA/JS is good, constructive, and flexible based on long standing working contact also in the former ETC programme.

In previous ETC programmes, CA was only transferring funds between the Commission and the Hungarian Treasury. In the 2014-2020 programming period, CA also makes payments to LPs, which induces more organisational tasks (e.g. reimbursement to LPs, recording data into eMS, statement maintenance).

By the end of 2017, in three packages of Applications for Reimbursements 23 transfers were made by CA to LPs, amounting to 5.8 Million EUR. All of these payments have been transferred in December 2017. Also in December 2017 two payment requests have been submitted to EC: 4.14 Million EUR for ERDF and 0.26 Million EUR for IPA.

The additional function of transferring to LPs may cause capacity problems in the CA in the future. Due to the fact that the eMS is not very supporting to financial management activity, extra human capacity is needed and consequently extra budget from TA is required (the relevant modification of the CA TA budget plan was approved by the MC, contract with MA/JS was signed in February, 2018).

eMS (which is operated in the Treasury itself) is of limited usability for the CA. It is more a project monitoring system and not a financial management system (bank account is not seen, balance in Excel sheet – no up-to-date info for JS). For some tasks CA has to apply excel tables due to missing functions in eMS.

Fulfilment of tasks by the Audit Authority (DGAEF) and interplay with MA/JS

The Audit Authority (AA) is an independent body which assigns also external subcontractors for audits. 3 persons in the AA are partly delegated to DTP. AA is paid partially from DTP TA.

The costs for second level control in DTP are high compared to other core tasks of the programme; the Audit Authority is as costly as the entire TA budget for communication. The AA audits of operations shall be conducted in 14 countries all over the DTP programme area. This contributes to the high costs.

There is a close, stable cooperation between MA/JS and AA over the programming periods. Cooperation between DGAEF and DTP MA/JS is good due to a stable team with high professional competencies, quick reactions, and cooperative attitude (perception of AA and of MA/JS). DGAEF had daily interaction with MA/JS during the designation process.

Designation audit was closed in December 2017. As Moldova and Ukraine have not been designated yet, system audit will be finished by the end of the second quarter in 2018.

The designation process, including IT Security audit took only half a year which is short compared to other programmes because of the simpler integrated structure of MA/JS.

Based on AA's opinion, DTP is well-structured system, one of the best transnational programmes. The designation report appointed only minor statements about missing or not comprehensive information in different documents. According to information received during the interview with the AA, problems identified by the AA during designation were the following: anti-fraud strategy should be extended to partner states; missing training plan for MA/JS, assessment of horizontal principles during selection procedures should be improved[3].

National control system description documents are updated every September; AA is informed about the actual changes.

Project audits on operation by the AA have not been started in DTP yet, this activity is planned to start in the 2. quarter 2018.

To support effectiveness of the first level control (FLC), the Financial Management and Administrative Unit of MA/JS organises meetings/training of the national controllers (held in Budapest for FLC Bodies) with the participation of Audit Authority. This is good practice to discuss typical mistakes, irregularities and to proactively clarify unclear eligibility questions.

Interplay with the Desk Officer of the European Commission

Within the last 3 years the programme experienced 4 different EC Desk Officers with different levels of experience, linked also to the EUSDR.

EC Desk officers have an observer position in the MC.

Despite of the fact that several actors are concerned, EC officers reply quickly and there is a full engagement from EC in supporting the programme.

Interactions with the Desk Officer relate mainly to

- modification of the Cooperation Programme / CP (2017: 1 case)
- planned modification of the CP in 2018: shifting of the budget between programme priorities for the 3. call
- AIR to be delivered yearly

There are technical discrepancies/problems between SFC and eMS - not the same structure, peculiarities of DTP (e.g. ENI) cannot be linked.

[3] The current standard how to treat horizontal principles is set out in the harmonised Implementation Tools for Interreg Programmes – TN Application Form

6.1.3 Conclusions and recommendations A1

Conclusion 1: MA/JS established a functioning integrated management structure and proved to fulfil the assigned tasks.

- In spite of the complexity and challenges of DTP, the management structure demonstrated the capability to fulfil the assigned tasks. 69% of ERDF funds and 76% of IPA funds have been approved by May 2018. The rate of interim payments from the EC of 7.5% by June 2018 is the fourth best among the transnational programmes.
- The integration of MA/JS is functioning well and is less complicated compared to the previous SEE Programme. All units within MA/JS are operational and cooperative. MA/JS and its experienced staff have close and supporting working relation to all programme levels and authorities.
- The hosting body (former Ministry for National Economy Hungary) provides back office services to MA/JS in a cost efficient way.
- The designation process, including IT Security audit took only half a year which is short compared to other Interreg programmes.

Conclusion 2: Bottlenecks in MA/JS staff capacity and lacking capacity building can lead to reduced effectiveness, in particular in the 2nd implementation phase. Appropriate countermeasures to update the management structure and capacity are under implementation.

- In principle, the management system was fully set up and works as stated by conclusion 1, but needs an update. The implementation of the planned staff increase by end of 2018 and the full implementation of the training plan for the years 2018 and 2019 as described in the HR plan will significantly improve the situation. The MC should be kept informed about the achieved progress in line with its tasks defined by Article 49 CPR.
- The workflow is not fully e-government based yet.

Short-term recommendation

- It is necessary to fully implement the planned MA/JS staff increase and first part of the training plan by end 2018.
- MA/JS should commission further analysis of the workload with regards to each position within it, the related HR measures, possible bottlenecks in IT equipment as well as the effectiveness of administrative procedures related to the hosting institution to ensure the effective operation of the MA/JS. In order to guarantee functional independence, this analysis should be performed by external experts independent from the hosting organization as well as from MA/JS. The data requirements for such an analysis will include timesheets, job descriptions and, possibly, reports from a workflow system, if one becomes operational in the meanwhile.
- Needs and benefits to use modern communication tools (e.g. Skype, Webinar software such as WebinarJam) should be further explored to manage the communication with project partners and stakeholders from the partner countries in a cost-efficient way (without physical travelling).

Conclusion 3: The Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority are operational and fulfil their tasks. Overall coordination with MA/JS is good. The CA is restricted by the eMS, which is of limited usability for financial management.

- Recommendations related to eMS are outlined under task C.

6.2 A2. Effectiveness of the Monitoring Committee (role, decisions) in co-operation with the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat and National Contact Points

6.2.1 Evaluation questions A2

This point assesses the provision of information to the MC, discussion culture in the MC, the effectiveness of decision making in relation to all MC-tasks, leadership, and involvement of partner states.

This activity addresses broadly the following evaluation questions:

- Are decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent?
- Is the implementation of the decisions on programme level fast and efficient?

6.2.2 Evaluation findings A2

Roles, responsibilities and tasks in brief

It is the joint responsibility of Danube partner states to govern the programme based on decisions of the Monitoring Committee (MC). The MC steers the cooperation programme and ensures the quality and effectiveness of its implementation (according to MC rules of procedures, §2 Tasks).

The MC is a **strategic body** whereas the MA is the operationally responsible body of the programme (according to the Interreg Programme Management Handbook provided by Interact).

It is composed according to the rules of procedure adopted in 2015 and consists of representatives of the partner states (up to three members from national and regional level), the MA/JS in an advisory/supportive function, the European Commission, Audit Authority, Certifying Authority and representatives of transnational, intergovernmental and/or non-governmental organisations in an advisory role, and as observers national contact points, and representatives of the EUSDR. The members have different mandates within the MC. Members with advisory role or observers have no right to vote. In total, the MC includes 38 full and 30 substitute members (according to the contact list).

The MA/JS supports the Monitoring Committee and provides it with the information it requires to carry out its tasks (the tasks of MA/JS in relation to the MC are described in the CP complement). The supporting MA/JS staff is stable and has long professional experience and competency from the previous transnational SEE programme. The MA/JS produced pilot internal newsletters to the MC in the beginning of the programming period (2-3 newsletters so far) when the frequency of MC meetings was not so high. It is temporarily stopped and demand driven. Since 2016, MC meetings are organized 2-3x/year.

The extensive tasks of the MC were specified in the rules of procedure. The MC in particular:

- Examines any issue that affects the programme´s performance and supports the MA in solving any significant problem encountered and with regard to modifications of the cooperation programme;
- Reviews the progress towards the targets and milestones defined in the performance framework;
- Establishes eligibility rules at programme level;
- Approves all technical assistance activities;
- Approves the evaluation plan and evaluation findings;
- Approves the communication strategy and examines its implementation;
- Examines and approves the methodology for project selection;
- Decides on the launch of calls;
- Selects and approves application, and deals with complaints;
- Approves major changes in the approved operations and may ask the MA to terminate subsidy contracts;
- Adopts all relevant programme manuals, documents, and reports to the EC;
- Examines actions taken by the programme to promote the horizontal principles.

Quantity and quality of MC meetings

So far, between 2015 and June 2018 seven MC meetings have been held. The next MC meeting is planned for July 2018.

- 2015: 1 MC Meeting
- 2016: 3 MC Meetings
- 2017: 2 MC Meetings
- 2018: 1 MC meeting so far (3 meetings are planned in total)

Room for improvement in the implementation of MC meetings

According to the online survey (14 respondents to this question), the implementation of MC meetings was rated average only. 71% of survey participants agree that the MC meetings are well structured to allow an adequate treatment of the topics to be discussed. However, 4 participants (29%) do not agree. A weighted average of 2.93 (from 1 to 4 with 4 being best) indicates that there is room for improvement.

The agenda is decided together with the Chair, and MC members have the possibility to add agenda points. Whenever requested (according to the MA/JS, very few times), additional agenda points are included. Typically, during one meeting around ten agenda points are discussed. An overview of the agenda points related to the programme and the project level is provided in the annex.

The agenda is often packed with too many items (up to 13 agenda points for 1.5 days). As a consequence, important topics cannot be discussed in details or due to lack of time, the last agenda points cannot be presented anymore (this was the case in the 7th MC meeting, where item 11 on communication had to be dropped). A reduction of agenda points, a strict time management or a more structured agenda could be an improvement. The MC would appreciate clearer steering of the MC meeting. In general, points where decision is needed should not be the last point on agenda (due to lack of time, complicated travelling arrangements of some members etc.).

Lack of strategic discussion

The biggest point of criticism is the lack of discussions concerning strategic goals of the DTP. Half of the MC members think that there is not enough time to discuss a strategic topic. A weighted average of 2.36 only (from 1 to 4 with 4 being best) clearly shows the need for some changes.

MC members recommend to dedicate more time on the agenda for strategic topics and to create more “workshop atmosphere”. Of course, a shift of focus towards more strategic discussions requires imposing certain limits on discussions of the details of programme implementation or on very technical issues (like IT equipment, technical issues on the monitoring systems etc.), which should be left in the hands of the MA/JS. The MC should focus on few relevant strategic issues (such as reaching a common understanding regarding the role of the DSP etc.), instead of spending a long time on (technical) details.

Decision making complicated

Discussion making can be very difficult, as the MC is numerous and complex. Naturally, 14 partner states often have many different views on various topics. In a MC meeting with a high number of participants (up to 3 participants per country), keeping the goal of the discussion clearly in the focus, instead of getting lost in details, is challenging.

When no decision is made at the meeting, it is then made in circulation. For most of the MC members, the division between decision making during the MC meetings and decision making by written procedure is adequate (only 2 persons disagree). A weighted average of 3.17 is satisfactory.

Nevertheless, in the online survey and the pilot interviews, some MC members stated suggestions for improvement. According to them, some debates could be better prepared. It is sometimes difficult to follow explanations and to keep track of the presented facts for the following discussion. A suggestion for improvement is to provide the MC members with handouts. Another suggestion for improvement is to have some discussions in ad-hoc working groups performed in a smaller setting, which would allow the MC to make smooth and fast decisions. However, these are single opinions, which are not necessarily shared by the majority of MC members.

Minutes well prepared

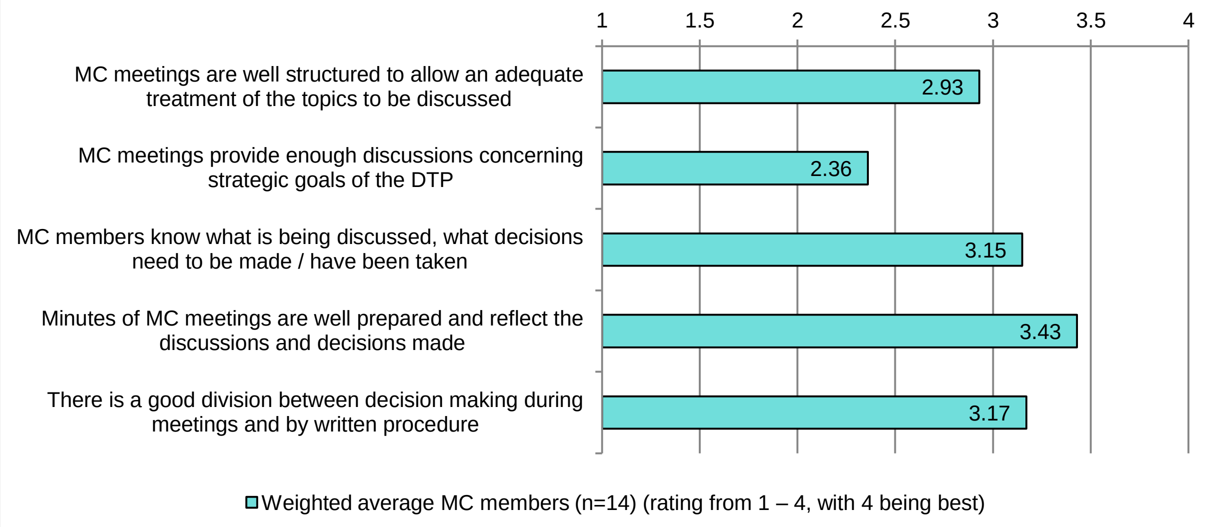
On the first MC meeting, participants discussed and agreed on the format of the minutes. Later requests to change (made by single countries) have not been accepted by the MC.

The minutes include the course of the debates and highlight the decisions that have been made. The number of pages increased over time (between 6 and 19 pages).

Most of the MC members (93% of survey participants) agree that the minutes are well prepared and reflect the flow of the discussions and decisions made. A weighted average of 3.43 is a very good result.

The graph below summarises the results from the online survey concerning the implementation of MC meetings (weighted averages from 1 to 4 with 4 being best, 14 participants)

Figure 3. survey results MC meetings



Source: online survey (n=14)

Cooperation between MC and MA/JS

In general, 85% of the responding MC members are satisfied with the cooperation between MC and MA/JS (see table below).

Table 9. Survey result MC cooperation satisfaction

	Very satisfied (4)	Satisfied (3)	Dis-satisfied (2)	Very dis-satisfied (1)	No opinion	Ø (1-4)
In general, how satisfied are you with the cooperation between the MC and the MA/JS (e.g. mutual trust and confidential cooperation, quick responses to emails etc.)?	14%	71%	7%	0%	7%	3,08

Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=14)

Cooperation good, but space for improvement

Most of the MC members see the communication with MA/JS as informative, cooperative and effective. The frequency of communication depends on the necessity; MC members can get documents, guidance and answers very quickly from MA/JS, who puts strong efforts into providing extensive information.

However, it has to be mentioned – while most of the MC members are satisfied - that a few MC members strongly criticise the cooperation between MC and MA/JS. According to them, there is not sufficient transparency or trustful cooperation between MC and MA/JS. Lessons-learned or improvements are hardly visible.

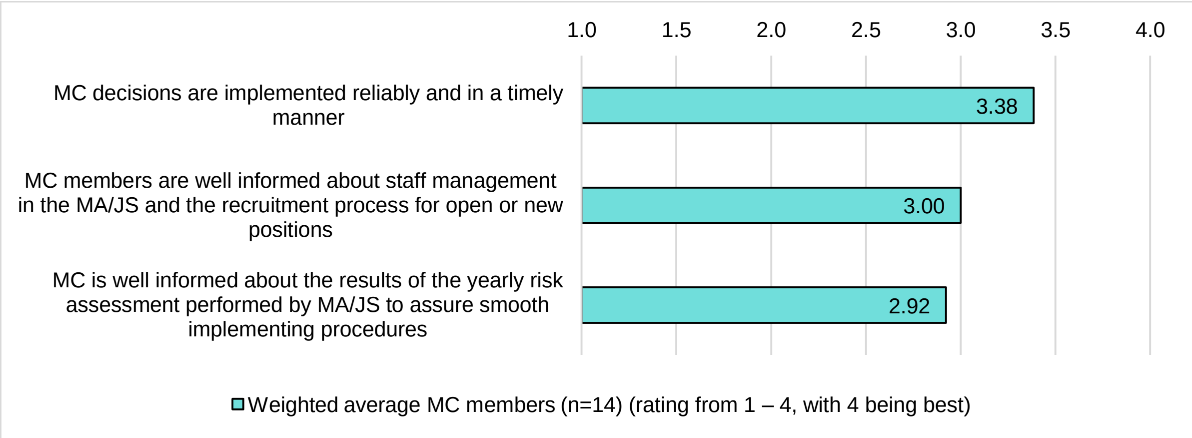
The figure below shows the results from the online survey in regard to the cooperation (weighted averages from 1 to 4 with 4 being best) and confirms, that cooperation along their main function is working well.

The MC members agree that decisions are implemented reliably and in a timely manner.

Even though usually staff recruitment is the responsibility of the MA/JS, in the DTP interested MC members are part of the recruitment committee. As shown in the minutes, the topic is discussed regularly at the MC meetings. In the online survey, the majority of MC members confirm that they are well informed about staff management in the MA/JS and the recruitment process for open or new positions.

A little less consent can be identified concerning the results of the yearly risk assessment performed by MA/JS to assure smooth implementing procedures. 64% of MC members agree that they are well informed about the results, but 36% either disagree or have no opinion on that topic. A weighted average of 2.92 indicates that there is room for improvement.

Figure 4. survey results cooperation between MC and MA/JS



Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=14)

Steering and management of programme implementation

Annual work plan: good information basis

A yearly work plan has been introduced to inform the MC on the programme activities and related TA costs (e.g. work plan with 16 pages in 2017). According to the online survey, MC members agree that the planned activities to implement the cooperation programme (CP) are clearly outlined in the annual work plan. Also the progress in the CP-implementation is clearly presented in the annual work plan implementation report.

The manual for the management of Technical Assistance (with around 50 pages) describes the TA management system and the use of the TA resources in the Programme. According to most of the MC members, the planned expenditures for Technical Assistance projects are clearly explained in the TA budget and the progress in spending the TA budget is clearly presented to the MC.

Beyond that: rather weak information, overload with technical documents

The online survey identified some weak points concerning the information on the programme implementation. According to the perception of respondents, there is a lack of clear and user-friendly information on:

- fulfilment of the n+3 rule and of the performance framework targets

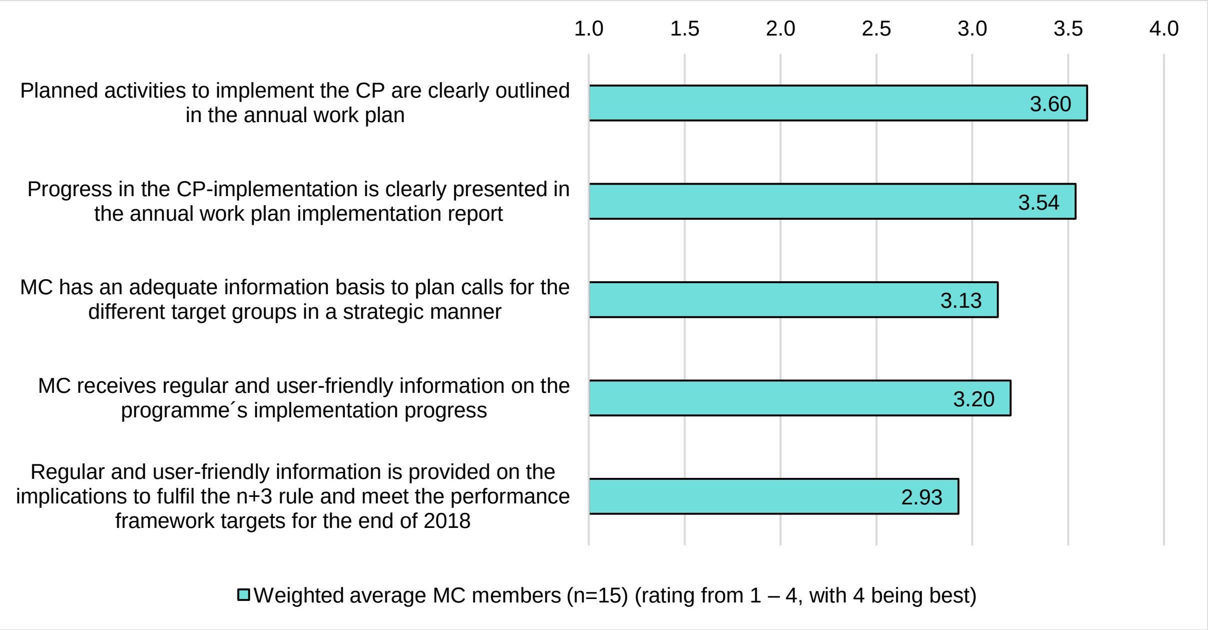
- payment forecast and on the programme's cash flow and financial liquidity
- the progress in developing the electronic information system (responsibility of the MA/JS)
- the functioning of the national control systems (this is partly done but it is a challenge because the MA/JS has to collect national level information which is not always available)

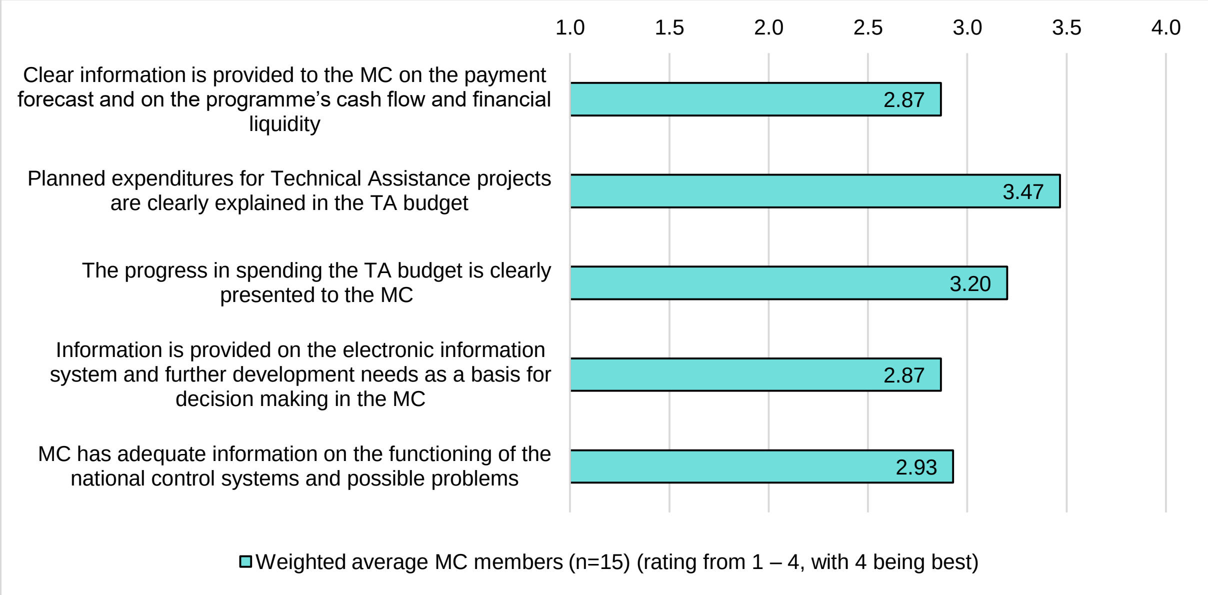
Even though most of these topics are regularly reported (including those which are the sole responsibility of the MA such as the eMS), the MC members seem to be not satisfied with the form of presentation. According to some MC members, the MC is overburdened by documents provided by the MA/JS. They do receive plenty of information, however, the documents are too long and filled with too many technical details (e.g. in connection with technical requirements of the audit strategy). Information provided lacks user-friendliness.

The minutes confirm that the topics have been presented in the meetings, but the form of information provided seems to be an ongoing open issue (e.g. 4th MC meeting, discussion on programme management). While few members are asking for more detailed information, other members are asking for more structured and clear information (to avoid including technicalities which are not important). The issue seems to be much rather that the MA/JS provides *too much* information than that it provides *too little*; or, in some cases, it provides information which is different from what some MC members would like to see, or not in a presentation which is useful for them.

The figure below shows the results from the online survey concerning the steering and management of programme implementation (weighted averages from 1 to 4 with 4 being best).

Figure 5. Survey results steering and management of programme implementation





Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=15)

Project selection

In the online survey, the set of questions concerning project selection shows good results. No critical points could be identified.

Good information for MC members

MA/JS provides extensive information on the assessment of applications to the MC. The assessment package to the MC consists of a ranking list, factsheet on the projects (only 2nd round) and an assessment report. Participants in the online survey agree that sufficient and user-friendly information on the assessment of the applications and the resulting ranking list is provided in a timely manner before the decision in the MC. Also the procedure to agree on the methodology for project selection (assessment procedure, criteria for eligibility check and quality assessment of applications) is seen as adequate.

Good preparation by the national committees in most cases

Most of the MC members participating in the online survey confirmed that the national committee in each Partner State discusses the assessment of the applications and the resulting ranking list thoroughly ahead of the MC meeting in order to have a good basis for the decision-making in the MC. However, there is one known exception: according to one comment, the assessment results are frequently not discussed within the national committee.

Discussions of applications good but space for improvement

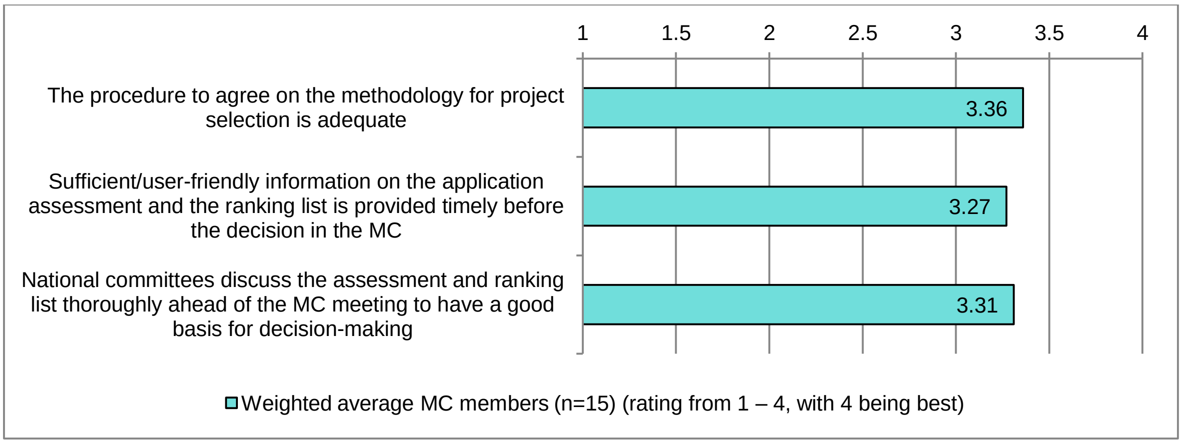
80% of the participants stated to have sufficient opportunity to express their opinion on the assessment of the applications. However, 20% do not agree and suggest that the content of the applications should be discussed more (this is one persons' comment which does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the majority). The weighted average of 3.13 is lowest in this question block but still satisfactory.

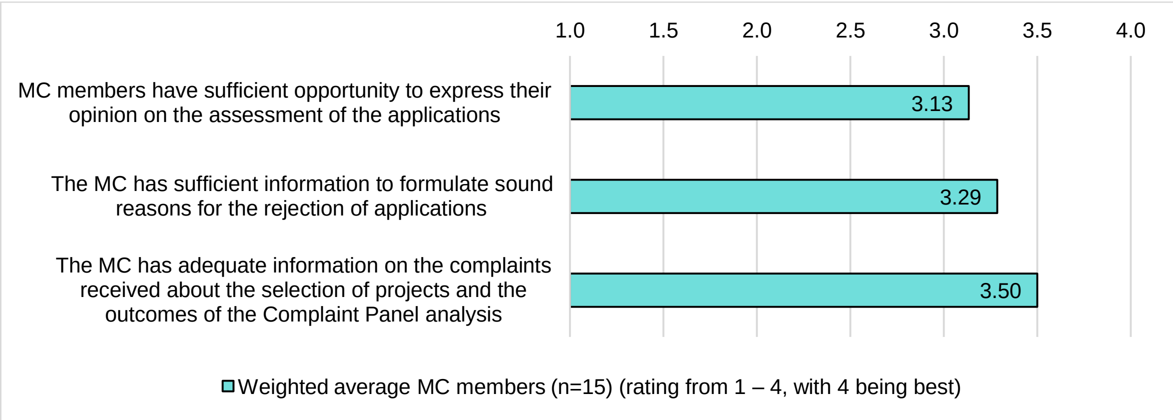
A similar picture can be seen in regard to information to formulate sound reasons for the rejection of applications. Most but not all of the MC members think that they have sufficient information. This demonstrates a discrepancy between the fact that extensive documents were provided by MA/JS to the MC and the perception of insufficient (user-friendly?) information.

Adequate information on complaints

The MC has adequate information on the complaints received about the selection of projects and the outcomes of the Complaint Panel analysis. A weighted average of 3.5 is good.

Figure 6. Survey results selection of applications





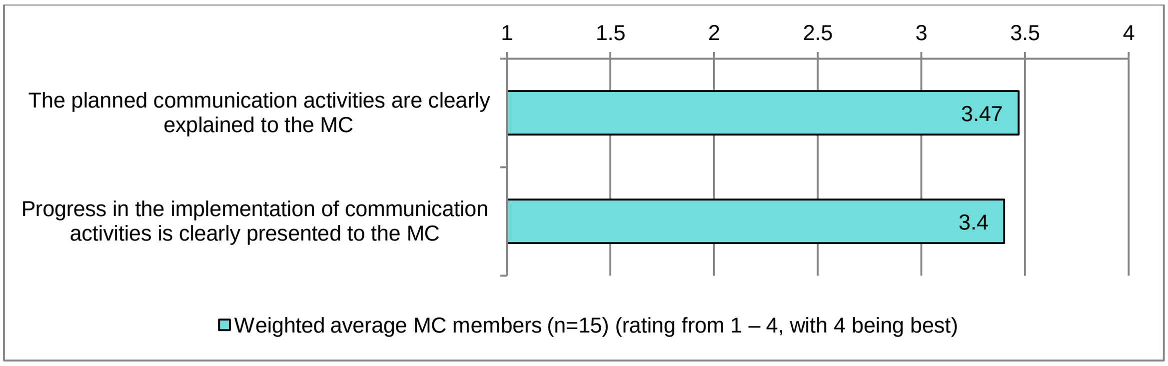
Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=15)

Planning and implementation of programme communication

Also about the programme communication, the online survey shows a positive picture. The MC members confirm that the planned activities as well as the progress in the implementation of communication activities are clearly presented to the MC (see figure below).

A more detailed analysis of the implementation of the communication strategy is presented in Task D.

Figure 7. Survey results information on programme communication



Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=15)

Planning and implementation of programme evaluation

Contrary to the selection of applications and the programme communication, the survey result concerning the programme evaluation is less positive.

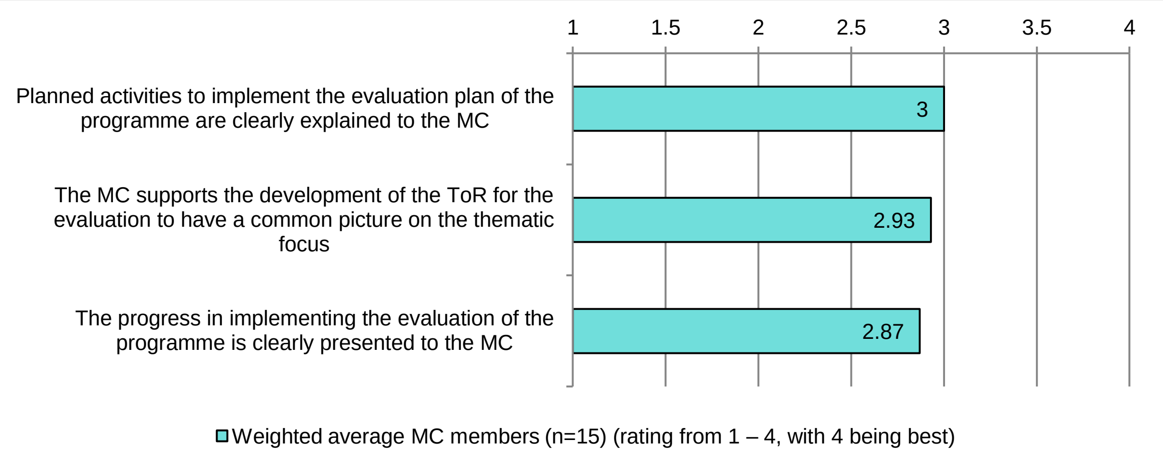
The MC members do not clearly agree that the planned activities to implement the evaluation plan of the programme were clearly explained to the MC.

Even though the Terms of Reference were commented and approved by the MC, there is also not very strong agreement that the MC supports the development of the ToR for the programme evaluation to have a common picture on the thematic focus of the evaluation. A weighted average of 2.93 indicates that improvements could be done in the way the MC is involved in the development of ToR.

Space for improvement is furthermore in the presentation of the progress in implementing the evaluation. A weighted average of 2.87 is not very good. According to a comment, the evaluation should have more time devoted and not be pressed into the MC like another standard topic.

According to other comments (2x), some MC members would appreciate a dedicated working group/task force for the evaluation. Separate, very dedicated meetings/workshops would allow more in-depth discussion to discuss thoroughly and interpret the findings and recommendations.

Figure 8. Survey results information on programme evaluation



Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=15)

Interrelation with EUSDR

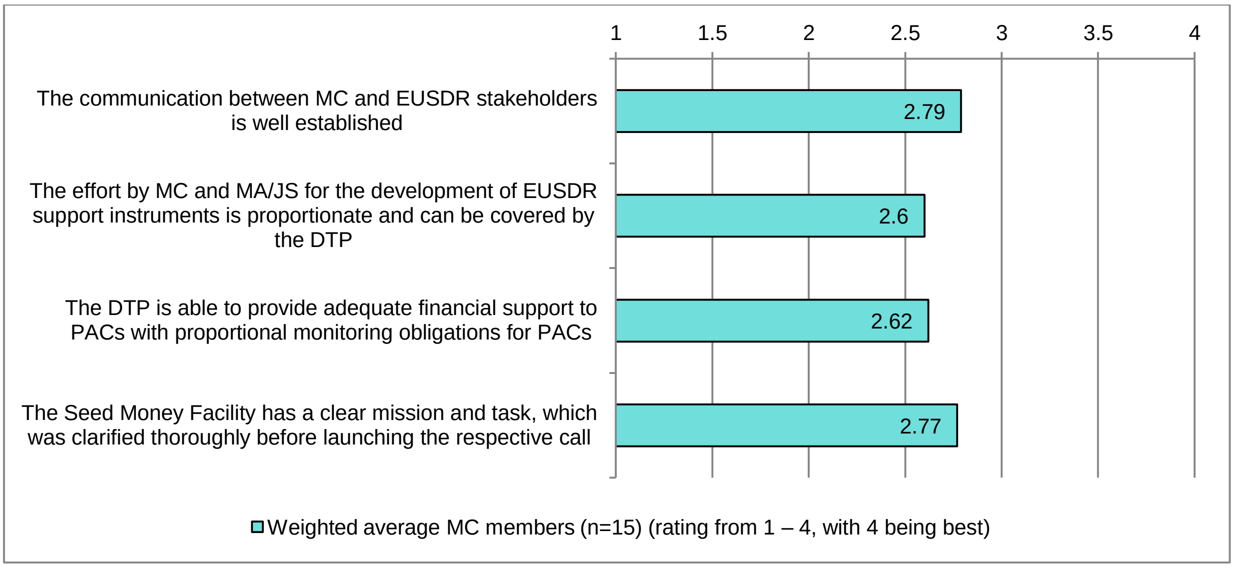
The MC members (those 15 who answered this block of questions) also did not grade the support to the macro regional strategy (EUSDR) very positively. The weighted averages between 2.6 and 2.8 out of 4 (from 1 to 4 with 4 being best) clearly shows that there are some open issues in regard to the interrelation with EUSDR (see figure below).

Only 60% of MC members agree that communication between the MC and EUSDR stakeholders is well established.

The MC members doubt that the effort by MC and MA/JS for the development of EUSDR support instruments is proportionate and can be covered by the DTP. Furthermore, only about half of the MC members think that the DTP is able to provide adequate financial support to PACs with proportional monitoring obligations for PACs.

MC members also do not clearly agree that the Seed Money Facility has a clear mission and task. This could be clarified more thoroughly before launching the respective call. In the CP there is only a very general description of the task of the SMF which needs to be further developed.

Figure 9. Survey results support to the EUSDR



Source: Online-survey on MC members (n=15)

According to some comments (4x), the DTP is supporting the EUSDR in a disproportionate way. The interaction sometimes generates long debates and decision-making procedure. The strategy and the programme benefit of each other, however, supporting the EUSDR can be a heavy workload, and, according to some MC members, the programme is not the right tool to do this. EUSDR support should be organized differently - and not as a project. Even though the DTP (especially the MA/JS but also the MC) puts a high effort to support the EUSDR in very different and innovative formats, the EUSDR deserves and needs a dedicated secretariat and TA budget outside of any programme.

According to other comments (2x), talking now about next call before finishing the Seed Money Call creates doubts about what will happen to SMF projects. The SMF was not launched at the right time. The development took long and now it is too late for 2014+ and too early for 2021+.

6.2.3 Conclusions and recommendations A2

Conclusion 1: Despite its complex composition, the MC has proven its ability to work and to fulfil its functions. The MC, however, underutilizes its function as a strategic body and devotes too much time on operational aspects programme implementation, which should be left in the hands of the MA/JS.

- Between 2015 and June 2018, the MC implemented 7 meetings. During one meeting, around ten agenda points related to the programme and project level are discussed. The agenda is often packed with up to 13 agenda points for a 1.5 days meeting.
- The biggest point of criticism is the lack of discussions concerning strategic goals of the DTP. Half of the MC members think that there is not enough time to discuss a strategic topic. MC members recommend to dedicate more time on the agenda for strategic topics.

- The MC deals in detail with technical issues (like IT equipment, technical issues on the monitoring systems etc.) which is time consuming and should be left in the hands of the MA/JS.

Short-term recommendation

- The division of work between MC and MA/JS needs to be modified. A shift of focus towards more strategic discussions requires imposing certain limits on discussions of the details of programme implementation. The tasks of MA/JS compared to the MC tasks should be better clarified in the rules of procedure of the MC. For this, the MA should elaborate a proposal how to amend this guiding document.

Conclusion 2: The majority of the MC members are satisfied with the support by MA/JS, which acts as the secretariat of the MC. Some members, however, state a lack of sound information policy in various fields.

- In general, 85% of the responding MC members are satisfied with the cooperation between MC and MA/JS. Most of the MC members see the communication with MA/JS as informative, cooperative and effective. MC members can get documents, guidance and answers quickly from MA/JS, who puts strong efforts into providing extensive information. The annual work plan and the annual work plan implementation report are a good information basis for the MC.
- While most of the MC members are satisfied, a few MC members strongly criticise the cooperation between MC and MA/JS. According to them, there is not sufficient transparency or trustful cooperation between MC and MA/JS.

Short-term recommendation

- Develop a bundle of measures to improve MC meeting organisation, information policy and the delivery of information such as:
  - MC chair and co-Chair should develop solutions how to better prepare debates and how to create more “workshop atmosphere” when tackling complex issues.
  - Provision of concise and user-friendly information by MA/JS to better address information needs of MC members (e.g. by means of brief summary documents with infographics instead of very text-heavy documents). The increase in MA/JS staff is the pre-condition to push internal communication to the MC to a higher level. Another pre-condition is the improvement of the reporting function in the DTP eMS which is addressed in Task C.
  - Fostering the cooperation spirit with critical MC members through confidence-building measures (e.g. inviting MC members to take part at internal MA/JS workshops with relevant actors and stakeholders).
  - Organize an internal training with MA/JS staff on how to improve the delivery of information to the MC.

6.3 A3. Effectiveness of the operation of the network of the National Contact Points (incl. IPA/ENI)

6.3.1 Evaluation questions A3

This point assesses if the NCPs provide adequate support to the programme and have adequate resources to fulfil their main functions.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Are the programme management related structures set up in an effective and efficient way?

6.3.2 Evaluation findings A3

Roles, responsibilities and tasks in brief

National Contact Points represent, promote and support the DTP in the participating countries by involving stakeholders from the national level and providing information and advice to potential project partners. Their four main tasks (and sub-tasks) are described in the CP complement:

- provide information to potential DTP-applicants
- provide advice and assistance to project partners
- support programme management (e.g. eligibility checks)
- provide information on achievements of the programme

The network of NCPs complements the activities of the MA/JS, and may initiate and carry out other specific transnational activities.

MA/JS supports and co-ordinates the National Contact Points in their activities.

Resources, capacities and activities of NCPs to fulfil the assigned tasks

The NCPs in 14 Partner Countries have a budget from TA of around 2.8 million EUR (without Ukraine and Moldova) and are equipped with around 16 FTE.

At present, all partner states - except Ukraine - have implemented NCP activities in relation to their available resources. In total 70 Info days & other events were implemented in the period 2015 to 2017 reaching around 5,300 participants (not all NCPs provided data).

NCPs implement more events than just national info days, e.g. FLC training for project partners, lead applicant workshops. Also communication tasks are taken over by sending out newsletters and providing information via websites.

All NCPs (except Ukraine) can disseminate information via websites. However, only 5 NCPs (36%) create a newsletter to proactively disseminate up to date information to a select group of addressees (no information on this was provided by RO).

NCPs are involved in the organisation of national committees with the involvement of representatives of regions and selected ministries. National committees are planned ahead of the MC meeting.

There are many ways for NCPs to stay in touch with the programme: NCP meeting with MA / JS (1-2 per year), participation in the controller working group (1 - 2 times per year), participation in Lead Applicant and Lead Partner Seminars (around 1-2 per year), participation in the MC as observer (2 - 3 times per year).

No set of performance indicators for NCPs activities was defined. MA/JS is not involved in the evaluation of NCPs' performance, as this is a task of the national government level. So, MA/JS relies on the NCPs and has little room to influence their performance.

There is no correlation between NCP budget with the number of applicants/partners; e.g. Slovenia provides very low budget for NCP but has numerous cooperation partners in the DTP (see table below).

Table 10. NCP resources and activities at the national level 2015 -2017

NCP	Total budget from TA and Staff (FTE)	No of Info days & events 2015-2017	No of participants 2015-2017 at Info Days and events	Website and Social media	No of newsletters 2015-2017 / contacts	No of project partners selected by end 2017
NCP Austria	108,381.00 (nationally financed) 0.5 FTE for DTP	2+2	292	http://www.oerok.gv.at/eu-kooperationen/etz-transnational-netzwerke/danube-transnational-2014-2020.html	12 ETZnews; 15 ÖROK newsletter 1,200 contacts for all ETC-programmes	83 PP
NCP Bulgaria	173,786.00 5 FTE for DTP	2+1	346	http://www.mrrb.government.bg/static/media/ups/articles/attachments/-e5a49e02c42ad3013f89f3e7a2833820.pdf		60 PP
NCP Croatia	45,728.00 0.5 FTE for DTP	2+2	508	https://razvoj.gov.hr https://strukturnifostruk.hr/ https://www.facebook.com/EuropskaTeritorijalnaSuradnja		60 PP
NCP Czech Republic	109,925.00 0.5 FTE for DTP	2+2	260	www.dotaceEU.cz Twitter @Interreg_CZ		33 PP
NCP Germany	422,700.00 1 FTE for DTP	3+3	200	Website Bavaria Baden-Württemberg	7 newsletters 1,000 contacts for all ETC programms (BW and BY)	41 PP
NCP Hungary	248,521.00 0,4 FTE for DTP	2	300	interreghttp://regionalispolitika.kormany.hu/transznacionalis-programok	9 newsletters (3x/year); 600+ addressee	103 PP
NCP Romania	754,163.00	8+4	600	MRDPAEF website	No information provided	92 PP

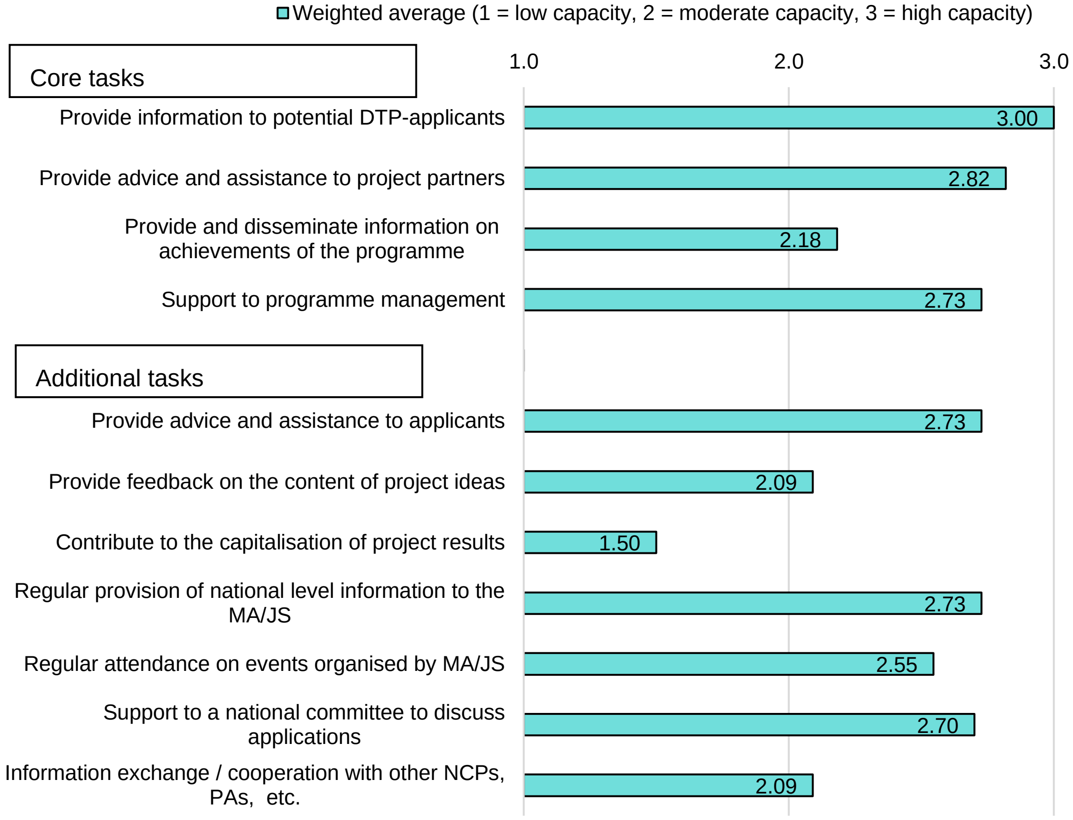
NCP	Total budget from TA and Staff (FTE)	No of Info days & events 2015-2017	No of participants 2015-2017 at Info Days and events	Website and Social media	No of newsletters 2015-2017 / contacts	No of project partners selected by end 2017
	3 FTE for DTP					
NCP Slovakia	133,849.00 1 FTE for DTP	6+3	600	www.danube.vlada.gov.sk	2 newsletters 350 contacts	55 PP
NCP Slovenia	23,901.00 0.5 FTE for DTP	2+5	1,458	www.eu-skladi.si	36 Newsletters "Kohezijski kotiček" 28 Newsflashes "e-Novice" 1,200 subscribers related to all TNP	68 PP
NCP Bosnia & Herzegovina	255,484.71	2		DEI's web-site		25 PP
NCP Montenegro	116,777.65	4+2	200	http://www.eu.me Twitter@ME4EUEU4ME https://www.facebook.com/me4eu.eu4me/		8 PP
NCP Serbia	402,122.36 1 FTE for DTP	2+5	500	www.mei.gov.rs www.evropa.gov.rr Twitter @MINEIsrb https://www.facebook.com/MinistarstvoEvropskeIntegracije		65 PP
NCP Ukraine	3 volunteers					0 PP
NCP Moldova		0+2		www.danube.md		0 PP
Total	2.8 million EUR 13.4 FTE + volunteers	37+33 (70)	5,264			

Source. Survey by Metis

Capacity of NCPs – findings of the survey

The survey on NCPs has shown that the capacity (qualified staff resources) to fulfil the tasks varies between the different tasks as well as between the countries. Furthermore, the workload is uneven with peaks before the submission deadlines of the different calls and during legal eligibility checks of project partners. The following graph shows the capacities per task (core tasks and additional tasks) as stated by the NCPs in the survey.

Figure 10. Capacity (qualified staff resources) to fulfil the NCP tasks



Source: Survey on NCPs (n=11)

In general (if the peaks of the different programmes do not overlap with each other), the workload of the NCPs core tasks is presently manageable. The NCPs agree that they have high capacity to provide information to potential DTP-applicants. Capacities to provide advice and assistance to project partners (LP and PP of approved projects) and to support the programme management (e.g. eligibility checks) are also seen as sufficient.

Anyway, due to strict deadlines in the process and the large number of applicants, less urgent, additional and specific tasks, like disseminating project results, are often postponed.

The major bottleneck of NCP resources is the contribution to the capitalisation of project results. For the NCPs it is often difficult to keep track of project results. NCPs do not have access to progress reports, etc. Not all project partners keep NCPs regularly informed about their work and it is often hard to grasp the essential information from project newsletters.

The resources to provide national level information to the MA/JS are regarded as adequate. If it is not done on a regular basis, then at least case-related.

Also the capacities to support national committees to discuss applications and the quality assessment / ranking list ahead of a MC meeting are sufficient.

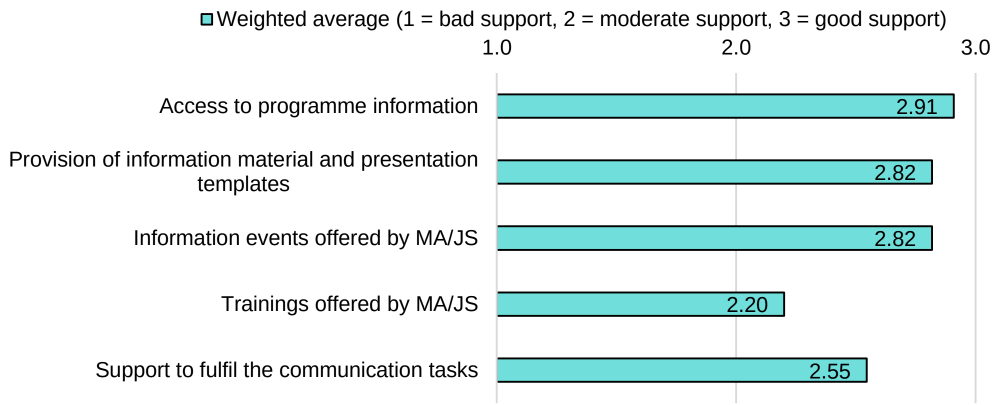
The events organised by MA/JS are an important source of information (about projects, rules & their interpretations, problems on programme/project/national level, etc.) and a possibility to connect with project partners and programme stakeholders (JS, NCP). Therefore, most of the NCPs try to regularly attend these events.

The result of the survey shows that information exchange and cooperation with other actors (NCPs, PAs etc.) could be improved. There is no existing network of NCPs, which makes e.g. partner search rather difficult. With regard to the PAs of the EUSDR, there are only limited contacts, often only effective connections to the national EUSDR stakeholder exist. There is also only limited contact to other programmes. This seems to be crucial also in the light of the capitalisation of project results and therefore could be better fostered and steered by the MA/JS.

Support provided by the MA/JS to NCPs

To fulfil their tasks, the NCPs get support by the MA/JS. This support is regarded as fairly well. The following graph depicts the NCPs assessment in regard to the support by the MA/JS to different tasks.

Figure 11. Support by the MA/JS to fulfil the tasks



Source: Survey on NCPs (n=11)

In general, the MA/JS is very supportive in providing programme information or presentation templates when needed. However, some NCPs have suggestions for improvement. According to their comments, it would be highly welcomed if the NCP could receive more access to the information of eMS or more information of ongoing important discussions.

During several NCP meetings, information and trainings on different topics (e.g. rules of the programme, explanations on each SO, information on calls etc.) were offered. However, in regard to trainings offered by the MA/JS, there is room for improvement and NCPs would appreciate more trainings. The first dedicated NCP training on communication is planned for July 2018, which is appreciated by the NCPs, as they seem to have only limited qualification in this subject and so far there was no communication training implemented. Some other specific trainings suggested by the NCPs are e.g. an eMS training, a capitalisation training or a training for NCPs on how to be better prepared to assist potential PP/LP within the call (as applicants have frequently problem to fit project idea in the most corresponding specific objective).

Contribution to eligibility checks

NCPs support the MA/JS and (pre)check the eligibility on single partners at national level (e.g. legal documents, bankruptcy, etc.) – based on checklist provided by MA/JS.

In DTP all applications/all partners are checked, in some other transnational programmes only those selected for financing are checked.

The eligibility check is demanding for the NCPs in MS with many applicants. The legal status of applicants must be clarified. There are requests to applicants to send in additional documents. NCP in this respect supports, but cannot take over the full responsibility for the eligibility check. This is a core MA/JS task (according to the management and control system), however, checking the legal status in 14 different countries in local language is a demanding (if not impossible) task for the MA/JS and close cooperation with the MS is required.

Changing activity pattern

The focus of the present NCP activity is on the project generation and project preparation phase (campaign based activity). The first granted projects have been implemented for more or less 1 year; the project results will come in the future and the focus of the NCP activity will be shifted to capitalisation as well.

It would be very effective if NCP could present how DTP supports their country (e.g. for this reason Hungarian hosting Ministry requested data from MA/JS).

It is predictable that additional NCP work capacity is needed for capitalisation and disseminating project results. Since MA/JS is not responsible for the provision of adequate NCP resources, it can only provide conceptual support to NCPs for the dissemination activities (see the chapter on communication).

Access to programme information

DTP has no specific tool for sharing documents. The NCPs receive documents via email and they have access to all documents through the website, which is frequently updated.

According to an interview with an experienced NCP (which is an interesting case for evaluators), in the SEE programme period, NCPs had much better access to data through IMIS. Currently, the NCP only has access to the application forms (but not to progress reports, partner reports, first year reviews, final reports, project changes / status). The Central Europe programme has much better access to data for NCPs because a separate interface has been programmed (Central uses eMS and has his own IT officer who can make adaptations). According this interviewee, the Alpine Space programme has a very good document sharing system, which should serve as a model. DTP also has currently no adequate reporting tools to extract data and present it clearly, while Central and Interreg Europe have very good reporting tools. The improvement of the reporting function in the DTP eMS is addresses in Task C.

6.3.3 Conclusions and recommendations A3

Conclusion 1: Almost all NCPs contribute to the programme implementation within the given framework conditions with good support provided by MA/JS. Weak points are the access of NCPs to project data, lacking NCP capacities to disseminate project results and poor exchange activities within the NCP bodies and with EUSDR actors and other Interreg programmes.

- At present, all partner states - except Ukraine - have implemented NCP activities in relation to their available resources.
- The NCPs have sufficient capacities to fulfil the core tasks (with the exception of disseminating information on achievements of the programme).
- MA/JS provide adequate support to NCPs. NCPs find information materials, presentation templates provided by MA/JS as very useful. However, NCPs have currently only limited access to project data.
- There is a lack of NCP work capacity for capitalisation and dissemination of project results. Only 5 NCPs disseminate newsletters.
- Networking activities within NCPs and with PAs of the EUSDR and with other transnational programmes seem to be a weak point.

Short-term recommendation

- The NCPs access to DTP project data needs improvement, possibly through the improvement of eMS reporting capabilities to provide data and statistics specific to a partner state
- Recommendations on dissemination and capitalisation are part of task D.
- The DTP programme should find ways to support networking between within NCPs and with other stakeholders.
- MA/JS should consider to put more efforts on this issue (also considering the potential increase of staff in the near future) and coordinate more strongly and directly the work of the NPCs. This would enhance the effectiveness of the NPCs work as a whole substantially.

6.4 A4. Effectiveness of the operation of the national first level control systems (including IPA/ENI)

6.4.1 Evaluation questions A4

This point assesses if the controllers have adequate qualifications and resources to fulfil their main functions in a timely manner (administrative verifications of each application for reimbursement by beneficiaries and on-the-spot verifications of individual operations proportionate to the risk level).

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the FLC system efficient in terms of human capacity compared to the number of beneficiaries and allows the validation of expenditures in time, considering the possibility to always ask further completion/clarifications from the beneficiaries?

6.4.2 Evaluation findings A4

Roles, responsibilities and tasks in brief

It is the individual responsibility of the partner states to set up first level control (FLC). Controllers are designated by each Partner State to ensure compliance of expenditure incurred by the national project partners with EU and national rules, Controllers are nominated in line with the national provisions of each Partner State. Each country participating in the DTP is responsible for verifications carried out on its territory.

The control system is centralized in 9 Partner States and set up in a decentralized way in 4 Partner States (AT, DE, BG, MD).

MA/JS coordinate and supervise the control systems and control activities carried out by the Partner States; including the organisation of working group meetings of the Network of Controllers. MA/JS also set up procedures to ensure that all documents for an adequate audit trail are collected. There is regular exchange of the MA/JS financial unit with national controllers and control coordination bodies.

The Partner States of the Danube Transnational Programme provide information on the control systems in the Partner States to the MA/JS by the verification report. On basis of the verification reports of the Partner States the MA/JS will produce the programme level verification report which is provided to the Certifying Authority (according to the requirements set out in the CP complement).

The usability of the electronic monitoring system eMS for FLC is addressed in task C.

Verification in the 1st reporting period 2017

In 2017 the MA/JS proactively executed a survey on verifications done in the first reporting period in DTP (first half of 2017) by the FLC bodies.

The survey showed that 114 national controllers are active in 10 partner states (no figures were available for Bulgaria). All national controllers in 11 partner states succeeded to verify expenditures in the first reporting period.

For this first reporting period, 664 Partner Reports (PR) have received a FLC Certificate from FLC. All 54 projects submitted their first PPR for a total certified amount of 9.4 million EUR of ERDF and 0.9 million EUR of IPA (Source: MA/JS, Report on programme and projects monitoring, March 2018).

Based on the FLC data of the second reporting period 2017, the evaluation assessed the duration of the verification process in the partner countries.

Findings of the analysis of FLC data on the 2nd reporting period 2017

Each Project Partner, as well as the Lead partner, submits a Partner Report to declare its expenditure for a certain reporting period to the controller in its partner state. According to the Danube Control Guidelines (version 2.0, July 2017) the controllers shall fulfil the verification of expenditures including issuing of the FLC certificate at partner level within 60 calendar days. After the verification is finalised, the Lead Partner prepares the Project Progress Report through the eMS. It is important to meet the 60-day deadline to give the LP sufficient time for preparation. The LP shall submit the PPR within 3 months after the end date of the reporting period.

The verification process has an above-average length in the partner countries **CZ, HU, RS, AT and SI.** These countries show the highest proportion of cases that exceed the

60-days limit. In CZ, SI and AT there is also a comparatively high number of cases not settled (see following table; the complete analysis is annexed).

The length of the verification procedure does not depend on the total number of cases processed. RO has a short procedure despite a high number of cases. A long procedure usually depends on the following factors:

- The number of requests by FLC and the number of submissions of clarifications / corrections per partner report which are very high in CZ, AT, HU;
- The average time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of clarifications/ corrections requested by FLC. This time span is comparatively long in CZ, SI, RS and HU;
- There are also factors such as the average time span (calendar days) between submission date of clarification / correction requested by FLC and issue of FLC certificate (F to G), which is particularly long in AT.
- In CZ, the average time span between first submission of partner report to FLC and submission of supporting document to FLC (C-D) is particularly long.

The number of officially registered FLC users per country does not necessarily correlate with the duration of the procedure, e.g. AT has the highest number of registered FLC users but the duration is above-average length (the number of in fact active controllers is not known).

Table 11. Key figures for the FLC verification process

Partner State	No of FLC users	Number of submitted partner report to FLC (C)	Average time span between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate (C to G)	% of cases exceeding 60 days (C to G)	Number of cases: not yet issued FLC certificates	% of cases: not yet issued FLC	No of requests by FLC and submissions of clarifications/ corrections per partner report	Average time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of clarifications/ corrections requested by FLC (D - E)
CZ	16	21	79	86%	5	24%	2.6	60.3
HU	12	63	64	54%	4	6%	2.1	39.6
RS	10	42	61	50%			1.3	44.5
AT	44	59	57	42%	6	10%	2.5	32.5
SI	25	42	55	36%	8	19%	0.8	45.7
HR	13	42	51	21%			1.2	33.0
SK	5	36	48	33%	3	8%	1.5	31.4
RO	16	62	47	18%	2	3%	0.8	27.8
BA	4	16	38	0%			1.7	19.3
DE	30	34	36	6%			0.6	22.6

Partner State	No of FLC users	Number of submitted partner report to FLC (C)	Average time span between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate (C to G)	% of cases exceeding 60 days (C to G)	Number of cases: not yet issued FLC certificates	% of cases: not yet issued FLC	No of requests by FLC and submissions of clarifications/ corrections per partner report	Average time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of clarifications/ corrections requested by FLC (D - E)
BG	21	38	32	8%	1	3%	0.3	13.5
ME	3	5	29	0%			0.2	19.0
Total	**199**	**460**	**52**	**33%**	**29**	**9%**	**1.4**	**35.0**

Source: FLC data for the 2nd reporting period 2017; analysis by Metis. Remark: It was necessary to clean–up data in term of incorrect formats, incorrect entries, in some cases numbers had to be brought into a logical chronological order. Data quality needs to be improved to allow a sound analysis.

Note: the number of 460 submitted partner reports is not the total number of overall/total partner reports submitted under the 2nd reporting period. According to our knowledge, more than 670 reports were prepared but data were only available for a part of it.

FLC bodies, which revealed a longer than average processing time, were assessed in depth, based on data analysis and interviews.

Assessment of the FLC activity in Czech Republic (centralised system)

The FLC system in the Czech Republic is centralised and operated by the Centre for Regional Development of the Czech Republic (Centrum) which is based in Prague. The FLC system is financed by the State and free of charge for the beneficiary.

In the 2nd reporting period the CZ FLC body had to deal with 21 cases of CZ project partners and demonstrated a low performance in terms of process duration.

- The average duration in calendar days between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate (C to G) is in CZ significantly above average (79 days compared to 52 days);
- In 86% of cases CZ exceeds the envisaged 60 days between first submission of the partner report and issuance of the certification (phase C - G);
- In 24% of cases, no certification was issued at the cut-off date.
- Even considering only the time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of issue of FLC Certificate (D to G), in CZ in 78% of cases, the 60 day deadline is exceeded.

According to an interview dated from 13 June 2018, the FLC body is aware of the lengthy process. The reason for the delays is that many verifications have to be made at the same time for several programmes (DTP, Central Europe, Interreg Europe). The programmes have the same reporting periods, the partner reports are all submitted at the same time and must be processed at the same time. This results in an overload of the FLC. According to the experience of the FLC, an ongoing application process (as opposed to the call principle), as practiced in some cross-border programmes, is much better to achieve an even workload for the FLC (Note: this approach is currently not suitable for DTP because a strict selection of numerous applications has to be done). In the future, the Centrum will re-allocate staff in order to speed up the verifications in the DTP in line with the timeframe given by the Control Guidelines. The improvement achieved is constantly monitored by the Centrum.

Assessment of the FLC activity in Hungary (centralised system)

In Hungary the FLC activities carried out by the delegated unit of the hosting organisation are financed mainly by the Ministry for National Economy (National Authority for transnational and interregional programmes) and partly by the Prime Minister's Office (National Authority for cross-border cooperation programmes). These contracts provide sufficient financial resources for the necessary FLC activity.

The tasks of the FLC controllers cover not only the verification of the partner reports, but also preparation for signature of contracts for national co-financing (10-15% depending on the type of PP) and managing contract modifications as well as preparation for signature of advance payment contracts (30% of ERDF grant is pre-financed from Hungarian state budget for central budget organisations and county municipalities).

In 2017 the human resource allocated for DTP FLC tasks was 3,81 FTE, which in optimal case should be at least doubled. In the assessed reporting period (63 submitted PP report) the missing staff capacity caused already sensible delays: in 54% of the assessed cases the time span between the first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate exceeded 60 days, while the average time span (calendar days between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate) was 64 days.

Further to the assessed reporting period more than 50% of reports submitted by the partners in January 2018 could not be checked within the 15 working days' deadline set in the FLC's operational manual (the first letters for completion should be sent out to partners within 15 working days from the date of submission of the reports).

Based on the actual up-dated information there is positive progress in solving FLC staff capacity problem, as two new controllers have been employed recently, and the fulfilment of further vacancies is in progress. Also there is positive prospect, that framework conditions provided by the hosting organisation could be improved in the near future.

Summarising all above, based on the actual and planned positive development regarding the increased human capacity allocated for DTP FLC activity in Hungary, there is a fair chance to improve the compliance with the rules of the Control Guidelines in the future.

Assessment of the FLC activity in Serbia (centralised system)

The centralized system is operated by a specific department within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia. Control activities provided by First Level Control officers are free of charge for the Serbian project partners.

In the 2nd reporting period 42 cases were processed.

- The average duration in calendar days between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate is in Serbia above average (61 days compared to 52 days);

- In 50% of cases, Serbia exceeds the envisaged 60 days between first submission of the partner report and issuance of the certification;
- Even considering only the time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of issue of FLC Certificate, in Serbia in 44% of cases, the 60-day deadline is exceeded.

According to the a statement by the FLC on the 7 June 2018, the main reason for delay in issuing FLC Certificate is the insufficient number of controllers. Civil servants who verify reports for the Danube projects also perform controls for additional three programmes.

From FLC point of view, the only solution for the mentioned problem is a different start date for projects. Now, all the projects have the same start date of the implementation and the FLC receives at the same date about 65 partner reports. Taking into consideration that the DTP is a complex programme, it is very hard for the FLC to meet the deadline for control and it needs a longer period than 60 days.

Assessment of the FLC activity in Austria (decentralised system)

Austria operates a decentralized FLC system mainly through four designated international audit companies.

The resources of public control bodies were massively reduced in AT in line with a trend to outsource the FLC to external control bodies. The model of outsourcing FLC tasks to external private auditors was already used in the programme period 2007-2013 by individual public control bodies. In the period 2014-2020 this model is applied throughout Austria (with a few exceptions). For this purpose, a pool of qualified external auditors (4 international audit companies) was selected on the basis of a call for tenders. The market prices for audits are high and have increased significantly compared to the period 2007-2013 (3.5% to 5% to 7% of reported costs plus basic flat rate plus 20% VAT). The control costs have to be borne by the beneficiaries and can be reported as eligible costs providing that the costs were budgeted and approved in the subsidy contract. It is not possible for the beneficiary to choose an audit body on its own initiative, and only the public control body responsible for a beneficiary may in turn contract a private audit body from the pool of designated auditors.

The delegation of tasks doesn´t lead to effective verifications at the current stage since the verification process is above average length and exceeds in 42% of cases the 60-days limit.

At the moment, the reasons of the longer process duration cannot be clarified in detail. The diversity of the decentralized FLC-system in Austria (7 operational FLC bodies, 17 public bodies involved) provides a large number of explanations that play a role in the initial phase of the introduction of this new system. Here one would have to deal in detail with the concrete individual cases.

Basically, the FLC coordinating body is satisfied with the performance of the Austrian FLC system in the start-up phase. The coordinating body will use the analysis of the evaluators as an interesting impetus to foster for quality control of the process and "shared learning" between the stakeholders.

Overall, the focus on four private auditors is viewed critically. In the next programming period, it is advisable to rebuild the control competencies and the staff resources for control in public bodies.

DTP is a difficult programme from the perception of the Austrian national coordinating control body.

DTP has developed a large number of (call specific) manuals for the beneficiaries which describe verification and control requirements in a general way. The only document that accurately describes verification and control requirements are the Danube Control Guidelines (around 90 pages without annexes). The control guidelines are available at the DTP website; thus the interested beneficiaries can read it. However, it was designed for controllers and is not proactively communicated to the beneficiaries.

DTP offers the beneficiaries too many options to verify expenditures. At the same time, the verification models are not sufficiently interpreted, which leads to a great need for clarification. Other programmes allow only a few reliable verification methods (e.g. Alpine Space, Interreg Europe) and limit the room for interpretation.

DTP did not want to limit the partners' choice, each model laid down in Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 481/2014 is available under DTP. Also the Control Guidelines are not as much as detailed as the controllers' would wish. DTP provide the controllers who are responsible for verification of expenditure the room for decision during the verification.

In view of the Austrian FLC coordination many checklists have to be completed by national controllers in the case of DTP (e.g. designation check list, contribution to fraud risk assessment). This is not necessary in other transnational cooperation programmes. The designation checklist was designed by the Audit Authority (they perform their audits based on this checklist in each programme where they are involved). The information collected through the designation checklist contributed to the short designation process which took only half a year in case of DTP.

Assessment of the FLC activity in Slovenia (centralised system)

The centralized system is operated by a specific division of the Government Office for development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC). Control costs are free of charge for Slovenian project partners.

In the 2nd reporting period 42 cases of Slovenian project partners were processed.

- The average duration in calendar days between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate is in Slovenia above average (55 days compared to 52 days);
- In 36% of cases Slovenia exceeds the envisaged 60 days between first submission of the partner report and issuance of the certification;
- In 19% of cases, no certification was issued at the cut-off date;
- Even considering only the time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of issue of FLC Certificate, in Slovenia in 32% of cases, the 60 day deadline is exceeded.s

From the view point of the Slovenian FLC body it is a challenge to deal with a high number of project partner reports which need more time to verify them. The Slovenian FLC ensures verifying within 3 months deadline due to the Common provision regulation No1303/2013 and that is the only deadline that SI FLC follows. According to the Slovenian FLC, the verification timeframe stated in the DTP Control Guideline is no binding reference for it. Overall, the Slovenian FLC considers their work as successful and in line with the regulation.

6.4.3 Conclusions and recommendations A4

Conclusion 1: The national controllers in 12 partner states succeeded to verify expenditures in the first and second reporting period. However, there are less well performing FLC systems that are currently unable to meet the 60-day verification of expenditures deadline to a greater extent. These are CZ, HU, RS, AT, SI. This contradicts the control guidelines and poses a great risk for the timely execution of the entire verification process. A systematic flaw in the system is caused by the fact that although FLC is a core process, MA / JS have little scope to intervene in the process since the FLC system is an individual responsibility of the partner states.

Short-term recommendation

- MA / JS should continue an ongoing analysis of the process duration of the verification of costs on the basis of eMS data. The findings of the analysis and the resulting consequences should be prominently presented and discussed in the MC. The national delegates of higher-risk countries should keep the MC informed about the steps that will be taken to remove the bottlenecks of a well performing FLC-system.
- The Slovenian FLC who does not consider the CG as binding document has a clear obligation to comply with MC resolutions. Since numerous SI partners are involved in partnerships, the SI attitude could affect seriously the programme management itself. The chair of the MC (or any other relevant programme body) should write a statement to the FLC and its hosting body calling for compliance with common rules established by the programme.

6.5 A5. Effectiveness of co-operation of the DTP with the EUSDR structures (EUSDR National Coordinators as MC member, Priority Area Coordinators, Danube Strategy Point, organization of Annual Forums, etc.)

6.5.1 Evaluation questions A5

This point assesses to what extent the cooperation framework of the DTP with the EUSDR could be implemented on the ground taking into consideration the context (partner state and EC interests) in which the EUSDR works.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the cooperation and communication between the programme bodies and the EUSDR main stakeholders (NCs, PACs) effective and efficient? Are the coordination mechanisms between the MA/ JS and the EUSDR managing bodies providing a proper contribution of the Programme to the Strategy?
- Special attention should also be given to Specific Objective 4.2. which includes new financial support elements for the EUSDR
- How is the programme perceived by beneficiaries? (focus on PACs, DSP, SMF-beneficiaries who receive direct support by the DTP)

6.5.2 Evaluation findings A5

Roles, responsibilities and tasks in brief

The programme has set up a cooperation framework with the EUSDR structures.

- EUSDR related issues are discussed in the MC with the active involvement of the present EUSDR National Coordinators.
- MA/JS informs/consults the EUSDR Trio Presidency and/or the DSP on relevant strategic issues related to the EUSDR.
- The DTP provides financial support to the Priority Area Coordinators, Danube Strategy Point (call planned for 2018), Seed Money Facility.
- The capitalisation strategy involves the PACs.

Support for EUSDR and coordination

EUSDR is exceptionally strongly supported by DTP:

- Around 5 calls of 8 calls in total will be dedicated to the EUSDR.
- The DTP budget for EUSDR support under the specific objective No 4.2 (PACs, DSP, SMF) of 15.5 million EUR exceeds the entire TA budget of DTP of around 14 million EUR (allocated ERDF and IPA funds).
- The extra coordination effort for the support of the EUSDR is not recognised by the TA budget. As a rough estimate around 30% - 50% of the MA/JS effort goes to EUSDR. This is disproportionate to the financial volume of EUSDR support in the CP (7% of total funds / 15.5 million EUR are allocated to SO 4.2). Of course, DTP benefits greatly from EUSDR through increased political awareness of the programme.
- It is a big challenge to develop the EUSDR related calls based on the programme principles and rules.
- EUSDR actors are very well presented in the MC and have even the majority in the MC: 10 EUSDR national coordinators are also MC members and full partners. Others are involved as observers.

The interaction between DTP MA/JS and EUSDR is very cooperative and effective based on close working relationship. The representatives of EUSDR are invited for DTP national committees. In 2017 one DTP MC meeting was organized jointly with EUSDR meeting, which occasion enabled effective personal discussions between the stakeholders.

The provided documents, manuals are well detailed and informative, the MA/JS staff is supporting with quick replies and problem solving attitude.

PAC/DSP are treated in DTP as regular “projects” - for MA/JS it was extremely high workload to translate the PAC intervention logic to DTP programme language. So institutional support to PACs is done by projects – MA/JS is stretching the rules to a possible extent to reduce the administrative burden for PACs, however, according to the interviews PACs consider rules and procedures overcomplicated for process support which is a technical assistance (and not a project) activity.

PACs provide process support and a platform for content-related discussions and contribute their own content. PACs are the interface to the political level, thus forming a link between the projects and the political level. Through the PAC involvement, the projects can better access the political level and thus achieve a greater relevance.

For this kind of process support the project logic is not a suitable instrument from the PAC perception. Project handling is very rigid and difficult. For example, the number of participants must be planned in advance, which is not seriously possible from the PACs viewpoint.

According to a PAC´s perception, only a limited number of PACs is working in a project management context and is able to understand a project logic (e.g. PACs in an operative agency). The qualification to understand and to implement proper project management is largely missing with classical ministry actors.

Therefore, when supporting PACs, the objectives should be well defined with the PACs. However, the path to achieving the objectives should be kept very flexible and not be squeezed into milestones. The 10% rule for shifting between budget items is by far too rigid (a similar rule was established through the financial support provided by the EC).

Also reporting obligations are considered as extensive in the interviews. In fact, PACs obligation is to report 1 time per year, with the option that they can ask up to 4-time reimbursement (no content report).

Experience with the first call for the financial support of the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators in 2016

Due to its special character the EUSDR PAC call is to be handled separately from the other calls.

Until the end of 2016 Priority Area Coordinators were financed directly from the Commission/ EU Parliament, which covered the costs of experts, travelling and organising events. The priority areas of EUSDR had been originally divided between the participating countries. As formerly decided DTP finances PAC activity from 2017 on in the frame of 4.2 priority of DTP. In the frame of the dedicated call only the previously appointed PACs could submit application. For those PACs, who were not familiar with former e.g. INTERREG calls, the submission of application process was challenging. Albeit the call manuals, documents were detailed and understandable, the Application Form was not totally customised to the special PAC governance activity. The requirements of the application process caused difficulties to handle especially with required detailed cost calculation. Taking into account the maximum eligible budget (EUR 300.000 with EUR 255.000 programme co-financing) for the 3-year PAC project with minimum 2/3 partners involved, the administrative workload both for the project partners and the MA/JS seems to be unproportioned.

The granted amount for PAC projects is not proportional with the necessary administrative workload in DTP. Simplified application procedure and more flexible financial regulation (assumingly in the next programming period) would be more cost effective and advantageous not only for the applicants and beneficiaries.

Experience with the first call of Seed Money Facility

The same consideration as for the PAC call is valid for the Seed Money Facility call, where overall budget limit is 50,000.00 EUR per project. EU contribution to each project is 85% (42,500.00 EUR) for min. 2 – max. 5 partners, the duration of the project is 12 months. Based on the opinion of pilot interviewee (with experiment in application in DTP), in this call administrative burden was manageable.

From the perception of a PAC for the small SMF projects a very large administrative burden is required. The granted amount is not proportional with the necessary administrative workload in DTP. Lump sum based construction would be more fitting to this type of projects. In addition, there is no pre-financing, which, for example, universities cannot afford. Small projects should be significantly simplified in the handling.

Participation at the SMF call was uneven: 65 applications addressed primarily the EUSDR priority areas 3 (Culture & Tourism) and 8 (Competitiveness of Enterprises). Most project partners applied from RO, BG and HU (source: MA/JS). The need to finance project development is likely to be unevenly distributed. In other EUSDR priority areas actor may use other financing instruments to support project generation.

Call for Danube Strategy Point (DSP)

The DTP launched a call for proposal aimed at establishing the Danube Strategy Point (DSP). The call was open from May to June 2018. Results of the call are out of the scope of the given evaluation.

6.5.3 Conclusions and recommendations A5

Conclusion 1: The DTP takes the support for EUSDR very seriously and provides substantial funds and support. For legal reasons, however, the tools that the programme can offer are not well suited for the funding of institutional support. Also EUSDR support binds a lot of work resources from MA / JS.

Short-term recommendation

- Support to EUSDR should be reviewed to avoid an unproportioned extra workload for all actors involved. Support for EUSDR is very welcome, but it is resource intensive and at the expense of normal calls. Currently there are no adequate tools available to implement EUSDR support with minimal administrative burden for MA/JS and/or EUSDR actors. Therefore additional staff must be provided for the EUSDR support at the MA/JS. If this fails, it is advisable to reduce the EUSDR support and to put the focus on the handling of normal calls.

Long-term recommendation

- For the next programming period, appropriate legal tools should be provided for a transnational programme to support a macro-regional strategy.

7 Task B. Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the entire project cycle (project generation, assessment, selection, monitoring, reporting, reimbursement)

Short introduction

Task B is divided into three specific activities:

- outreach to potential applicants
- project assessment and selection process
- support for the project implementation

7.1 B1: Effectiveness of outreach to potential applicants in the different calls

7.1.1 Evaluation questions B1

This point addresses the first phase of project preparation and support and assesses the following aspects:

- Provision of tools to support project generation and applicants
- Satisfaction of the applicants with the tools according to the online survey
- Generated applications according to their geographical distribution
- Success in attracting newcomers to the programme

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the programme using the right tools for reaching the applicants?
- How transparent and effective is the application process in terms call of procedures, tools provided and support to applicants?

7.1.2 Evaluation findings B1

Overview on tools to support project generation and applicants

Support to potential applicants and applicants is provided in different form by MA/JS and NCPs (see the table below).

Table 12. Support to potential applicants and applicants

Ongoing support	• Communication tools (addressed in task D) • Individual consultations by the JS
Support to potential applicants	• Support to find a suitable partner for the project (via the DTP website) • National info days by NCPs • Individual support to applicants by NCPs
Support to applicants	• Lead applicant trainings by the JS • Help desk for applicants by the JS • Call-specific application manual by the JS

Source: Programme documents, interviews

The MA/JS produces specific applicants pack for each call to provide stakeholders and potential project applicants with appropriate information about the programme, the options and conditions for the development of their project ideas into full-fledged project proposals and the assessment and selection procedures for proposals.

The extensive set of documents provided for applicants for each call is presented in the annex.

DTP applicants have the possibility during call to individually consult with the Joint Secretariat on their project ideas (contact the thematic JS Project Officer responsible for their project topic). Project ideas being at an early stage of development were recommended to first address their respective National Contact Point for general advice and information.

The DTP offers also a partner search tool, to give potential applicants the possibility to propose projects ideas and to form quality partnerships for call for proposals.

In order to provide information on the DTP and promote calls, events were conducted by the MA/JA and by the National Contact Points.

The eMS electronic system to handle applications was introduced mid-2017 to be in place for the Seed Money Facility (SMF) call (so far, 1 call out of a total of 4 calls has been handled via eMS).

Satisfaction of the applicants with the tools according to the online survey

Overall, the applicants are satisfied with the support for project preparation and application by MA/JS and NCPs. In the online survey, these questions are rated with 3.28 points out of 4 in average. It is not surprising that this number is lower for rejected proposals (and those who have no decision yet), where the average grade is only 3 out of 4 (weighted average, 4 being best).

Good information on calls

Applicants agree that there was timely pre-information on the calls and the submission of project applications via DTP-website (interreg-danube.eu) and other channels.

The programme better supports partner search and project application than NCPs

When it comes to finding a suitable partner for the project applications, the respondents' answers in the online survey (n=268) are acceptable but not very good. Applicants are more satisfied with the support from the programme (via the DTP website) than with the support by NCPs. Very striking are the answers of rejected projects (n=30), who rated the support by NCPs with 2.43 only (2 standing for "not so helpful" and 3 standing for "somewhat helpful").

A similar picture is given by the questions concerning the advice provided for the preparation of project application. Applicants are more satisfied with the advice provided by MA/JS (e.g. through the lead applicant training, help desk for applicants by the MA/JS) than with the advice provided by NCPs (e.g. through national info days and individual support by NCPs). In total, the responses (weighted average of 3.2 for NCPs and 3.4 for MA/JS) are satisfactory. However, in both cases there is a remarkable difference in answers between rejected and successful projects.

Application manual is more useful as the guidance on how to develop a successful project

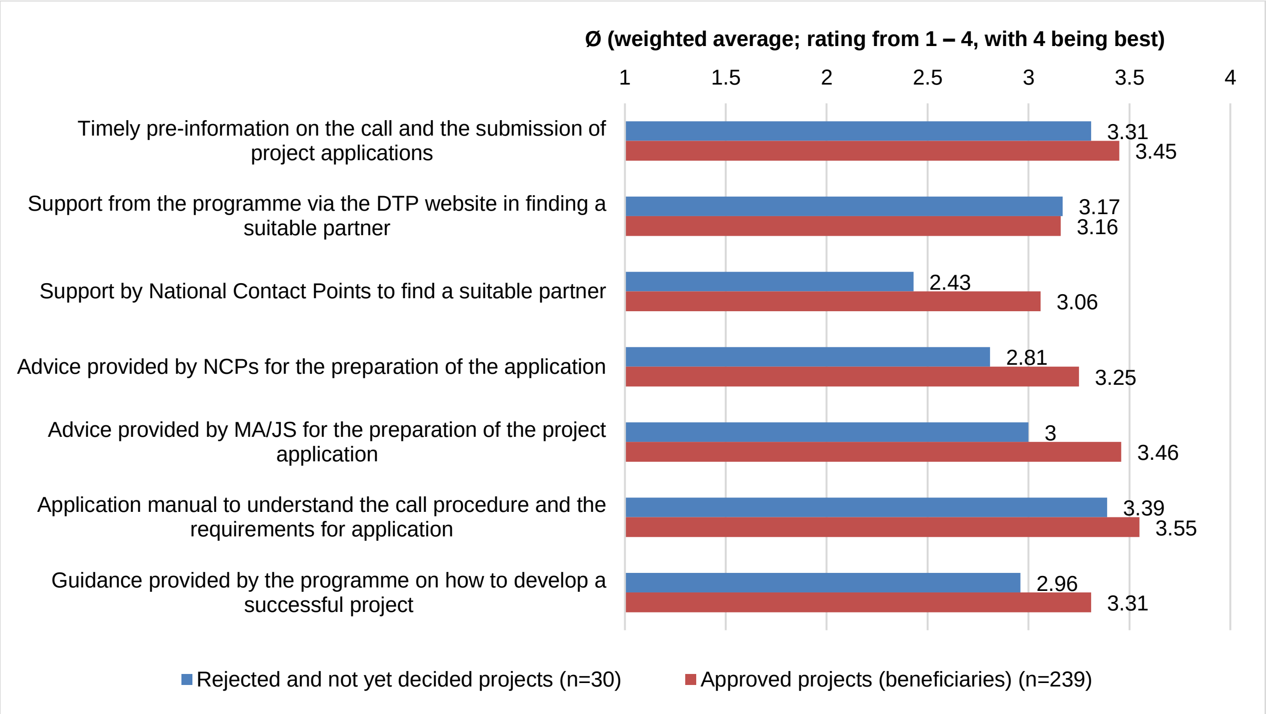
The applicants agree that the application manual offered by the MA/JS in order to understand the call procedure and the requirements for application was very helpful. Less helpful but comparatively still well graded is the guidance provided by the programme on how to develop a successful project (e.g. further develop the project idea, set up the partnership, develop the intervention logic and indicators).

Suggestions for improvement

Some survey participants (4x) suggest providing good practice examples of successful applications as an improvement in the preparatory phase. Further suggestions for instance are an event for developing project ideas or a glossary of the "Interreg language" to explain the programme / project terms (like "outcomes", "outputs", "intervention logic") and philosophy in a generally understandable form. Others suggest reducing the number and shortening the content of manuals and documents.

The figure below depicts the weighted average of the answers to the questions separated by rejected/not yet decided projects and successful (approved) projects.

Figure 12. survey results on the support project generation and applicants



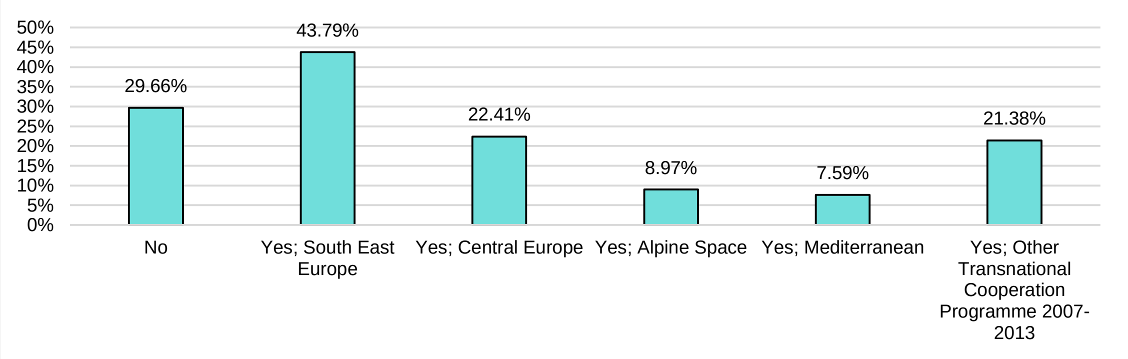
Source: online-survey (n=269)

Beside the effective support provided by the MA/JS and National Contact Points in the preparatory and project generation phase, the applicants considerably depend on their own expertise and their own professional network and their former participation in different INTERREG programmes.

Success in attracting newcomers to the programme

According to the online-survey, approximately 30% of participants are newcomers. The relatively low proportion of newcomers is common in Interreg programmes and an indication that the entry threshold is very high.

Figure 13. Involvement in a transnational cooperation programme in the programming period 2007-2013 (multiple answers possible)



Source: online-survey (n=290)

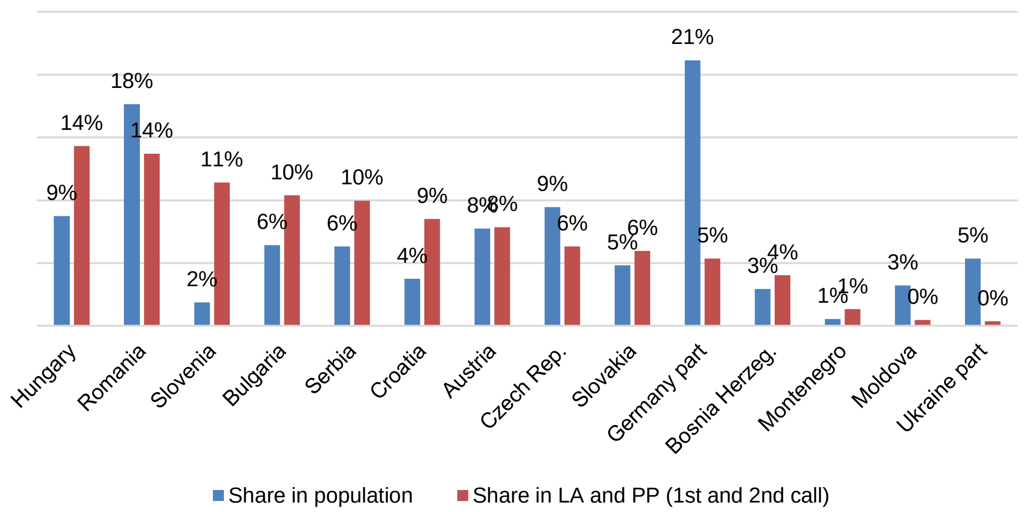
Generated applications according to their geographical distribution

An analysis of the first and second calls shows that 766 Lead Applicants and 7,706 Project Partner (in total 8,472 partner) applied to the programme (see annexed table). All 14 partner states generated applications (lead applicants / lead partners can only come from the 9 EU-Member States). So the cooperation programme has in principle a great coverage.

The number and proportion of partners per country, however, varies widely. The applicants are very unevenly distributed.

- 60% of the applicants come from only 5 partner countries (Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Serbia);
- Strongly overrepresented (against its population share) are applicants from Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia;
- Roughly represented according to their population share, are applicants from Austria, Slovakia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro;
- Underrepresented are applicants from Germany (very strong deviation), Romania, Czech Republic, Moldova and Ukraine In particular, the integration of the new partner Germany (which entered the DTP in the 2014-2020 period) is not working properly yet. In addition, the integration of Moldova and Ukraine is lagging behind because of different supporting schemas (due to lack of ENI funds in the 1st call).

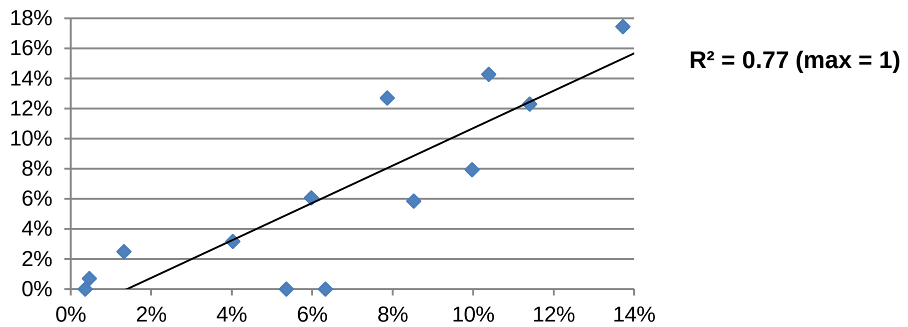
Figure 14. Proportion of applicants per country



Source: MA/JS, analysis by Metis

Several factors can explain the participation rate of Lead Applicants and Project Partners coming from the partner states. For the DTP the most important factor seems to be the participation in SEE 2007-2013. There is a high degree of continuity. For example, Hungary and Romania, which had the highest participation rates in SEE 2007-2013 of the DTP countries (each 17% of DTP-partners) are dominating the participation also in the 2014-2020 period. Non-participating countries in 2007-2013 like the Czech Republic or Germany are under-represented. Partnerships seem to develop over longer periods. Supposedly, the Czech Republic and Germany would have to invest disproportionate effort in activation measures to catch up. The figure below shows the strong correlation between the share of LA and PP in DTP 2014-2020 and LP&PP in SEE 2007-2013 (Absolute numbers for the DTP-countries are presented in the annex).

Figure 15. Correlation between share of LA&PP in DTP 14-20 (x-axis) and LP&PP in SEE 07-13 (y-axis)



Source: MA/JS; Ecorys 2013 (Evaluation of South East Europe Programme 2007-2013, Final report 2013 p 31); analysis by Metis

Another influencing factor may be the possibility to get state co-financing, which is the case for Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, that all show high participation rates.

Particularly striking is the low participation of German applicants. Germany has in principle a very high potential of capable project partners. Reasons for the relatively low participation rate – in addition to the lack of cooperation history – may be that other transnational programmes (covering the same area as DTP) are available for DE partners. Also German PPs are mostly active and more interested in certain topics (e.g. innovation) compared to for example culture or environment.

7.1.3 Conclusions and recommendations B1

Conclusion 1: The applicants are mostly satisfied with the support for project generation and application. The weak point is usually the support provided by the NCPs (e.g. information does not go beyond what is posted on the DTP website). Big national differences in the capabilities of NCPs exist which cannot be influenced by the DTP. Therefore, the main responsibility for support and consultation lies with MA / JS. The tools for support provided by MA/JS should be continuously developed and improved.

Short-term recommendation

- MA / JS should apply modern communication tools such as skype (or similar software) and live Webinars (going beyond YouTube videos) to better advise applicants on a daily basis in a resource-efficient manner.

Conclusion No 2: The distribution of applicants across the programme area is very uneven. In particular, the involvement of German project partners is low. The potential of German partners is under-used.

Long-term recommendation

- It seems necessary to consider thoroughly the promotion of Germany's participation at the DTP and to identify the bottlenecks of non-participation in detail.

7.2 B2: Effectiveness of the application procedure, project assessment and selection process in the different calls

7.2.1 Evaluation questions B2

This point addresses drafting and submission of project applications, assessment of applications, decision and approval of projects and establishment of subsidy contract. The following aspects will be assessed:

- Drafting and submission of project applications
- Assessment procedure and related complaints
- Strengths and weaknesses of 1-step and 2-step procedure

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Are the project selection criteria and assessment procedure sound, transparent and fair, effectively supporting the selection of the best quality transnational projects?

- Has the programme set adequate measures to reduce the administrative burden of applicants?

7.2.2 Evaluation findings B2

Drafting and submission of project applications

Usability of the application forms – room for improvement

Results from the online survey confirm that the application form has potential for improvement. In average, these questions were rated with a weighted average of 3 (out of 4 with 4 being best). This is acceptable, but not very good.

Most of the respondents agree that the application form (content part) could be better structured and contain less detail. Only 64% out of 251 respondents agree (16% strongly agree) that the effort to fill-in the application forms is proportionate. 14% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree to this statement.

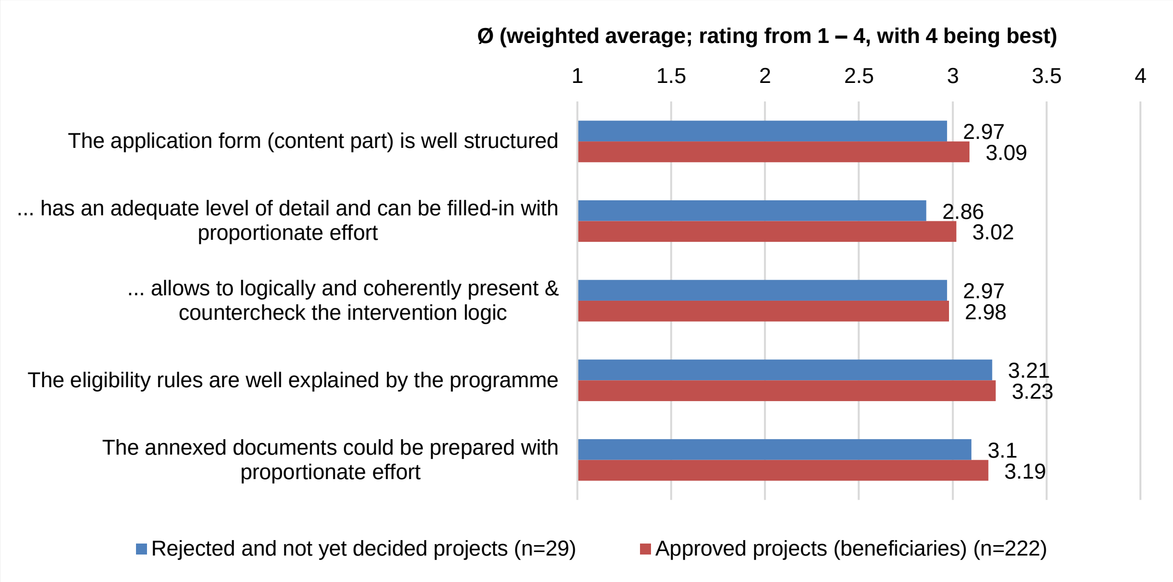
The possibility to present and countercheck the components of the project intervention logic (objectives, results, outputs, activities) in a logic and coherent way is also limited. Both, rejected/not yet decided and approved projects rate this question with an average below 3, which is compared to the overall results a rather low performance.

The annexed documents to the application form (declarations, partnership agreement) are rated a little better and could be prepared with proportionate effort by 84% of respondents (27% strongly agree and 57% agree).

A higher satisfaction is noted on the explanation of the eligibility rules by the programme (e.g. through the applicants manual, programme complement).

The figure below shows the weighted average in relation to the drafting and submission of project applications.

Figure 16. Figure: survey results application form

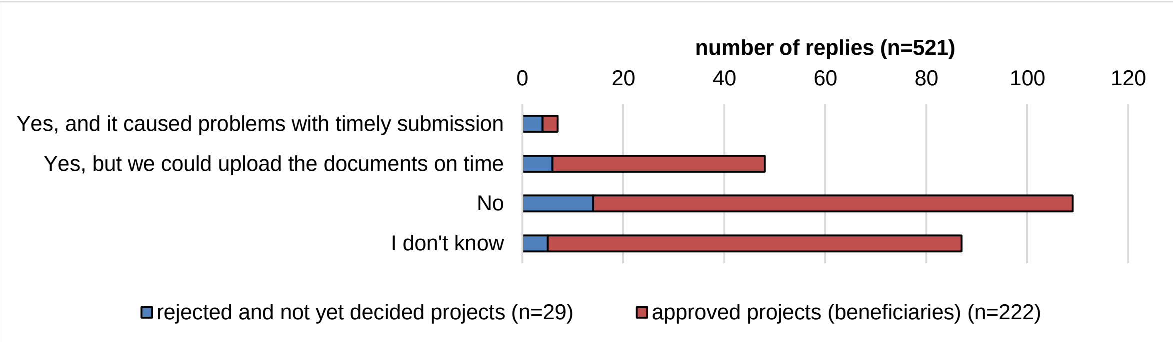


Source: online survey (n=251)

Uploading the application form – only minor problems

Several respondents (55 out of 521 applicants or almost 22%) reported technical problems in uploading the application form and the annexed documents. The majority still succeeded in uploading the documents on time, however, 7 survey respondents stated that it caused problems with timely submission (see the figure below).

Figure 17. survey results technical problems



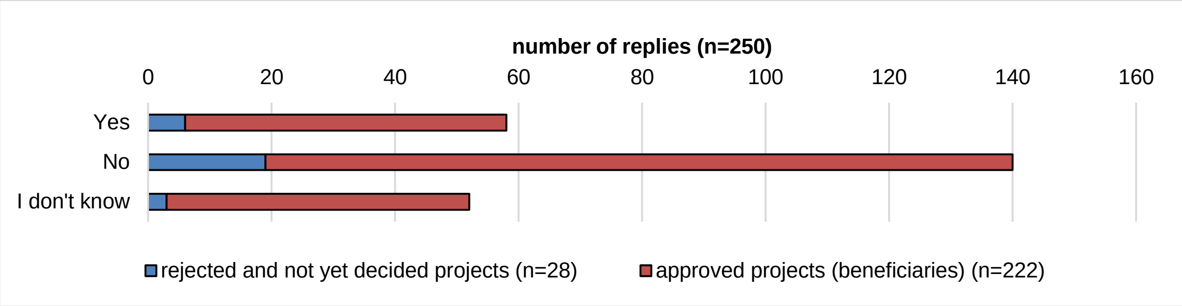
Source: online survey (n=251)

External consultants supported 23% of applicants

As a consequence of the rather complicated and complex application process, 23% (58 out of 250) of survey respondents state that the application process of their project proposal was supported by an external consultant (see figure below).

According to the survey results, applications with external support have a slightly better success rate (5%).

Figure 18. survey results application process by external consultant



Source: online survey (n=250)

Mostly good support by MA/JS less by NCPs

Overall, participants knew whom they could contact as a contact person in MA/JS for their concerns during the application. Continuous support from a competent member of staff of the MA / JS was given for most of the applicants. However, some participants (around 10%) disagree with this statement.

Again, the NCP-support as an important and helpful factor during proposal draft is performing less good (weighted average of 2.84 out of 4 with 4 being best).

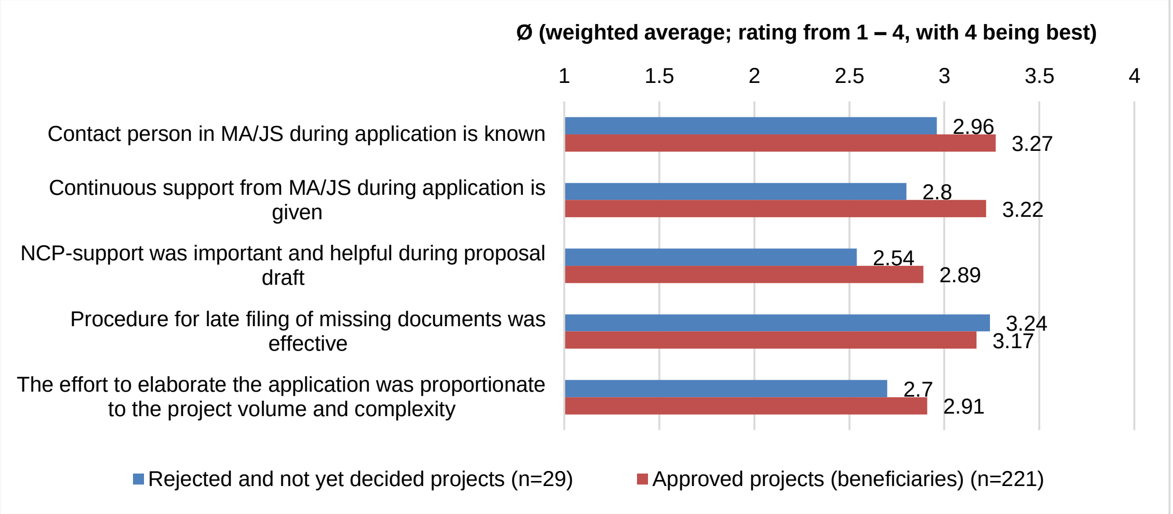
The procedure for the late filing of missing documents was effective for most of the participants who could answer this question. Both, rejected/not yet decided and approved projects gave a satisfactory rating to this question.

Overall, many complaints about the effort for application

With a weighted average of 2.88, participants confirm again, that the effort to elaborate the application in all parts was not very proportionate to the envisaged volume and complexity of the project.

The figure below summarizes the results (weighted average of answers) about the support during application.

Figure 19. survey results support during application



Source: online-survey (n=250)

Suggestions for improvement

Participants in the online survey had the possibility to share their comments and suggestions for improvement in a text box. Also about the drafting and submission of project applications, several respondents used this option. They mainly suggest to reduce and simplify the application form (10x explicitly requested). Too many questions are addressing similar issues and for some applicants it is difficult to distinguish where and in which way to describe their project. Even though some fields require different content (e.g. outputs/deliverables/results), the applicants tend to repeat the same description in different fields. Other partners claim that the financial planning is too strict for the early stage of the project or that they faced technical problems with the application template (e.g. the pdf is too big).

Analysis of the assessment procedure

For each call an internal Assessment Manual is elaborated which describes the selection procedure, based on traceable, transparent and binding criteria. The assessment questions are transparently included in the Applicants Manual, so that the beneficiaries are knowledgeable about the whole assessment and selection process. The Assessment Manual sets the selection criteria and selection procedure and is approved by MC.

The assessment distinguishes between an eligibility and a quality check.

The eligibility assessment is carried out by the JS assisted by the NCPs (e.g. clarification of legal status of PP).

The quality assessment is done by the JS and by external assessors which are selected by calls.

The quality check consists of a strategy and an operational assessment. A relevance assessment was introduced as a 1st step in the 2nd Call in order to quickly filter out little relevant proposals with a quick check (based on 4 guiding questions instead of 17). This should help to reduce the workload for the in-depth quality assessments. The relevance filter is also an attempt to introduce a quasi-step-by-step process in a one-step process.

The individual assessment criteria are treated separately. Only if a proposal passes a step, the next assessment takes place. The most time-consuming step with the highest number of guiding questions is the strategic assessment.

Table 13. Definition of quality assessment criteria per call and step

Main criteria	No of main questions			No of guiding questions			Weight in points / %		
	1st call 1-step	1st call 2-step	2nd call	1st call 1-step	1st call 2-step	2nd call	1st call 1-step	1st call 2-step	2nd call
A. Relevance assessment			2			4			10 (18%)
B. Strategic assessment	6	6	5	17	24	17	30 (75%)	30 (60%)	25 (46%)
C. Operational assessment	2	4	4	5	16	14	10 (25%)	20 (40%)	20 (36%)
Total	8	10	11	22	40	35	40 (100%)	50 (100%)	55 (100%)
Knock-out threshold for relevance and strategic assessment							60%	60%	60%

Source: DTP documents 2nd call, Metis

The design of the assessment system is complex and includes up to 40 guiding questions in the quality assessment (1st call 2nd step). The number of guiding questions was slightly reduced in 2nd call, which is very positive.

The number of assesment criteria and the weighting of the criteria was determined individually for each call and step.

The highest weighting clearly gets the evaluation of the strategic relevance of the projects with 75% / 60% / 64% of the total points which is in line with the principle of result-orientation.

Overall, the assessment system is transparent for the stakeholders and in line with the result-orientation. A challenge of assessors is to deal with up to 40 guiding questions.

JS staff experienced a lack of common understanding on how to interpret the guiding questions between external experts and JS staff. The options are either to invest a lot in capacity building or to simplify the system (and even in this case building a common understanding is necessary). From the point of the evaluator, the numerous guiding questions are over-complicated. Experiences show that the strategic and operational assessment can be reduced to 5 main and 23 sub-criteria without loss of quality.

Good experiences with the experimental relevance assessment but late communication of results to MC

In the second call out of the 119 projects assessed qualitatively 85 (71%) failed the relevance assessment, meaning that they received a score lower than 60% in this criteria group. To compare this figure: in the 1st step of the 1st call, 83% of applicants failed.

The relevance filter helped the MA/JS to sort out the projects that are not fitting the requirements of the programme and the call in terms of topic addressed, intervention logic and transnationality. This produced a more efficient and effective assessment process in terms of timing and resources used, as the strategic assessment (which contains the highest number of criteria) was only performed only for the projects relevant for the DTP.

Applications rejected in the first step were not informed in advance. The LAs failing the relevance were informed together with the other applicants not selected for financing after the MC in Podgorica (23.3.18) approved the entire ranking list which contained all the eligible projects assessed qualitatively.

The result of the strategy assessment with its high failure rate of 71% was communicated to the MC after the entire assessment was finished (and not in advance). From the viewpoint of the evaluator it builds trust with the MC to inform it early even on interim results and not wait until the entire assessment procedure is closed (informing the MC in the middle of the assessment is especially advisable in the current situation where there are some very critical voices in the MC).

Assessment procedure and complaints from the perspective of applicants

In regard to the overall assessment procedure, the survey participants see space for improvement. Overall, the weighted average of these questions is around 3 (out of 4 with 4 being best).

The majority (83%) agrees that the eligibility and quality criteria applied in the assessment procedure are clearly communicated (e.g. in the application manual). However, a weighted average of 3.14 is not excellent.

The same result achieved the following question on the information of the decision by the MC. In general, partners rather agree, that their partnership was informed promptly and in sufficient detail about the outcome of the assessment and the decision made by the MC to approve or reject the project proposal. However, this question clearly reflects the dissatisfaction of rejected applicants, who give a distinct worse rating and complain about the transparency in the assessment procedure. Some rejected partners stated the wish for a more detailed justification of the rejection of the project.

The survey result shows that applicants are unsatisfied with the duration of time from application to the decision on the project selection. A weighted average of 2.65 is one of the worst rating in the whole survey. Applicants clearly wish for a faster selection process, this is again much more striking in the case of rejected and not yet decided projects.

Also the procedure of filling a complaint against decisions taken by programme authorities during project assessment and selection process has some space for improvement (complaints can be lodged only against eligibility and not quality assessment).

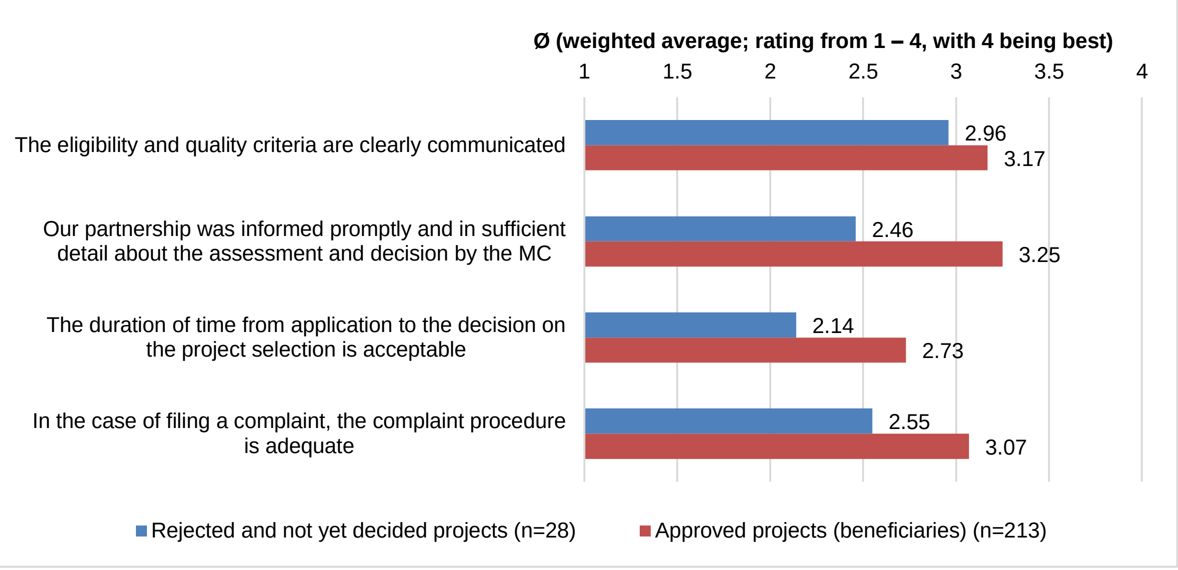
Respondents criticize the superficial reasoning of the assessment (“shallow reference”, insufficiently developed”), which makes it difficult to formulate a targeted complaint. Respondents would have wished for a more detailed justification of the rejection of the application. Unsuccessful applicants would like to be supported with some comments how to improve their proposal.

In addition, the 5-day deadline for submitting a complaint against eligibility decision is too short to form a concerted position within the consortium.

To sum it up, the possibilities for an adequate treatment of complaints are currently very limited, which is understandable from the viewpoint of scare staff resources.

Please see the figure below for more details on the survey result on the assessment procedure and complaints.

Figure 20. survey results assessment procedure and complaints



Source: online-survey (n=241)

After fulfilling all conditions, the contracting starts. The procedure to fulfil some conditions and/or consider some recommendations with regard to the proposal (e.g. budget revision, correction of the intervention logic, dropping out the ineligible partners) was effective for most of the respondents (76%). Yet almost 10% of the beneficiaries disagree.

Strengths and weaknesses of 1-step and 2-step procedure

The 1st call 2-step procedure dealt with 576 and 91 applications and had a duration of 11.5 month (4.5 plus 7 month). The success rate was overall 10% (54 approved of 547 submitted in the first step).

The 2nd call 1-step procedure dealt with 119 application and had the same duration of 11.5 months until approval of projects. The success rate was 18% (22 approved out of 119 applications).

Table 14. Success rates

	1st call 1st step	1st call 2nd step	1st call overall	2nd call relevance assessment	2nd call overall assessment
Applications	576	91	576	119	119
selected applications	100	54	54	34	22
Success rate	17,4%	59,3%	9,4%	28,6%	18,5%

Source: MA/JS, Metis

A low success rate is a common result. In SEE programme 2007-2013, the success rate in the first two calls was very low at 5% and increased in the 3rd and 4th call to 10% and 14% (source MA/JS).

The 1st call with 2-steps was very labour-intensive, because a complex workflow had to be mastered. The work assignment was only possible because the project officers did not have to do any project monitoring at the same time.

The 1st call was very selective and produced according to MA/JS high quality projects also because it allowed the MA / JS to coach the applicants between the two steps. Based on feedback the applicants could fine-tune their proposal.

The 2nd call lasted as long as the 1st call, although only a 1-step procedure was performed. The following factors contributed to the length of the procedure:

- The project officers did not have sufficient capacity for the assessment, because they were occupied with evolving project monitoring.
- For the 2nd call assessment no external experts were available in some SO (1.2, 1.2, 3.2) because of conflict of interest of interested external assessors, or external assessors not fulfilling minimum award criteria. This resulted in an overload of JS staff.
- Although the introduction of the relevance filter helped to filter–out non-relevant projects, it has not significantly reduced the processing time for the 2nd call (maybe the timeframe would have been extended without relevance filter). A prerequisite for a reasonable time duration of calls is a sufficient staffing of the JS, which is currently not given.

Compared to the first call, less emphasis was placed on strategic relevance in the second call (reduction from 75% to 64%), making the second call less selective and allowing more projects to be approved (18% approval rate against 10 % in the 1st call).

It is an open question if an increasing success rate is paid for with less result orientation. From the point of view of the fund absorption, more projects should have been approved, but less so from the perspective of result-orientation. The MC has to decide on the trade-off between these two dimensions.

From the perspective of the evaluator, a stepwise selection procedure brings benefits to the programme and to applicants. For the applicants, there is a good proportion between effort and risk of failure. The applicants can test their proposal in a first stage with a light application. In the second round, the applicants then have to invest a lot in project development, but the success rate is also much higher. The stepwise selection process allows the programme better to intervene and to consult and at the end, better project proposals can be expected. The stepwise process, however, is more labour intensive.

The stepwise process can be applied to both calls and ongoing submission of applications.

7.2.3 Conclusions and recommendations B2

Conclusion 1: The application process works and is very well supported by MA / JS. The assessment criteria are transparent for applicants. The relevance filter introduced in the 2nd call helped the MA/JS to better allocate their scarce staff resources and select programme-relevant proposals. Challenging is the lack of support by NCPs to applicants, whereby major national differences can be noted. The application form has room for improvement. The assessment criteria are over-complex and difficult to communicate to all assessors. A stepwise selection process favours the result orientation and is fair to applicants.

Short-term recommendation

- Inform MC on interim results of the assessment steps. As the assessment process takes a long time, it is useful to keep the MC informed about the interim results. However, it has to be considered that the assessment is performed on the same time for all projects, therefore it would be more time consuming to separate the two assessment steps (relevance and strategic).

Long-term recommendations

- Better structuring and consistency of the project application form. The criticisms on the design of the application form should be taken up in the next programme period. The structure offered should help applicants to describe the individual elements more coherently and without numerous redundancies. The modification of the application form should go hand in hand with the further improvement of harmonised implementation tools offered by Interact.
- Ongoing improvement of the assessment criteria and assessors capacity: The numerous criteria for the strategic and operational assessment can be reduced without loss of quality (the evaluator can provide the MA/JS with a good practice example). The quality assessment should be more based on a common understanding within JS staff and external experts.

7.3 B3: Effectiveness of support for the project implementation

7.3.1 Evaluation questions B3

This point addresses support for beneficiaries, monitoring and reporting, reimbursement, controls, payments. The following aspects will be assessed:

- Contracting
- Support in the start-up phase by MA/JS and NCPs
- Reporting obligations
- Verification of expenditures, payments
- Monitoring visits by MA/JS
- Project changes
- Capitalisation of project results
- Resolution of complaints

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How well is the programme supporting the beneficiaries during the project implementation?
- Is the reporting and monitoring process set up in an efficient way? (e.g. allowing the qualitative monitoring of the outputs, verification of the project progress and achievements, reimbursement of the beneficiaries in due time, reducing the risk of de-commitment and financial corrections)?
- Has the programme set adequate measures to reduce the administrative burden of beneficiaries?

7.3.2 Evaluation findings B3

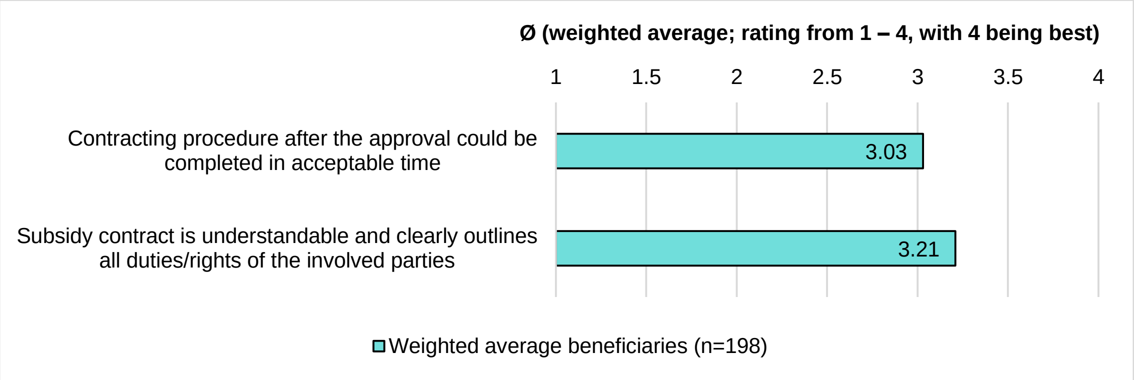
Contracting - works in most cases without complaints

Based on the online survey, the satisfaction of beneficiaries with the contracting phase is average. Most of the respondents (77%) agree that the contracting procedure after the approval (without conditions or after the successful fulfilment of conditions) could be completed in acceptable time. However, with 13% beneficiaries disagreeing and a weighted average of 3 (out of 4 with 4 being best), there is space for improvement.

The beneficiaries (88%) find the subsidy contract understandable; it clearly outlines all duties/rights assigned to the involved parties.

The graph below shows the weighted average (1 to 4 with 4 being best) concerning the contracting procedure.

Figure 21. survey results contracting



Source: online-survey (n=198)

Support to beneficiaries - good support by MA/JS less by NCPs

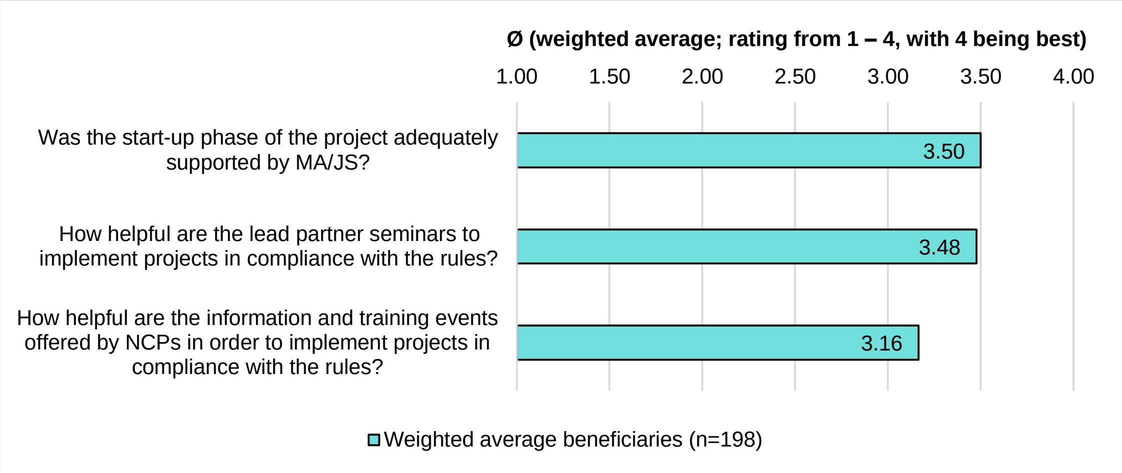
The implementation of the projects is guided by the Implementation Manual, which provides detailed guidance for Lead Partners and project partners of the approved projects in the implementation phase from contracting to project closure, including reporting obligations, payment of the contribution from the EU Funds (ERDF/IPA/ENI) and other programme-related requirements set in the Subsidy Contract.

A table of all the tools provided for LP and PP to guide the implementation of projects is enclosed to the annex.

The MA/JS is perceived by the beneficiaries as very professional body providing good support. Based on the pilot interviews the beneficiaries can get effective formal and informal support from DTP staff. The online survey confirmed the high satisfaction rate with the support by MA/JS (e.g. attendance at the kick-off conference, continuous advice and support through the MA/JS) in the start-up phase of the project.

The information and training events for project partners are helpful to be able to implement projects in compliance with the rules. In this regard, beneficiaries consider the lead partner seminars as very helpful. Still on a satisfactory level but a little less helpful are the information and training events offered by (some) National Contact Points perceived (see figure below).

Figure 22. Survey results support to beneficiaries



Source: online-survey (n=198)

In general, most of the beneficiaries (87%) agree that the programme offers clear and understandable guidelines on how to implement projects (e.g. through the DTP implementation manual). The weighted average of 3.17 is satisfactory.

The implementation manual is detailed and clear. It is clearly explained which costs are eligible and which are not and which methods for the verification of expenditures should be applied (weighted average 3.12). The beneficiaries almost agree (weighted average 3.25) that the reporting obligations for the lead partner and project partners are clearly described.

In case of any question the DTP staff is cooperative, supportive and problem solving, the raised questions are replied quickly. Despite the good support that is provided by the programme, around 20% of respondents use an external consultant to support the management of their project.

Reporting obligations are adequate for the most, but 20% deny this

The projects have to report on the project progress regularly by means of partner report (PP), project progress report (LP) and final report.

Beneficiaries only partly agree that the content of the reports is well structured, has an adequate level of detail and can be filled-in with proportionate effort. The weighted average of 2.99 clearly shows that some improvements could be done here.

Simplify reporting, focus on results

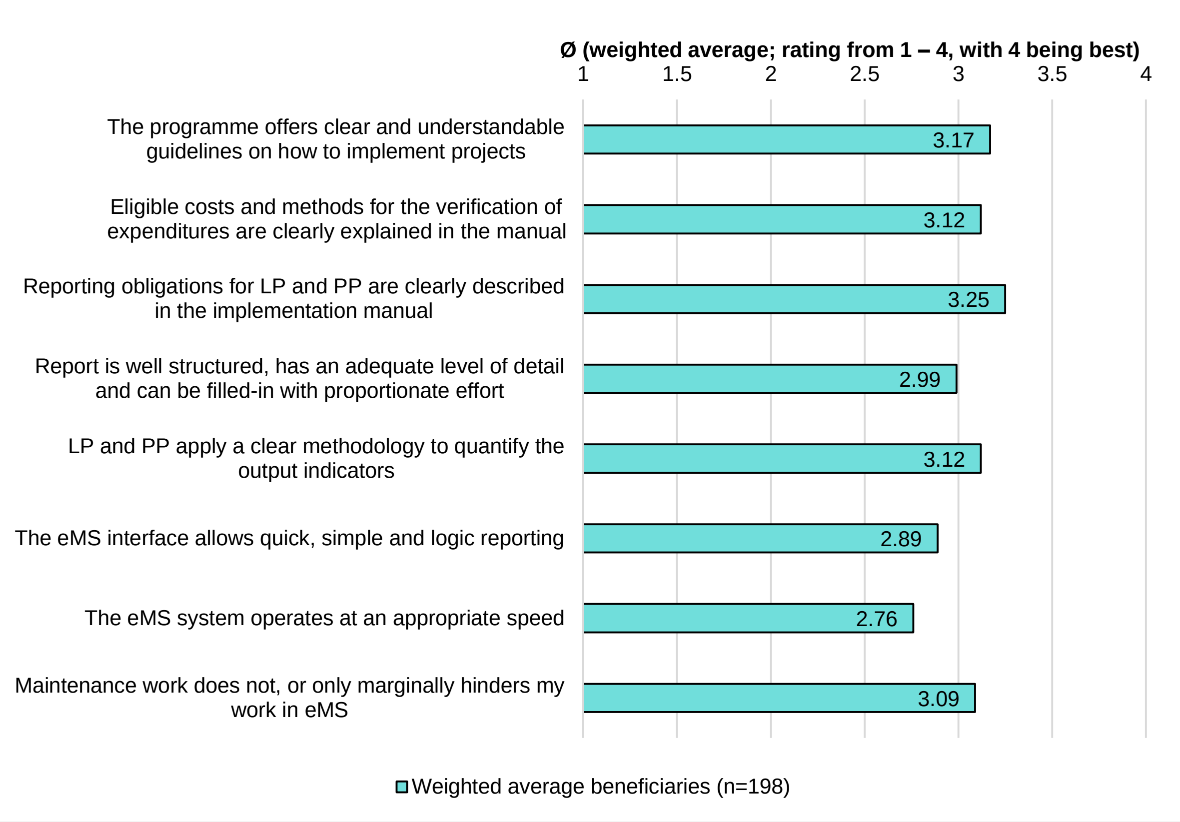
The project reports are structured based on the eMS and the related HIT-tool developed by Interact (DTP cannot modify the standardised structure). However, according to the beneficiaries (approximately 16 comments), the current reporting requirements are too complex and too time-consuming. Reporting efforts are disproportionate to the benefits gained for smaller sized budgets and partner companies. Reporting every 6 months is very time demanding and it causes many administrative costs for all involved parties (PP, LP, FLC, JS). The structure of the project reports contains many repetitions and at the same time, the space available for texts is not proportionate (2,000 characters might not be enough for activity summaries or output descriptions). The output table should also be simplified. Many partners have struggled with the administrative burden. The trainings for lead partners on reporting could be available also for the partners in form of online training (e.g. webinars). Beneficiaries ask for simplification of bureaucracy and more focus on results. By simplification of the processes, the partners could dedicate more time on the implementation of the content and the delivery of project results.

Other comments from the beneficiaries concern the eMS, which according to them is not very practical and inefficient. Some technical improvements would help in the reporting process.

Another issue is the methodology to quantify the output indicators. When more than one partner is involved in the same task, it can be challenging to quantify the output indicators without double counting. Therefore, a clear methodology that is applied by the lead partner and all project partners is required. The MA/JS discovered some problems in this regard, e.g. several partners are counting the same learning interaction, at the end the numbers are aggregated even though it was only one. Most of the beneficiaries, however, are the opinion that they apply a clear methodology to quantify their output indicators (e.g. to avoid double counting of learning interactions).

Satisfaction rates concerning the eMS are acceptable but compared to the average answers relatively low. A considerable number of beneficiaries do not think that the eMS interface allows the whole reporting procedure to be managed quickly, simply and logically. Also the speed is criticised. Further analysis on the eMS is presented in the following chapter (Task C).

Figure 23. survey results implementation manual, reporting, eMS

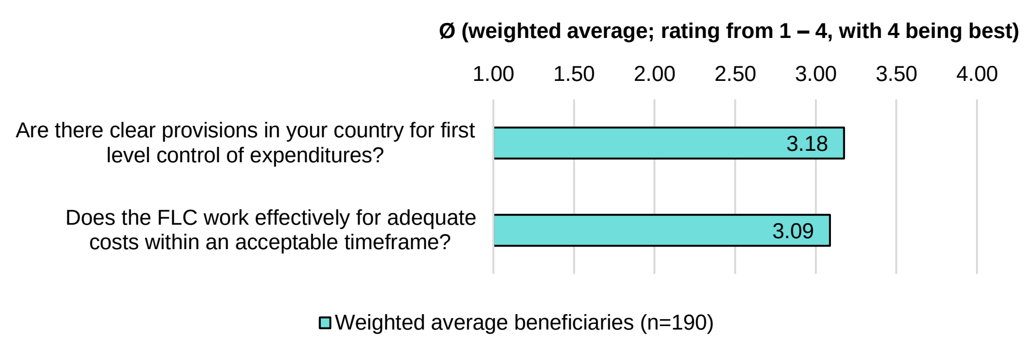


Source: online-survey (n=198)

Most respondents are satisfied with the national FLC systems – around 20% report serious problems

The online survey shows an average result concerning the first level control. 76% of respondents agree and 17% disagree that there are clear provisions in their country for first level control of expenditures (the rest 7% have no opinion). The majority assess that the first level control works effectively for adequate costs within an acceptable timeframe. However, almost 14% definite disagreeing and 8% disagreeing is a considerable high rate of unsatisfied beneficiaries.

Figure 24. survey results FLC



Source: online-survey (n=190)

Demand for clear and transparent FLC rules

Highly criticised were the FLCs by some respondents (approximately 15 comments). The time for checking the reports should be shortened and the control system should be more unified, e.g. with a clear guidance for all FLCs in order to not have so many country specific rules. Some beneficiaries complain about the high costs of the audit and the effort. Some report that the FLC and the JS are following different rules or that the controllers are following rules which are not transparent to project partners. Financial checks are very detailed. More flat rates, example checks or intensive control only for bigger sums would make it easier.

Illustration of problems with FLC by single cases

According to the pilot interviews, the costs for the FLC have more than tripled for Austrian project partners who were already active in the previous period (from 2% -3% to 7% - 10% of the project costs). The project partners only learned afterwards that the FLC costs are so high. The full costs were not allocated in the original budget and must be additionally taken over. Here a cost containment is necessary.

The auditors in AT (decentralized system) apply different interpretations of eligible costs (for example, performance-based salary component are eligible for one auditor and not for another).

Public authorities in Austria who act as LP/PP have a hard time with the assigned external audit experts. These have little understanding of the cost verification system in public bodies. The cooperation is difficult. In the period 2007-2013, cooperation with the FLC (mostly public bodies) was much better.

The rules in the Implementation Manual of the Programme are differently interpreted by different national controllers (especially regarding staff cost reporting and equipment/ depreciation costs). For instance in Croatia, controllers validate entire amount of equipment, not only depreciation costs but in Romania the FLC validates depreciation costs month by month and not the entire amount consisting of depreciation costs at one time.

Monitoring visits by MA/JS are well received

The JS carries out monitoring visits of projects on the spot in the framework of the first-year review process or in necessary cases in order to check the progress of projects and provide consultancy. If available staff resources allow it, monitoring visits are operated by a duo of project officers and financial officer in the ideal case.

The beneficiaries agree that the first-year review as well as the monitoring visit by MA/JS could be implemented with adequate effort and contributed to the successful implementation of the project.

For most respondents minor project changes worked well – 10% experienced problems. More problems were stated in the case of major changes

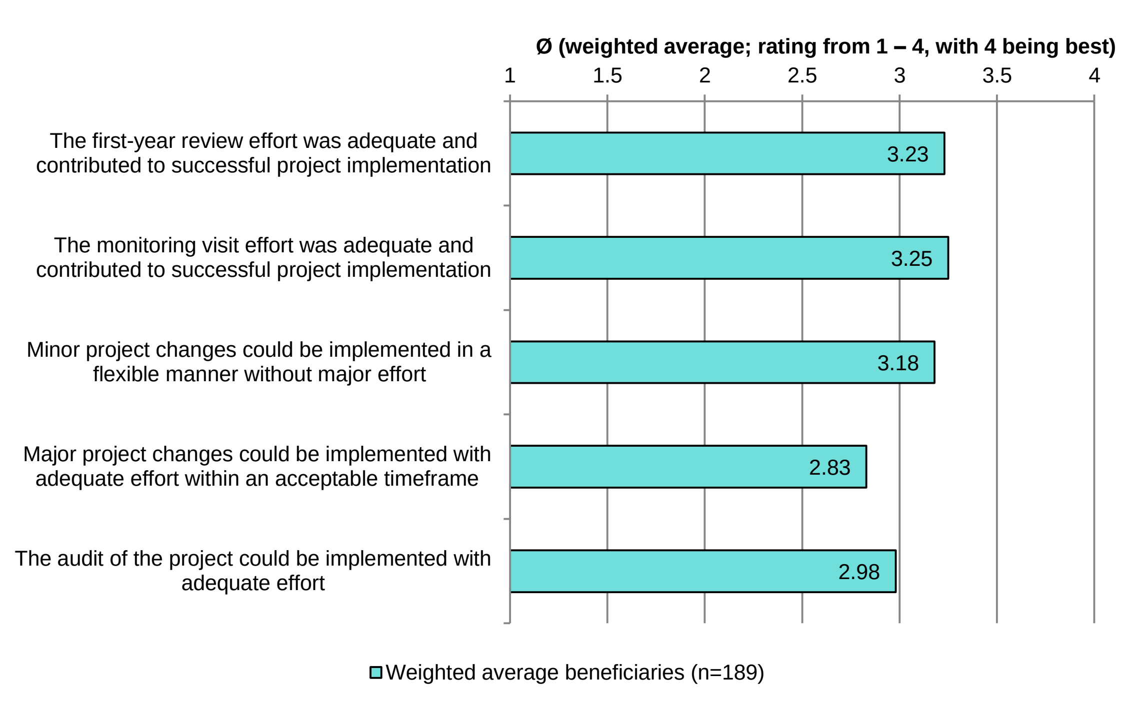
In view of most of respondents, minor project changes could be implemented in a flexible manner without major effort. More dissatisfaction can be observed concerning major project changes. Only a part of beneficiaries think that they could be implemented with adequate effort and within an acceptable timeframe (weighted average of only 2.83 out of 4 with 4 being best).

MA/JS sees some room for improvement to have more flexibility and less administrative burden in the management of project changes.

Hardly any experiences with audits up to now

Most of the respondent's couldn´t answer the question on the effort caused by audit bodies of the programme, EU or Partner State.

Figure 25. survey results monitoring visits, project changes, project audit



Source: online-survey (n=189)

40% think the timeframe for expenditure verification until the payment is too long

The online survey showed that the satisfaction rates about the reimbursement are remarkably low.

Only 53% of all respondents think that the time period from the application for reimbursement (submitted by the lead partner to MA/JS) until the payment to the lead partner (by the Certifying Authority) is acceptable. The weighted average of this question is 2.5 (out of 4 with 4 being best), which is considerably low. Consequently (the timeframe between the payment and the reimbursement is approximately up to 10 months). This fits in well with the evaluation of the FLC data since in 33% of the cases of the 2nd reporting period, the 60-day limit was exceeded.

Lacking financial capacity for pre-financing

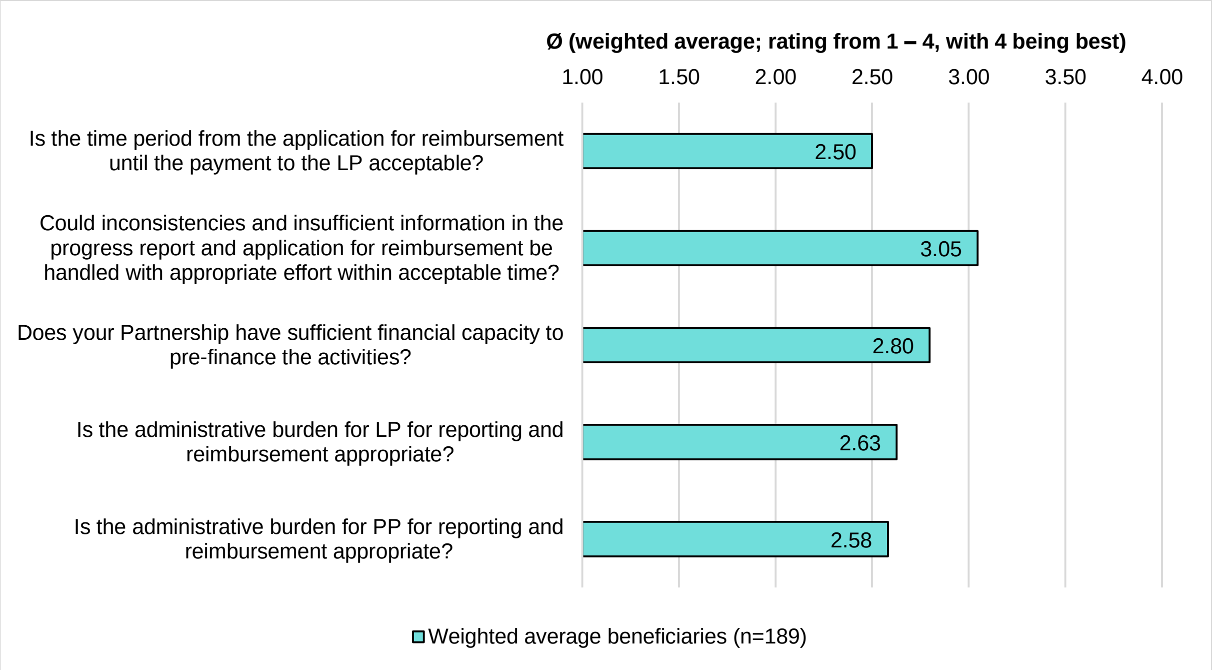
In addition, a higher share of partnerships (28% of respondents) do not have sufficient financial capacity to pre-finance the activities without major difficulties. This is particularly true for smaller companies and NGOs that depend on project funding.

An acceptable but not very good result reached the following question: ‘Could the clarification of inconsistencies and insufficient information in the project progress report and application for reimbursement be handled with appropriate effort and within an acceptable timeframe?’ Beneficiaries rated this point in average with 3.05 (out of 4 with 4 being best).

Long verification period, pre-financing

Some beneficiaries (approximately 10 comments) emphasize that the period for reimbursement should be shortened, as it can cause difficulties for the implementation of project activities. Several partners ask for pre-financing. A suggestion is using existing solutions from other EU funding programmes that pre-fund project partners in advance. However, changes in verification periods have massive consequences on the programme level and have to be carefully considered by MA/JS.

Figure 26. survey results reimbursement



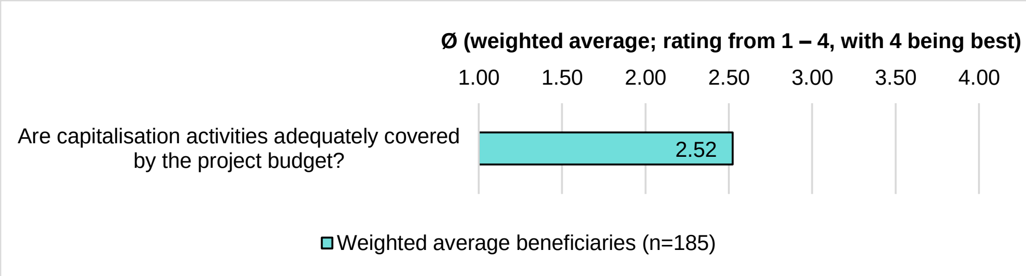
Source: online-survey (n=189)

Capitalisation of project results

Most of the partnerships (65% of respondents) are involved in capitalisation activities to support cross-fertilisation between projects (e.g. joint thematic exchange meetings). However, only around the half of them consider that the capitalisation activities are adequately covered by the project budget. A simple and fast procedure to apply for additional funding for capitalisation would be a big improvement.

According to an interview with an experienced lead partner, the capitalization strategy is very useful because it forms a thematic framework around projects. Working in the poles has a great transnational added value in order to further develop the policy in the cooperation area.

Figure 27. survey results capitalisation



Source: online-survey (n=185)

Clear guidelines and more budget for capitalisation recommended

Comments in the online survey show that beneficiaries appreciate the capitalisation activities, but there is a big knowledge gap. More clear guidelines detailing the roles and responsibilities of beneficiaries are needed. Capitalisation should be better embedded in the programme and it should be clearly communicated what exactly is expected already in the beginning. For implementation, more flexibility, dedicated meetings and more budget is needed.

In this respect, a handbook has been created by the MA/JS in January 2018.

Resolution of complaints

Three types of complains are possible (related to assessment and selection; decisions made by the MA/JS during project implementation; and related to the national control system).

It is noticeable that only 38% of survey respondents are aware of the possibility of filing a complaint about administrative decisions of the programme authorities (MA/JS, MC, national controls). Most of the respondents couldn´t give any answer whether the effort for filing a complaint is proportionate.

In relation to the project implementation, so far no complaints have been submitted to the MA/JS. The magnitude of other problems is unknown. Currently no statistic is available on how many complaints are submitted to MA/JS and national controllers.

7.3.3 Conclusions and recommendations B3

Conclusion 1: Overall, the support for project implementation is adequately organised and works well for most of the beneficiaries. Two points need more consideration by the programme: the flexibility for project changes is very limited; and so far in many cases the timeframe for expenditure verification until the payment is too long.

Short-term recommendations

- MA/JS should critically reflect the flexibility rules for (major) project changes. Management of (major) project changes seems to be overcomplicated now and higher flexibility would be welcomed. The first step is to systematically record problems that occur during project changes. On basis of this information solutions could be considered that allow greater flexibility without jeopardizing the programme´s goals.
- See the short-term recommendation on the implementation of the FLC verification process.

Conclusion 2: Reducing the administrative burden for project implementation is on the long-term agenda of all Interreg-programmes to allow beneficiaries to redeploy their personal resources from administration to content development. However, this depends mainly on the legal framework conditions, which can hardly be influenced by the programme.

Long-term recommendations

- Further development of the HIT – Tools for project implementation Redirect resources for reporting from overly detailed outputs towards result-oriented implementation.
- The control system of Interreg programmes needs to be reformed. A significant share of beneficiaries report serious problems. There are a number of suggestions for improvement, for example, with extensive management verifications (first level control) to be replaced by risk-based verifications on beneficiary’s expenditure. Harmonisation of eligibility rules should be further strengthened. The audit system of Interreg programmes should be reformed, with a strengthened cross-reliance among different levels of audit according to the “single audit approach”.
- The framework conditions set by the EC-regulation should allow pre-financing. Interreg programmes should have enough liquidity to enable pre-payments to beneficiaries, thus reducing administrative burden and ease the access to funding for organisations with limited financial means.

8 Task C. Monitoring System: analysis of the functionality and effectiveness of the programme monitoring system

1.1 Evaluation questions task C

This task will assess the following aspects:

- Legal requirements
- Introduction of the system
- Capacity of eMS to support the management system of the programme
- Access of relevant programme bodies to the monitoring system
- Completeness and quality of the collected data including relevant data for evaluation and performance framework
- Usability of the DTP eMS system from the viewpoint of the implementation of first call applications
- Collection of relevant information in the IT-system which can be used for communication activities at programme level
- Comparison of the DTP eMS system with other systems, especially IMIS, used by the predecessor SEE 2007-2013 Programme
- Identification of necessary adaptations to have a fully operable system in place

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How is the programme management system functioning? Is the monitoring system effectively supporting the management system of the programme?
- How can the monitoring system support the information activity? How can it be improved?
- Have all important data been collected and included in the system?

1.2 Evaluation findings Task C

Legal requirements

According to Article 122 (3) CPR, every Interreg programme is obliged to set up a computerised monitoring system in order to collect all information on project and programme progress: "*Member States shall ensure that no later than 31 December 2015, all exchanges of information between beneficiaries and a managing authority, a certifying authority, an audit authority and intermediate bodies can be carried out by means of electronic data exchange systems.*"

These systems "*shall facilitate interoperability with national and Union frameworks and allow for the beneficiaries to submit all information referred to in the first subparagraph only once*". This latter legal requirement puts special emphasis on the establishment of interfaces with other, already existing information systems in order to allow for automatic exchange of information.

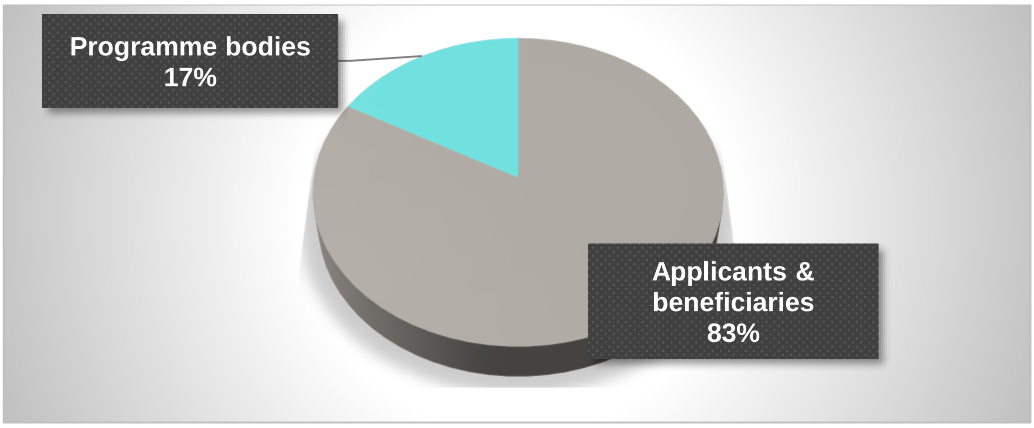
Challenges in the introduction of the system

Applications to the DTP have been submitted in electronic form through the programme homepage from the 1st call in 2016. Then, after 2 unsuccessful tendering processes for the development of its own system, DTP introduced the electronic Monitoring System (eMS) in the middle of 2017. Currently, all documents and data submitted by applicants and beneficiaries are sent electronically through the eMS, with the exception of the hard copies necessary for contracting and supporting documents for payment requests.

In order to be aware of the necessity and importance of eMS it is important to point out that at the time of the evaluation, the system has 1705 users. More than 4/5 of the users are applicants and beneficiaries.

The predecessor South East Europe (SEE) Transnational Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 used its own system, called IMIS2, which is now replaced by eMS. eMS offers a fully web-based user interface, while IMIS required remote desktop connectivity for programme bodies.

Table 15. Distribution of eMS users



Source: eMS user report as of 12 February 2018

Resources and responsibilities to run the systems

MA/JS:

Within DTP MA/JS, eMS-related tasks are distributed to different actors:

- monitoring coordinator: user rights and administrative management tasks
- eMS coordinator: coordination tasks between module coordinators, Hungarian State Treasury and Interact
- module coordinators: content related tasks within a certain module.

All of the above roles are covered by employees who have different additional responsibilities and are not qualified IT professionals. The DTP MA/JS does not employ a dedicated IT officer. Instead, the hosting Ministry has an agreement with the Hungarian State Treasury for performing IT-related tasks.

Hungarian State Treasury:

- operations of eMS
- maintenance of default settings
- release management
- configuration
- plug-ins (development, modification etc)
- certain bug fixing

Setting up and operation of the infrastructure and the support for the application maintenance is undertaken by a unit of the Hungarian State Treasury separate from the CA, according to an agreement signed by the Ministry and the Treasury.

Additionally, the MA/JS has a framework contract for external IT consultancy, utilized on a case-by-case basis, and not exclusively for eMS-related tasks, but also supporting the management in IT-related issues, such as IT security, IT law and others.

Functionality of the system

The eMS is a monitoring system with communication portal to support submission, approval, management and administration of projects in the context of Interreg programmes. Interact developed an open source online application system and monitoring tool whose basic modules can be used free of charge by all Interreg programmes. The functionality of the system is described in manuals provided by Interact.

The adaption of the system to its specific needs, however, is the task of each programme. The continuous development and maintenance of the system is a major task for MA/JS.

From the point of view of the CA, eMS is too much of a monitoring system, and does not support its work in a satisfactory manner (particularly compared with the IMIS of the previous programming period). Due to missing functionality, some of the tasks (e.g. transfer process, statement maintenance) are managed manually in separate sheets by the employees, which, in some cases, may overload the human capacity of CA, could lead to more errors and requires more supervision. eMS generates Statements of Expenditure automatically from the system. However, transmission analytical function is missing and erroneous transmissions are a risk. According to the CA, repayments can only be handled manually in Excel sheets.

From the side of MA/JS, the largest challenge of the eMS implementation is the reporting functionality. The web-based solution provides help with the export of data in the form of MS Excel sheets. It shall be properly recognized that the creation of complex statistics is a very long and difficult procedure, entailing the export of several MS Excel sheets and their compilation. The absence of a user privileges report and a report on spending per partner state were noted during the interviews.

Consulted FLC and beneficiary users are generally satisfied with eMS and primarily highlighted that the system works fast and also that it assists their work, makes all data easily available. On the other hand, it was mentioned that rarely, due to the overloaded servers, slow operation may occur. Data may be viewed only in one window (due to the technical barrier of web-based accessibility), therefore it is necessary to switch between menu items frequently, the speed of which depends on the speed of the internet connection and current system load at any given time. This makes the work more difficult, especially when verifying costs. In addition to the above, there are also cases when Internet Explorer (IE) does not support the flawless operation of eMS, even though the eMS user manual states that “eMS is a web application and can therefore be used with any up-to-date web browser like Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome or Safari. For technical reasons, eMS only supports the latest version of these browsers and one version before.”

An online survey was conducted for gathering all relevant information about experiences of the applicants and the beneficiaries regarding to eMS. Based on some telephone interviews in February 2018, users are mainly satisfied with eMS both in the project application and implementation phases. It helps their work with e-administration and speeds up the procedures.

Several eMS users made observations on the weaknesses of the **reporting functionality**. This is an issue in several financial and administrative processes, in that the system is unable to provide appropriate information for a variety of needs. The system does not have dedicated functionality for reporting or statistics, which limits its usefulness as a monitoring system. The web interface allows an MS Excel export of most (but not all) of its screens, but does not provide fully customizable reports (except for certain financial data). User-generated excel exports must be handled manually and any statistics must be updated continuously by user interaction.

Based on the feedbacks from FLC, it is shown that the system depends on the IT knowledge of users. It should send more notifications, e.g. warning the user before leaving a page without saving, alerts about reception of incoming documentations, reports. In addition, according to the feedbacks of FLC users, eMS does not allow the controller to make corrections after submitting/verifying a report, furthermore, eMS does not automatically detect if a report submitted is not in line with the project partner's budget.

The number of characters (i.e. 2000) for each section of FLC Certificate which can be entered is less than necessary in many cases.

Checklists do not have an option to automatically assign N/A or NO to the whole set of questions (only one click is enough) and there is not any additional tick at the certain cost category.

Knowledge base for users

Besides providing a detailed user manual, Interact provides a user forum for the resolution of certain more difficult issues. The purpose thereof is to provide an interface for users where they can share their questions, experiences with each other and furthermore to provide users with the available updates and improvements for the purposes of their broad distribution. Many other similar systems do not provide such a forum; therefore, the fact that eMS does provide such a forum is a great plus. Until May 2018, this was implemented in BaseCamp2; since then, Interact has opened a new IT communication platform, IBM Connections.

Current state of eMS implementation

It may be stated based on the interview answers that eMS provides basic functionality in a satisfactory manner. It also has been pointed out that the fact that the software is open-source and entails no licensing fees made the implementation thereof easier and was easily adaptable to the local needs due to its simplicity. Being a monitoring and management system, it could partially fulfil its main tasks, with some suggestions for improvements in the system. Having regard to the fact that most of these elements do not affect the everyday use of the system, they mostly serve as aspects of convenience, the improvement would make daily work faster and, in some cases, it would make the parallel data management avoidable. Paper-based document management is very rare nowadays, it is primarily related to payments, as the payment system of the Hungarian State Treasury has not been integrated to the eMS system, therefore it is necessary to record all executed transactions manually.

eMS does not have any interfaces to any other IT systems. It provides a function to export data to KEEP, an IT system operated by Interact, but this data transfer requires user interaction.

Each type of users (e.g. applicant, beneficiary, CA) is now able to connect to the system, to reach all necessary information, to handle projects and to carry out its respective work. E-mailing and communication services of eMS are not in all cases reliable, which would cause problems in such cases. It is not easy to recognise all functions that privileges have and which tasks users are entitled to carry out with the help of these functions. This information is not revealed by eMS itself either. The relevant manuals do not contain accurate descriptions either.

DTP eMS compared to other monitoring systems

In this chapter, we will show the comparison of the eMS system to the IT solution used by other transnational programmes. Next, we compare the eMS used by DTP with IMIS2 used by SEE Programme. Our goal is to put the eMS into context.

Table 16. Monitoring systems and IT human resources used by transnational programmes

Transnational Programme	In-house IT support	No. of positions	Name of position	Monitoring system	Total Programme Budget (1000 €)
Danube Transnational Programme	Partly	-	Not dedicated-	eMS	239 661
North-West Europe	Yes	1	IT information officer	eMS	648 572
North Sea Region	No	-	-	e-Cohesion	328 773
Baltic Sea	Yes	1	Finance and IT Monitoring System Officer	BAMOS	322 978
Central Europe	Yes	2	IT Manager and IT Monitoring System Manager	eMS	298 987
Mediterranean (Med)	Yes	1	IT Manager (Communication unit)	Synergie CTE	264 898
Atlantic Area	No	-	-	SIGI	185 366
South-West Europe (Sudoe)	No	-	-	eSudoe	141 879
Alpine Space	Partly	-	Not dedicated	eMS	139 751
Adriatic-Ionian (Adrion)	Yes	1	eMS Officer (provided by hosting institution)	eMS	99 460
Northern Periphery and Arctic	No	-	-	eMS	78 636

Transnational Programme	In-house IT support	No. of positions	Name of position	Monitoring system	Total Programme Budget (1000 €)
Balkan-Mediterranean	No information				33 640

Source: Websites of the concerned transnational programmes. Programme budget data is extracted from Open Cohesion Data, as provided by the European Commission; these figures only include the ERDF contribution and the attached national co-financing.

In the table above, job titles of individuals are taken from the programme websites without a detailed examination of their exact portfolio of tasks and qualifications, which is beyond the scope of this evaluation project. Even so, it is apparent that at least one person in an explicitly IT role is employed by most transnational programmes, particularly the larger ones. However, it is a common practice in such programmes to have one individual perform several roles, and it is likely that many of these individuals take on other responsibilities in addition to their (primary) IT tasks.

eMS compared with IMIS 2

The IMIS2 (Interreg Monitoring and Information System) is the predecessor monitoring system of IMIS3 and eMS, but the three systems are completely different, developed by different companies, and using mainly different technologies. IMIS2 and IMIS3 are linked to each other only by the name, there is no direct relation between them. IMIS3, like DTP-used eMS, is a fully web-based monitoring system. Thus, there are many similarities. The Java-based IMIS2 was developed by a banking software developer company, thanks to this IMIS2 had strong banking knowledge and functions, but also had advanced project management features. At the same time, IMIS3 and eMS were both created by companies developing management and monitoring systems. In addition, it is a significant difference that IMIS2 has web-based front office interface and a Java-based back office interface. Therefore, back office could only use the IMIS2 software on dedicated computers. IMIS3 and eMS, on the other hand, are fully web-based, so users can access the system online wherever they are.

IMIS2 — presently still the most advanced version of IMIS — supported SEE, HU-SK, HU-RO, HU-HR and HU-SRB, HUSKROUA Programmes[4]. eMS supports numerous cross border and transnational Programmes. Accordingly, due to the many similarities with eMS, IMIS2 was added to the comparison, which was otherwise used earlier by the SEE Programme.

Overall, eMS is an easy to use program. There are some improvements missing from the system that would support day-to-day work, and previously used IMIS2 system had these features. Especially mentioning that eMS offers less developed financing features at the moment, and there are other missing features in comparison with IMIS2 still to be noted:

- workflow,

[4] SEE - South East Europe Programme
HU-SK - Interreg Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HU-RO - Interreg Hungary-Romania Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HU-HR - Interreg Hungary-Croatia Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HU-SRB IPA CBC - Interreg - Hungary-Serbia Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HUSKROUA ENPI CBC - Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Cross-border Cooperation Programme

- some reporting functions,
- automatically transferred data, interfaces in financial module from / to the paying authority
- ergonomic features that make everyday use easier and faster
- proper version management.

However, the development of workflow and reporting functions are intended by DTP.

Concerning the developments it is important to point out, that eMS is a web-based platform, thus using a widely known programming language (html and php). This has many advantages due to the fact that inhouse IT skills are less necessary, tasks can be easily done by external actors, for example by the Hungarian State Treasury. In addition, it is capable of running plugins, which makes it easier to add customization to the base eMS platform.

For further developments of the DTP eMS, possible directions include the following:

A. Within the framework of eMS are two possible scenarios.

   - Within the framework of eMS, cooperation with Interact continues the developments, which are expected to be realized if many users are demanding the same development, otherwise it may be individually requested for development. Developments involving many users are time-consuming, but cost less, as they are split between many programmes. On the other hand, the individually requested development is faster, but more expensive.
   - The eMS platform will be continued to use, however, it will include improvements that will move away from the common platform so they cannot always benefit from bug fixes and improvements regularly issued by Interact.

B. The current version will be retained for eMS, so improvements and bug fixes will still arrive and no upgrade costs will occur. However, administrative burdens remain at the current level, and therefore, due to the human resource capacity constraints, additional costs may arise.

Table 17. Comparison of the main features of IMIS2 and eMS

Assessment criteria	IMIS 2	eMS	Notes
General features overall	**++**	**+++**	
			IMIS2 was developed in Java, which was popular at the time. It is not open source, and can only be developed by a Java developer. This meant in-house IT knowledge was not a viable option, and outsourcing of IT was a necessity. In contrast, eMS works as an open source web-based monitoring system. This means that support can be outsourced simply, but the handling of basic processes in-house is also a possibility.
Open source, further development possibilities	+	+++	
In-house IT knowledge beneficial	+	+++	
Compatibility and accessibility	++	+++	
Front office interface	+++	+++	
Reliability	+++	+++	

Assessment criteria	IMIS 2	eMS	Notes
Finance module features overall	**+++**	**+**	
Handling of beneficiary reporting process	++	+++	IMIS2 was developed by a banking software developing company, thus the IMIS2 financial functionality is strong. eMS does not have interfaces, besides that beneficiary reporting processes and handling of irregularities and recoveries can only be done manually.
Handling of payment process	+++	+	
Handling of irregularities and recoveries	+++	+	
Handling of progress report	+++	++	
Preparation of Application for Payment to the European Commission	+++	+++	
Management features overall	**+++**	**++**	
Application features	+++	+++	The application process is fully automated for both software. Call parametering is properly sophisticated for both software, but to support day-to-day work for all stakeholders, some ergonomic shortcomings are visible for eMS. eMS offers very basic functionality for access rights management.
Call parametering	+++	+++	
Daily-work facilitating features	+++	++	
Access rights management	+++	+	
Beneficiary interface usability	++	++	
Monitoring features overall	**++**	**+**	
Reporting features	+++	+	IMIS2 has very strong reporting functions. In contrast eMS has very basic and insufficient reporting functionality, with the possibility of creating custom reports by scripts, currently done by the Hungarian State Treasury. Following up indicators is difficult in eMS.
User-friendly data access	++	+	
Exporting features	+	++	
On time follow up of financial/management processes	+++	-	
Follow up of indicators	+++	+	
Advanced Features overall	**++**	**+**	
Comparisons of different project versions	+++	++	Based on the interviews the lack of the workflow is a serious deficiency of eMS. For this reason a workflow plugin is being planned. It is a big advantage that eMS has regular and free updates and bug fixing by Interact. Involvement of external IT support required to perform similar tasks.
Logging of user activity history	+++	+	
e-signature	-	-	
Workflow engine	+++	-	
Regular updates, error fixings	+	+++	
Built in checks, warnings	+++	++	

Legend: (-): unavailable or inadequate feature; (+): adequate; (++): good; (+++) excellent. Source: multicontact

eMS costs compared to other systems

The costs associated with the development, maintenance and subsequent further development of IMIS2 are summarized in the following table:

Table 18. Summary of IMIS2 costs between 2008 and 2015

	Original software development and deployment	Maintenance and support	Additional software developments	Total cost for entire programme period
IMIS2	126 994 €	205 076 €	268 152 €	600 220 €

Source: MA/JS data. Edited by multicontact. Exchange rate 1 EUR =310 HUF. All costs indicated are calculated with VAT included.

The costs of eMS do not allow a direct comparison with the above data, since the associated costs are very different. The introduction of eMS did not entail a license fee for DTP, and the cost of original software development was covered by Interact. According to a news bulletin[5] from Interact dating from October 2015, the total cost of original software development covered by Interact between 2014 and 2015 was 625 920 € with VAT included. Ongoing development and bug fixing for eMS is also covered by Interact.

For the deployment of eMS, DTP paid 197 055 EUR to the Hungarian State Treasury (HST). The applicable contract with HST, which covers operation, maintenance, bug fixing for bugs that do not originate from the core eMS code, as well as minor additional software developments (see above), entails an annual fee of 116 129 EUR. This is currently covered through a separate contract as an indirect TA cost by a flat-rate.

As visible from the above text, comparing the costs of different IT systems is very difficult depending on what cost is included and how, or even what code is included in what system and what not. Such comparisons can very easily lead to false conclusions. According to the Interact news bulletin referred to above, Interreg programmes that develop their own monitoring systems generally spend 486.360 – 716.040 EUR on the original software development alone, excluding VAT. Applying a rate of 20% VAT, which would be typical across Europe, these numbers come to 583.632 EUR and 859.248 EUR, respectively. According to Interact, this estimate range is based on the feasibility study carried out in 2013 by Interact, which provided a very conservative estimation of how much the development of an Interreg monitoring system software could cost, fulfilling e-cohesion requirements.

Survey results

Satisfaction rate of SMF applicants regarding user-friendliness, support

This question was answered by 82 participants, which number is still low to allow detailed conclusions to be drawn from the answers. Some criticisms of eMS speed was received, but the overall survey results of eMS speed show a general satisfaction of users with the speed – those atypical cases where speed was an issue may well be due to local network conditions.

A frequent response to the question about eMS support team's problem-solving ability was ‘no opinion’. This latter can be considered as a positive result because probably the

[5] Fifth Update on the eMS, INTERACT support to Interreg programmes in fulfilling the requirements of e-Cohesion, 16th INTERACT II Monitoring Committee meeting (MC16), 29 October 2015, Riga, Latvia

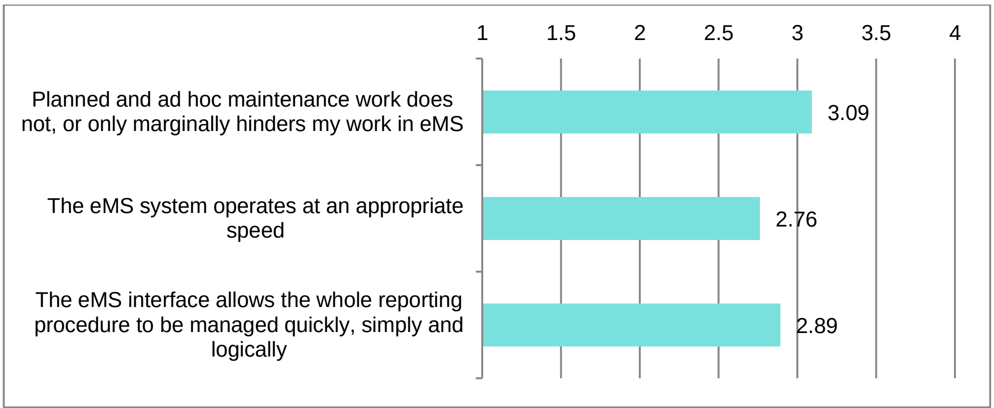
respondents did not have to contact the eMS support team. This is supported by an observation from the MA/JS that eMS works with minimum need for contacting support/helpdesk – probably due to its simplicity.

Satisfaction rate of beneficiaries regarding reporting, operation, maintenance

This question was answered by 195 participants, which number is sufficient to draw detailed conclusions from the answers. The most important finding is that at least 2/3 of the answers to each question are positive. This suggests that users, beneficiaries are generally satisfied with the eMS. However, in this place it should be pointed out the criticism received about system speed. As noted above, the overall survey results on system speed were more positive than negative – however, system speed may well be an issue for specific users. This can easily be caused by local network conditions, which is beyond the influence of DTP eMS – a common issue with all web-based IT systems. Another positive finding is the lack of maintenance reviews. This means that the maintenance is well designed and does not cause any disruption to the operation.

The figure below shows the weighted average of the answers to the questions. Higher value means more positive opinion. Overall, it can be seen that the planning of the maintenance does expressly satisfied the users. The eMS features are also delighted by the users. The speed of eMS does not raise any critical problems that need to be remedied quickly.

Figure 28. Satisfaction rate of beneficiaries with eMS (weighted average of answers)



Source: online survey. Edited by multicontact.

In the first half of 2018, Interact also conducted a survey on the use of eMS. The results of the Interact survey are largely in agreement with the results of the present survey. The introduction of eMS was primarily due to the positive experience and the free use of the system. The system is suitable for every need. Thus, substantial resources and time can be saved. eMS users generally show a relatively high level of satisfaction.

1.3 Conclusions and recommendations task C

Conclusion 1: eMS was implemented as “Plan B”, but what it promises it does fairly well

After two public procurement procedures for the development of a new IT system failed, a functional IT monitoring system was needed to support programme implementation.

eMS, having been a plan B all along, provided basic functionality quickly and for no licensing fee, so the choice to deploy it was evident. eMS has limited ambitions and does not offer everything that programme management may need, but **what it promises it does fairly well**. It provides a simple web interface which allows all applicants, beneficiaries and programme management bodies to interact with the system and provides the basic functionality of a monitoring system. Among other positives of the system, we want to draw special attention to the different platforms offered for sharing knowledge amongst users.

Conclusion 2: The poor reporting functionality of eMS is the biggest challenge for the programme management bodies

eMS does not provide necessary support for financial and administrative procedures, which in turn limits its usefulness as a monitoring system. The web interface allows excel export of most (but not all) of its screens, but the system does not provide fully customizable reports or a dedicated reporting/statistics module. Among other reports missing, the system is currently unable to produce a privileges matrix or a report on spending per partner state. The web interface is unable to extract much of the information that the system contains. Certain reports, however, can be generated by custom-made scripts written specifically for that particular report. At this time four pre-defined reports are being retrieved at regular intervals.

Short-term recommendations

- Weaknesses in the reporting functionality of eMS are most easily made up for with the use of custom-made scripts to produce desired reports. Having the Hungarian State Treasury do such scripts for standard (regularly required) reports is fine, although the definition and development of such reports can easily prove to be a lengthy and complicated procedure. For ad-hoc reports, flexibility and reaction time are much more important considerations. For these, options include employing internal staff with the necessary programming skills to write such scripts, or deploying specialized software for data analysis.

Conclusion 3: eMS lacks a sophisticated user interface and important functionalities are missing

eMS provides an unsophisticated user interface which is economical for simple, basic tasks, but insufficient for the complex management tasks often required by DTP. System users would need a more ergonomic, user-friendly interface; as an important example, user roles should be selectable on the interface.

Other challenges include the facts that the eMS does not offer:

- interfaces with other established IT systems
- a workflow system
- e-signature functionality.

Short-term recommendation

- For possible improvements in eMS, compare the reduction in HR costs, decrease in risks of human errors and other benefits likely to result from such improvements to the cost of software development, maintenance and support before making a decision on whether to implement those improvements.

Conclusion 4: Open source software, eMS is easy to keep up to date

- It is a great advantage of eMS that the developer Interact regularly ensures bug fixes and updates to keep eMS up to date. As a result of these, maintenance costs are kept low. In this context, the Hungarian State Treasury performs a number of minor development needs and bug fixes. This way, the system can be operated continuously and downtimes are minimalized. This is also confirmed by the relevant replies from online survey.
- eMS offers the possibility to implement custom scripts and plug-ins while not forking the software. Thanks to this, it is possible to upgrade the system with plugins. MA/JS is considering to purchase an additional workflow plugin to the eMS.
- eMS's open source nature allows a lot of room for IT solutions customized to the specific needs of DTP. However, these possibilities may only truly be capitalized upon with access to proper IT expertise to allow a deeper understanding of IT needs and possibilities.

Short-term recommendation

- The MA/JS should consider different possible models of channelling IT-related knowledge into the management of the programme, including employment of a dedicated IT officer or relying more on external IT expertise. When considering these options, the potential benefits should be compared to the expected increase in HR/consultancy costs.

Long-term recommendation

- DTP should start considering possible models for providing IT support to programme implementation for the next programming period between 2021-2027. **Options** include the following:
  - **Stay with eMS**: Interact may decide to re-write eMS and/or to change the accompanying financial model, but DTP may count on the continuation of eMS in one form or another. Staying with eMS comes with the advantages of development costs being split among many programmes, and that already accumulated knowledge can be utilized for the future in the development of eMS. Also, eMS's open source nature allows customizations and plugins while not forking the software.
  - **Consider other existing monitoring systems**, including possibly IMIS3, where DTP may join.
  - **Develop DTP's own monitoring system:** An individually developed monitoring and management system gives the opportunity of full personalization; it is also faster (once procurement issues are out of the way), but likely more expensive. Given that the current version of eMS can be developed free of charge due to its open-source nature, even eMS may form the basis for a future independent monitoring system.

9 Task D. Analysis of the implementation of the Communication Strategy

Short introduction

The evaluation assesses the effectiveness of communication activities at different levels:

- Programme level
- Partner State level
- Project level

9.1 D1: Quality and effectiveness of the programme communication strategy

9.1.1 Evaluation questions D1

The evaluation assesses both the quality of the communication strategy and the effectiveness of its implementation:

- Outline of the communication strategy and resources for its implementation
- Operational planning of the communication activities by annual work plans
- Implementation status and effectiveness of the planned communication activities and communication tools to implement the communication strategy
- Achievement of communication result and impact indicator target values by end of 2017
- Comparative analysis of DTP communication activates with CE and Alpine Space programme

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the strategy for programme communication and the yearly plans sound?
- Does communication contribute to reaching the specific programme objectives?
- How effective are the approaches and activities for reaching the communication objectives (e.g. for involving competent partners)?
- Are all the indicators foreseen in the Communication Strategy fulfilled at this stage of the programming period?

9.1.2 Evaluation findings D1

Provisions by the communication strategy

The DTP developed its own communication strategy approved by the Monitoring Committee (MC). The Communication Strategy is the framework for the programme communication for the entire programme period. The four overall objectives are:

- Raise general awareness towards the DTP, its activities and its potential impact in the region
- Attract potential project partners to apply to the programme and generate increased demand in participation in the DTP
- To ensure the generation and quality of the DTP projects
- Demonstrate the role of the EU and ensure transparency about the use of public funding

The indicative communication budget for the entire programme period is around 1 million EUR financed by the Technical Assistance. The operational bodies carrying out the communication strategy are the Joint Secretariat and the network of National Contact Points. Within the JS a communication officer was assigned to coordinate the implementation of the communication strategy. The communication officer works closely with the project communication officers assigned by the projects (it is mandatory for projects to have a Communication Officer in charge).

The communication strategy is streamlined to implementation through the **annual work plan** drawing detailed plans for how the Strategy objectives are to be fulfilled during each year. The annual work plans demonstrated what activities are carried out under the four overall objectives of the communication strategy. So far, in total four DTP Communication Plans covering the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 have been elaborated. The plans are getting more and more detailed and extensive (from 12 pages in 2015 to 25 pages in 2018). Beside the context and the main objectives, the communication plans contain the planning of resources, a list of the main communication activities in the corresponding year and a chapter on communication activities according to the objectives. From 2016, the communication officer invested extra effort to gain an overview on national communication activities.

Resources for communication activities at programme level

At present, only one communication officer is employed (a second position is planned).

The communication officer devotes 40% to 90% of his resources for consultancy of projects (IT-support and content support). This is much more than originally planned. Unexperienced but also ambitious project partners demand support from the programme level to introduce the new system of project websites.

The communication officer is partly assisted by the project officers. The project officers receive the progress reports and assess the communication part. They also support the communication officer in assessing the quality of the communication activities. When checking the communication part, the project officers take into consideration the communication officer’ feed- back sent to the projects by email. The decision on approval of the content part (or request for completion etc.) of the report is done by the project officers.

The communication officer, however, assesses all the project communication plans and, supported by the project officers, the quality of project activities on communication. He checks the quality of the project communication activities and provides detailed tips to improve the website, analytics, the project communication plan, the visual identity of the project. He also points out to the possibilities of the programme and asks for contribution. Every project communication officer receives feedback (in total around 100 feedbacks are envisaged).

The JS project officers take part in project kick off meetings and can discuss communication activities of the projects. However, they have not received a training on communication yet, which could improve their knowledge/capacities in their daily work.

Communication tools to implement the communication strategy

The communication strategy is implemented by a mix of various communication tools (see table below). At the end of 2016, all communication tools were available and fully functional and there is an increased interactivity between MA/JS and target groups for communication.

Table 19. Implementation of communication tools

Communication tools	Implementation status	Performance control
Events of different types (physical meetings and trainings such as kick-off event, annual event, seminar, trainings, third party events)	Start of implementation in 2015	Number of participants Collection of feedback
DTP website	Start of implementation in 2015	Online analytics
Project websites within the DTP website (mandatory; no eligible costs to create other websites)	In progress (in total around 100 are envisaged) User Manual for DTP project websites Project logos are created by MA/JS	Individual assessments
Automatic transfer of information from eMS to project websites	Planned to be put in place for future updates	
e-Newsletter	3-4 per year related to calls, events	Online analytics
Social media	In 2017, the IVY Interreg Reporter has supported the DTP social media posts	Online analytics
Publications in different formats (printed, online, videos etc.)	Start of implementation in 2015	Number of publications printed and distributed
Promotional materials in different formats (printed, online, videos etc.)	Start of implementation in 2015	Number of materials printed/produced and distributed
Media relations (press releases, press conferences, online newsletter etc.)	Start of implementation in 2015	Difficult to track as most media coverage is performed at project and national level
Capitalisation Strategy (cross fertilisation between projects)	12 thematic poles; one of the projects acts as pole leader; PACs co-lead the poles	An analysis out of a survey addressed to the main Capitalisation actors has been produced along with a Handbook
Training on communication for project partners	Start of implementation in 2017	Number of participants Collection of feedback

Source: Communication working plans, interview

Effectiveness of the communication tools in the light of quantitative and qualitative evidence

The implementation of the communication strategy is monitored through a set of predefined result and impact indicators and related target values for most of the communication instruments and activities (see chapter 9). The communication activities are evaluated by different evaluation tools, e.g. questionnaires to collect feedback by participants in programme events, website visitors, focus groups.

The monitoring and evaluation data provided by MA/JS as well as further findings from the online analytics (a set of indicators and data from the online performance) and the online-survey are interpreted in the following part. Selected tables with detailed information are provided in the annex.

A quantification of the indicators on the communication activities show that almost all targets have been achieved so far with the exception of two target values regarding the expected number of participants in the annual event 2016 and the number of thematic events in 2016 and 2017 which were not fully met.

Events of different types

The number of participants in the events has been overachieved in 2015 and 2017, and almost achieved in 2016. The number of annual events, lead applicant events and lead partner seminars is in line with the targets. Only for the thematic events and communication trainings, the target could not be reached by now. However, for the communication trainings the target will be reached in July 2018 when a training for the 2nd call projects is planned.

In order to measure the satisfaction with the programme events, questionnaires are used to collect feedback from the participants.

According to these questionnaires, participants were most satisfied with the PAC call Lead Partner seminar. However, with only two persons participating in the survey, this is little meaningful. Very high satisfaction rates are also given to the 6th EUSDR Annual Forum (a score of 4.59 out of 5), the communication training (4.42), the Seed Money Facility launch event (4.3) as well as the Kick-off event (4.27).

The lowest satisfaction rates, with scores below 4, are achieved by the two Lead Partner seminars that have been addressed to 1st call approved projects in 2017. However, this is still an acceptable result. The online-survey confirms that most of the beneficiaries consider the lead partner seminars as helpful in order to implement projects in compliance with the rules.

A table, which summarizes the overall satisfaction per event, is presented in the annex.

DTP website

The growth in terms of number of website visits and page views was about three times from 2016 to 2017. The development of new webpages including project webpages impacted the number of sessions and page views. Both calls obviously attracted a significant number of visitors. According to the page views, there was more interest in the second one, yet the difference is not substantial.

Even if the number of page views in 2017 is significantly higher, the bounce rate kept at reasonable levels. Staying below 50 per cent bounce rate is definitely a good sign in two aspects: the web content is engaging and SEO is rather accurate.

The increase in website visits in 2017 is reinforced with bounce rates similar to the previous year. It is an indication that the content is attractive and engaging. Some websites increase their numbers of visitors but their bounce rate increases also massively.

The bounce rate measures the interaction of users with the website. If users enter the website but do not click on any link and close the window, that counts as bounce rate.

Usually uninterested users increase the bounce rate. A rising bounce rate is a sure sign that the website is boring or off-putting. The figures for DTP are reasonable.

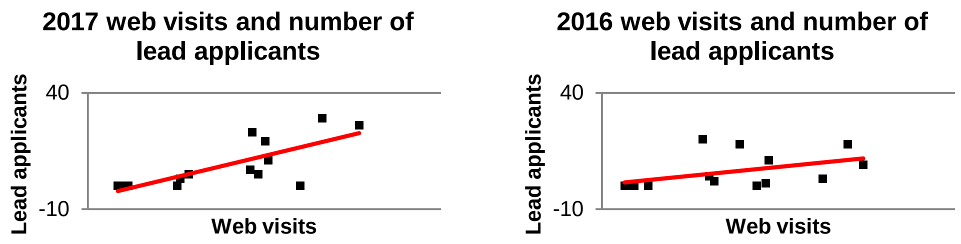
SEO (search engine optimisation) affects the positioning of websites on search engines. Usually good SEO websites rank at the top of online searches. Efficient SEO includes accurate keywords, strategic linking and regular updates for webpages to rank high on search engines like Google when users type related keywords.

Another significant finding is the correlation between the percentage of website visits per country and number of lead applicants presenting proposals as well as the participation of lead partner and project partner per country. The deeper the product perception is, the higher the number of lead applicants looking for funding. This is particularly clear in 2017 (see graphic below). A figure on the strong correlation between participation of LA&PP and website traffic per country can be found in the annex.

The correlation between web visits and lead applicants is an important point for the communication objective number 2 (attracting potential project applicants and generate more partners). If people do not know about the programme, they will not apply for funding. Online communication strategies could be carried out to raise the perception of the programme and drive people to the website. It is evident, especially in 2017 that users in countries who visited the website applied for funding and vice versa. The low numbers of website traffic for some countries indicate lack of promotion (and the correlation between web visits and applications).

This issue could be handled both online and offline. Online communication strategies could be carried out to raise the perception of the programme and drive people to the website. An offline communication strategy could include organisation of events by NCPs in order to increase the number of partners in those countries.

Table 20. Correlation between web visits and no of lead applicants per country (especially evident in 2017)



Source: Metis; Gabriel Alvarez

The figures for acquisition (website traffic sources) remained stable in both years. Organic searches were the main method used to access the DTP website (users accessed the website through online searches). It is expected that a tool like the new Interreg website will increase referral traffic (referral traffic is used to describe visitors to your site that come from direct links on other websites rather than directly from online searches).

The global increase of Internet use on mobile phones is exemplified by the figures in 2016 and 2017. Even if the number of mobile phone users represents one sixth of the audience, the efforts to make a responsive website pay off.

Project websites within the DTP website

The DTP uses standardised websites for project level, which is cost-efficient and better to monitor but implies more workload to MA/JS to establish sites, give continuous support in the website management and push the projects for quality. Currently there is no automatic transfer of information from eMS to project websites, which are updated by hand. Automatic transfer is planned in summer 2018.

A screening of the standardized project websites (assessment of the quality of the websites of the 54 projects approved in the 1st call) as well as the perception of beneficiaries and stakeholders from the online-survey is presented in chapter 9.3 D3: Quality of the communication strategy implementation at project level.

e-Newsletter

Eight e-newsletters have been sent out during 2016 and 2017. The open rate for the last issue was nearly 20 per cent for a contact database of roughly 10,000 people. Since the contact database has been increasing during the last couple of years it is hard to estimate the open rate for previous e-newsletters. In any case, open rates of around 20 per cent are still reasonable numbers. Open rates measure the number/percentage of users that open an email.

Regular e-newsletters are sent but no targeted e-newsletters to thematic groups are possible at the current stage.

Social media

Facebook is the most used tool by DTP and also the one having the higher amount of followers with over 2,000 users. Twitter and LinkedIn are used to a smaller extent and the engagement is much lower.

There is a particularly telling number concerning Facebook: a correlation can be found in the number of posts, engagement and website traffic coming from social media. The more posts, the more engagement, the more visits to the website. It means that the more social media work, the more interaction: people talk about it, share content, like content and, eventually, the more users visit the website.

Publications and promotional materials

The number of printed and distributed flyers and posters already exceeds the target. Brochures and programme catalogues will be produced in 2018 and 2019.

In regard to the promotion material, no quantified targets have been set. The target is variable, in function of materials and to cover the number of participants in the events. So far, the following promotional items have been produced and distributed: Rubik’s cubes, notepads, folders, pens, umbrellas, bags and pendrives.

Media relations

The target that has been set for media relations is 2 articles/year per country. However, it is very difficult to track all media appearances in the projects and national level (events organised by the NCPs). At programme level in general, several Hungarian media mentioned the programme in articles about the Kick-off event organised in 2015 and the EUSDR Annual Forum 2017.

Capitalisation Strategy

The DTP launched a Capitalisation Strategy (which is more than communication) in order to create and make use of synergies between projects and better disseminate their results (see DTP website). The capitalisation is an experiment and started informally after the 1st call was concluded. The 12 thematic poles are co-chaired by PACs.

From the perception of a lead partner the capitalization strategy is very useful because it forms a thematic framework around projects. Working in the poles has a great transnational added value in order to further develop the policy in the cooperation area.

Training on communication for project partners

One communication training is foreseen per call. The communication training for 1st call approved projects was implemented in January 2017 for 78 participating communication officers.

The programme offers a package with information (Communication toolkit which was adapted from Interact Toolkit and which will be updated soon with new chapters), Visual Identity Guidelines for DTP projects; User Manual for DTP project websites; project logo and poster templates.

Comparative analysis with CE and Alpine Space programme

The following comparative analysis includes quantitative and qualitative information of the implementation of communication activities of three Interreg Transnational programmes: Danube, Central Europe and Alpine Space. It comprises indicators of online and offline performance during 2016 and 2017 as well as human resources devoted to communication. It also addresses the qualitative aspect of several communication initiatives such as events, online presence and visual identity.

Table 21. Comparative analysis of communication activities

Indicator	Danube	Central Europe	Alpine Space
Total Programme budget	263 million €	299 million €	140 million €
Communication budget	1,064,000 €	1,042,000 €	775,000 €
Countries in the programme area	14	9	7
Human resources on communication	1 permanent (full time); 1 intern (80% for 11 months in 2017)	3 permanent (105 hours a week); 1 intern (100% from Aug. 2017 to Feb. 2018)	1 permanent (full time); 1 intern (80% for 6-8 months a year); 1 temporary (90% from Oct. 2016 to March 2017)
Calls in 2014-2020 programming period	4 (including EUSDR PAC and Seed money call)	2	2
Communication workshops in 2016-2017	1	2	1

Indicator	Danube	Central Europe	Alpine Space
Other events organised or co-organised in 2016-2017 (inc. national info days)	34	21	28
Website sessions (visits)	2016: 78,580 2017: 229,222	2016: 71,864 2017: 286,536	2016: 65,409 2017: 80,200
Social media followers by end of 2017	Facebook: 2,038 Twitter: 715 LinkedIn: 1,435 YouTube: 51	Facebook: 3,843 Twitter: 2,581 LinkedIn: 5,348 YouTube: 177	Facebook: 1,629 Twitter: ~2,000 LinkedIn: ~3,000 YouTube: 61
Social media posts in 2016 and 2017	Facebook: 187 Twitter: 182	Facebook: 220 Twitter: 416	Facebook: 184 Twitter: 400
Videos in 2016-2017	25	71	10
Promotional materials (brochures, giveaways etc.) in 2016-2017	1 flyer, 1 poster, giveaways — Rubik's cubes, notepads, pens, umbrellas, bags, pen-drives, folders	2 leaflets, 1 map on wooden board, rollups, exhibition pillars, giveaways —notebooks, sets of cards, posters, pens, notebooks, lanyards, project fact sheets, cotton bags, calendars, usb memory keys	1 brochure, 4 project briefs, 1 report. No giveaways as the programme supports sustainability through greening
e-newsletters in 2016-2017	8 e-newsletters	8 e-newsletters and 8 direct mails	8 e-newsletters and 3 newsflashes

Source: Metis; Gabriel Alvarez

Website structures nowadays strive for simplification to avoid excessive clicking and loading of pages before reaching the desired content. In this respect, the three-click principle sets a maximum of three loaded pages to access any website content. This has been achieved by modern websites with the inclusion of relevant content on the homepage through scrolling (each section is represented by a content box of text and or images on the homepage). This allows seeing and accessing more content from top to bottom as opposed to old websites (no scroll-down, only links to content available). Websites with a high amount of content like DTP still rely on the old model based on sub-navigation (info boxes display a section breakdown when mouse rolls over). Others like Central Europe managed to avoid it.

Modern website trends also indicate a tendency towards dynamic landing pages. The three programmes have static website landing pages. Different ways to boost this end include videos (www.lse.ac.uk) and slideshows (www.interact-eu.net). Interactive graphics could be a way to somehow give a dynamic feeling (www.urbact.eu).

All three programme websites are responsive, meaning that content adapts automatically to the screen size of any device used to access the website. This makes a lot of sense considering the growing amount of mobile phone users accessing the Internet. In the case of DTP, the amount of traffic from mobile phones and tablets increased to nearly 20 per cent in 2017.

The three programme websites host **project websites** as well, with Central Europe's having a more modern approach (e.g. in terms of design: more visual and a more attractive organisation of items). This can be considered as an innovative practice, as it:

- saves costs (projects do not necessarily have to create a website on their own),
- harmonises the approach towards project web and ensures the respect to the visual identity rules visual,
- integrates all projects in one site (easy access, monitoring and fostering synergies and capitalisation opportunities among the projects),
- and increases the life spam of the websites.

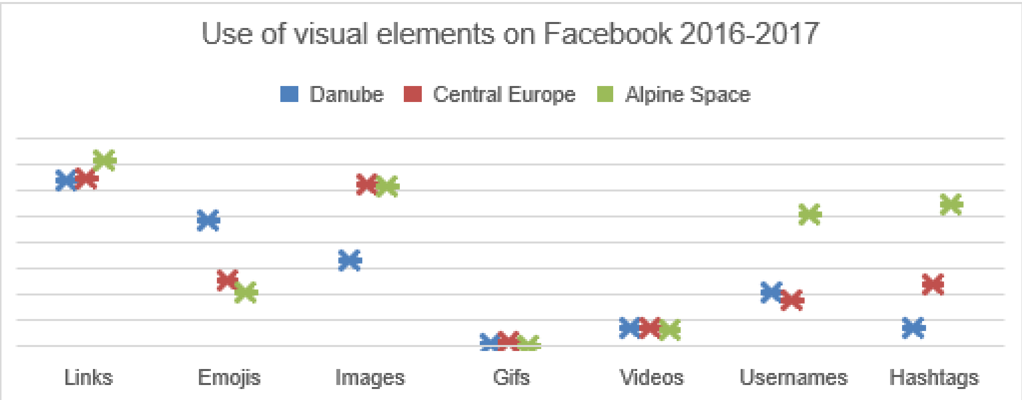
DTP project websites include an e-newsletter and contact database functions, an intranet for file management available to all project partners and an automatic news publishing for both main and project websites.

All three programmes make use of an **online partner search tool** available for potential applicants, yet its use can be improved.

In a world of rapid information consumption, short videos including web tutorials are becoming powerful communication tools. Central Europe is leading the efforts in video making with a substantial amount of outputs.

Concerning **social media**, DTP is largely using Facebook for its communication. DTP's posts make little use of images, videos, gifs, usernames and hashtags while emojis are used often. Research shows that posts including the above are more engaging and have a stronger impact. Lastly, DTP is lagging behind on Twitter, a tool that is widely used by Central Europe and Alpine Space.

Table 22. Frequency of visual elements on Facebook by programme



Source: Metis; Gabriel Alvarez

Regarding the **graphic identity**, all three programmes comply with the visual standards of the Interreg visual branding. Yet they all have some unique visual elements that differentiate themselves from other programmes and they do so across their products. This can be seen in the logo (not Central Europe), front cover pages of publications, social media, e-newsletters and websites.

In terms of **typography**, all the above programmes are using different sans serif models. DTP uses Montserrat and Cambria, a more modern and unique set than Trebuchet (Central Europe) and Arial and DIN (Alpine Space). There is sometimes a tendency to use rather small typographic sizes in online communication (e-newsletters and website content) that should be avoided.

Concerning **imagery**, DTP uses a set of photographs (Danube river's sky view) with a predefined filter that ensures visual recognition. Apart from that, there is no use of any common picture or illustration style that visually harmonises the approach.

All three programmes make use of **infographics** in a smart way showcasing facts and figures in some of their products. This is an efficient approach to reach audiences by conveying messages in a more attractive manner.

Regarding **events**, programmes have made used of different innovative techniques including web streaming (and publication of videos afterwards), idea pitch (based on the Dragon's Den concept), treasure hunt etc. DTP pays special attention to match-making, funding opportunities and capitalisation in the area of macro-regional strategies.

In addition, Central Europe carries out **webinars** via youtube channel (but no real-time interactive webinars) for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. This is a time and cost saving solution for the programme and provide useful information in a smart way.

All three programmes organise specific **communication events for beneficiaries** and offer support on communication issues along the way. This comprises regular e-mailing, application of measures to simplify requirements including design templates for project partners, delivery of communication toolkits, development of one-page content (to shortly present a project idea or tell a story), active linking with other initiatives etc. This aims to raise the communication profile of the projects as well as the efficient dissemination of content while at the same time increases the amount of human resources needed.

All three programmes seem to spend a high amount of time on **support to project communication** including project websites (while innovative and harmonised approach, it is time consuming to help out along the process). DTP, in particular, experiences an additional workload due to the impact of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

9.1.3 Conclusions and recommendations D1

Conclusion 1: Staff resources for communication at programme level are very scarce and communication is not fully embedded as horizontal issue in MA/JS.

- Communication is currently understaffed. There is much more demand to support the project websites than originally planned.
- The comparative analysis shows that DTP is at a high level of development in communication activities but is handicapped by insufficient human capacity. As a result, the potential of communication instruments cannot be fully exploited.
- Project officers receive only limited training on how to deal with the horizontal issue of communication.

Short-term recommendations

- There is certainly a correlation between the capacity of human resources and the number of outputs and achievements. If resources allow, DTP could certainly devote more time to other communication activities. More human resources would allow for more focus and less multitasking with a division of tasks between programme promotion, project support and assistance to the EUSDR.

Alternatively, more resources could promote specialisation in different communication areas such as graphic design, video-making, event organisation, social media etc.

- More communication trainings for project officers (by external experts) would be very useful to anchor the communication as a horizontal topic (e.g. how to integrate communication in every phase of the project life cycle).

Conclusion 2: The communication strategy and the annual work plans are well developed.

- The objectives and planned instruments of the communication strategy are sound.
- The communication officer invests an extra effort in the annual work plans to gain an overview on national communication activities.

Conclusion 3: All planned communication instruments have been implemented (except the automatic transfer of information from eMS to project websites) and work well. Ongoing improvement is needed in some points. A weakness is the low numbers of website traffic for some countries, which indicates lacking promotion. In addition, lead partner seminars in 2017 were judged critically. The project related communication instruments pose a specific challenge.

- There is a high satisfaction rate with events implemented at programme level with the exception of 2 lead partner seminars in 2017 which are ranked lower.
- The number of website visits and page views increased three times from 80,000 (2016) to 230,000 (2017) and the bounce rate was kept at stable level.
- Facebook is the most used tool by DTP and it is a proven tool to drive users to the website.
- The responsive website is used by around 20% of visitors who use mobile phone or tablet.
- Eight e-newsletters were sent out during 2016 and 2017, but no targeted e-newsletters are possible.
- The standardized project websites are cost efficient and better to monitor but lack attractiveness.
- Project e-newsletters say little about project content and achievements and lack usability.
- The capitalisation strategy is seen as a very useful tool but financing of extra activities of PP is an open question.
- Low numbers of lead applicants in countries where the DTP website traffic is low.

Short-term recommendations

- In order to attract applicants from the less active countries, some online and offline communication strategies could be carried out. For example, SEO work and social media campaigns could be done to improve the visibility of the programme in those countries. An offline communication strategy could include organisation of events by NCPs in order to increase the number of partners in those countries.
- Concerning social media, an analysis of target groups could be done in order to understand their most preferred social media tools to keep informed. For instance, potential beneficiaries may want to be informed about calls and other opportunities

via Twitter while other stakeholders may want to know about project results via Facebook.

- Social media posts could be made more attractive by including images, gifs and videos. Posts including these features tend to be more engaging and make a stronger impact.
- Some specific e-newsletters issues could be released to specific target groups in order to improve the open rate. In this respect, it would be interesting to be able to break down the contact lists per users' main interests e.g. thematic areas. Data on click-through rate would be particularly useful to collect and analyse in the future in order to have a better picture of the actual impact of the e-newsletter – MA/JS has already indicated that this will be used in future e-newsletters.
- Instead of guidance papers and manuals, the production of videos and or screencasts would be a more attractive way to reach audiences.
- Communication workshops could be complemented with the use of live webinars.
- Considering that DTP is going to produce a promotional video, it would be a good occasion to use part of the footage to replace the static homepage image. This dynamism would result in a more attractive and informative approach and could bring along a human touch.
- In order to have a strong visual harmonisation, DTP could produce or ask the Interact Programme for a relevant set of images to illustrate the content of its products. This would ensure visual recognition and boost credibility.
- Conduct of Lead Partner seminars in smaller working groups: Experience shows that the satisfaction of the participants increases when conducting workshops with smaller groups, where the participants can contribute intensively instead of large group events. However, to carry out workshops with smaller groups requires more staff resources from the MA/JS.

Conclusion 4: So far, the target indicator values of the communication strategy have been achieved largely. The performance control of the communication tools works in most cases.

- The number of articles about DTP is difficult to track and not a suitable indicator for success control of media relations.
- Only 2 target values were not achieved so far: planned participants at the 2016 annual event and the number of thematic events in 2016 and 2017.

9.2 D2: Effectiveness of communication activities at Partner State level

9.2.1 Evaluation questions D2

The evaluation will assess the following aspects:

- The capacity of NCPs to fulfil their communication tasks as planned in the communication strategy
- The effectiveness of support provided by the JS to NCPs in order to deliver their communication activities

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How does communication at national level contribute to the implementation of the overall communication strategy?

- How is it possible to improve the visibility of the programme in all Partner States?

9.2.2 Evaluation findings D2

Roles and tasks

The role of the national contact points (NCP) is to inform the relevant target groups at national and regional level in general on the cooperation programme and its specific call opportunities. The NCP facilitate the contact between potential beneficiaries and administrations, politicians and policy makers at different levels in the regions and play an important role when creating awareness of and interest in the Programme. NCPs do not only promote programme/call awareness but should also disseminate programme/project results to the relevant stakeholders and broader public. The role of NCPs is described in the programme communication strategy. The NCPs are supported by the JS.

Implementation of tasks

NCPs capacities, activities and communication tools applied were already presented under task A.

The survey on NCPs has shown that the capacity (qualified staff resources) to fulfil the tasks varies between the different tasks as well as between the countries.

The NCPs agree that they have high capacity to provide information to potential DTP-applicants.

However, as stated in Task A, NCP resources to provide and disseminate information on achievements are limited and their contribution to the capitalisation of project results is a major bottleneck. This aspect could be improved.

There is also only limited contact to other programmes. This seems to be crucial also in the light of the capitalisation of project results and therefore could be better fostered and steered by the JS.

Support provided by the JS to NCPs

To fulfil their tasks, the NCPs get support by the MA/JS. This support is regarded as fairly well.

In regard to trainings offered by the MA/JS, there is room for improvement. So far there was no training on communication for NCPs implemented. The first dedicated NCP communication training is planned for July 2018, which is appreciated by the NCPs, as they seem to have only limited qualification in this subject.

9.2.3 Conclusions and recommendations D2

Conclusion 1: The NCP resources and their knowledge to communicate project achievements actively to national stakeholders and national public are very limited. The DTP cannot fill this resource gap by increased TA funds spent to NCPs. Therefore, the role of NCPs as described in the programme communication strategy needs redefinition in a realistic way.

- Most NCPs don´t possess the resources to ensure ongoing capitalisation of results at national and regional levels and support the programme in the dissemination of outputs and results in the participating countries, with the use, among other tools, of the national media.

Short-term recommendation

- The DTP should work with the NCPs to identify ways in which NCPs can contribute to communication in a highly targeted manner with low costs.

  As pilot initiative, social media accounts could be created by selected NCPs to disseminate information at a national level. This is done efficiently by programmes such as Espon and Urbact. In order to test the success of such activity, two countries with a low amount of applicants can be used as treatment and control groups. One opens a Twitter account and the other does not and, after consistent posting, the growth in the number of applicants for the next call can be measured and compared between the two.

9.3 D3: Quality of the communication strategy implementation at project level

9.3.1 Evaluation questions D3

The evaluation will assess the following aspects:

- Availability of qualified project communication managers and sound communication plans (online-survey)
- Quality of the project websites (screening of 54 project websites)
- The effectiveness of support provided by the JS to projects in order to deliver their communication tasks (online-survey)

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How effectively is communication planned and carried out at project level for involving relevant target groups and achieving the planned project outputs and results as well as supporting their transfer and sustainability?

9.3.2 Evaluation findings D3

Project communication manager and communication plan

In the online-survey, the vast majority of participating lead partners and project partners (167 out of 183 or 91%) confirmed that their project communication manager is a qualified person and able to plan, coordinate and implement the projects' communication activities. Survey participants (89%) confirm furthermore that it was possible to develop a sound project communication plan with appropriate effort.

Table 23. Communication manager and communication plan (n=183)

	Yes, I strongly agree (4)	I agree (3)	I disagree (2)	No, I strongly disagree (1)	No opinion / I don't know	Weighted average (1-4)
The project communication manager is a qualified person and able to plan, coordinate and implement the projects communication activities	50%	41%	3%	1%	5%	3,48
It was possible to develop a sound project communication plan with appropriate effort	42%	47%	3%	1%	7%	3,39

Source: online survey

Screening of 54 project websites

DTP uses standardised websites for project level and hosts the individual websites on the DTP homepage (http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects). This section of the evaluation assesses the quality of the project websites of the 54 projects approved in the 1st call. The websites were screened based on the following aspects:

- use of the elements of the DTP visual identity guidelines for projects (visual identity manual);
- attractiveness of the websites (using od infographics, videos, link to social media platform);
- keeping the website up-to-date (number of e-newsletters, news, events these numeric data were assessed uniformly based on elements issued until 31st March).

The evaluators screened the project websites following the structure of the standard sub-sections of the menu list.

Home section – well-structured and easy to understand but lacks of attractiveness

This section contains basic information about the project main objective, the partnership, and the main project data, including the overall budget and the amount of financial contributions by different Funds (ERDF, ENI, IPA). The site automatically applies the joint branding INTERREG visual identity with the four-coloured graphic symbol of DTP. In general, DTP projects are not allowed to develop their own project logo, so the DTP logo together with the project acronym is placed uniformly in the home section for each project.

All screened projects are introduced in a well-structured, focused and easy to understand style, so that reader can get a quick understanding from the project. At the same time, the home sections are not very attractive. Although the projects usually put some illustrative picture or team photo into this section, only 12 out of the 54 websites use informative and relevant infographics, which represent added value to understand the project. *(Good practice for applying infographics: RI2integrate).*

Partner section – automatically generated

This section is automatically generated by the system and includes contact details of the project partners. This section does not contain descriptive information about the partners.

Library section – 70% provide content

This section includes mainly the output documents of the project. In 16 cases there was no relevant element in this section (no element or just leaflet/e-newsletter only), while in the remaining cases the average number of documents was 5 (with a range of 1-30). These are project related documents.

News and events – frequently updated with in average 1.7 news/month

This section contains the news, generated by the project, including major events (e.g. kick-off meeting) and smaller events organised either by the consortium as a whole (e.g. expert group meetings or partners meetings) or by the different project partners during the implementation period. There are also posts about the participation of different project partners on regional/national/international meetings, exhibitions, events organised by DTP MA/JS or by other entities with topic relevant to the programme and/or project. It is also remarkable that there are frequently news about joint activities with other DTP projects for the sake of the synergic capitalisation of project result, which is highly encouraged by DTP MA/JS.

Assessing the communication activity of the projects, the screened project websites posted in an average 1.7 news/month, including articles, information about meetings, events and even seasons' greetings. This can be assessed as frequent updating of this section. As far as events are concerned, altogether 682, in an average 13 events/project have been published. The majority of the events addresses the project group and stakeholders, but in each website, there are events, exhibitions addressing a broader audience as well.

Gallery – 53% use attractive videos

In this section, photos and videos in connection with the project can be displayed. Albeit all websites show some photos about different events of the project implementation, only 29 out of the 54 projects displays attractive videos in this field. *(Good practice for applying animated films CityWalk and Attractive Danube).*

e-Newsletter functionality used by 92%

Beneficiaries are required to send out e-newsletters regularly, for which the layout design is proposed in the DTP Visual identity manual. Out of the screened websites, 5 projects have not published any e-newsletters; the average number of published e-newsletters of the remaining 49 projects is 2.4 varying from 1 to 8. All the screened projects use the template proposed. Some projects have e-newsletters published even in mother languages of the different project partners *(Good practice e.g. Danube Sediment, Danube skills).*

Contact/Social Media used by 61% providing appealing information

Out of the 54 projects, 33 websites had reference to the projects' social media link. Screening of these links underlined that in most cases the social media platform is more attractive, interactive and dynamic concerning the main topic of the project and can attract presumably wider public to join. Project related interesting news and articles are more often disseminated on social media pages than on project website itself. In some cases, videos and attractive infographics are placed on social media sites but not on the official websites. The synergy of project websites and social media platforms is not fully capitalized yet.

Other communication tools used by the project and presented on the website such as poster, leaflet, roll up, flyer

Websites were screened for other communication tools used by the project. It should be mentioned that the availability of communication tools is evident only if there is a separate section dealing with communication/dissemination tools, but screening covered also the visible elements (e.g. photos) in the Gallery section.

Based on the screening, in 6 cases we could not detect other communication tools on the website. Taking into account that according to the Visual identity manual within six months after the approval of the project, each project partner has to place at least one poster with information about the project (minimum size A3), it can be assumed, that project partners use the compulsory visual element even if it cannot be detected on the website.

Other commonly used tools are the “ready-to use” elements recommended by the Visual identity guidelines (leaflet, roll up, flyer), for which DTP MA/JS provides templates. Other elements presented on the websites included project folders and handbags.

Extended menu list (in addition to standard main sections) – 69% use this functionality

The DTP project webpages allow some flexibility to create new sub-sections according to the projects’ requests. 37 out of the 54 screened projects created subsections, covering e.g. following topics: PR material/communication tools, best practices, e-publications, project results. Although in the majority of cases these extra sections include also project related documents or information, their visibility is enhanced and easier to find. Extra section is used in case of special project related subtask *(Good practice e.g. Call for Applicants in the Excellence-in-ReSTI project).* However, creating extra section for project related special topics (e.g. Best practices or relevant EU strategies in the topic) or just for social media links is highly recommended. *(Good practice e.g. CAMARO-D project).*

The following Table summarizes the statistical data based on the screening:

Table 24. Project websites screening

	% of screened websites		Average number per project
	Yes	No	
Using relevant images/ infographics to better explain project (in Home section)	24%	76%	
Use of videos (in Gallery section)	46%	54%	
Link to social media	61%	39%	
Number of outputs in the Library section			5.3
Number of news/per month (in News and events section)			1.7

	% of screened websites		Average number per project
Number of events presented (in News and events section)			13.0
Number of issued e-Newsletters			2.4

Source: http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects, screening by multicontact

Feedback by project partners – satisfactory but lack of user-friendliness

Based on the online survey, the beneficiaries consider the centrally hosted websites as satisfactory but not very good (see survey result in the figure below).

Even if the structure and sections provided do not differ much from the previous websites (in the previous programming period) which were produced by the projects themselves, approximately 20% disagree with the statement that the new centrally hosted website offers adequate options to present the project to the respective target groups.

A critical point is the lack of user-friendliness in handling (weighted average of 2.95 from 1 to 4 with 4 being best).

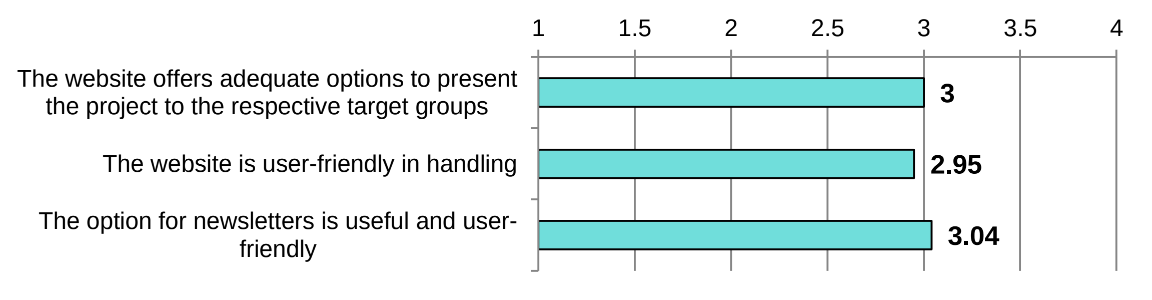
In the comment section of the online survey, several beneficiaries provided detailed information on their discontent and valuable tips for improvement. According to their perception, the project website is very limited in possibilities, technically and concerning the design. It is not as user-friendly as the classical WordPress software and there are limited options to make the standard website attractive.

Several critical comments were mentioned concerning the document manager for uploading files/photos etc. According to the beneficiaries, the options for uploading need to be improved as larger files cause a crash and only few file formats are accepted. The option for exchange (update) files/photos should be given. The need to upload a photo twice (once as 'public' for the news and once as 'photo' for the gallery) is time consuming for the beneficiaries and seems redundant. Furthermore, the document manager section would be more user friendly if sub-folders could be created. This would help the organisation of information and make it easier for project partners to use this tool.

Several beneficiaries also criticise the option for e-newsletters offered by the programme. From their experience, the editing of the e-newsletter is not very user-friendly. For example, many beneficiaries reported that the created content cannot be stored temporarily. When the application is closed, all content is lost. It is also very limited in editing and formatting (very few font styles, colours etc.) and it is difficult to upload photos. Another suggestion is that the lead partners should be able to send e-newsletters to different groups of stakeholders (based on language or interests), not only to one list of subscribers. The e-newsletter application has potential for improvement.

The MA/JS confirmed that based on the projects' input some improvements have been included both in the projects websites and e-newsletters to facilitate their usability.

Table 25. Satisfaction with project websites within the programme website (n= 185; rating from 1 – 4, with 4 being the best)

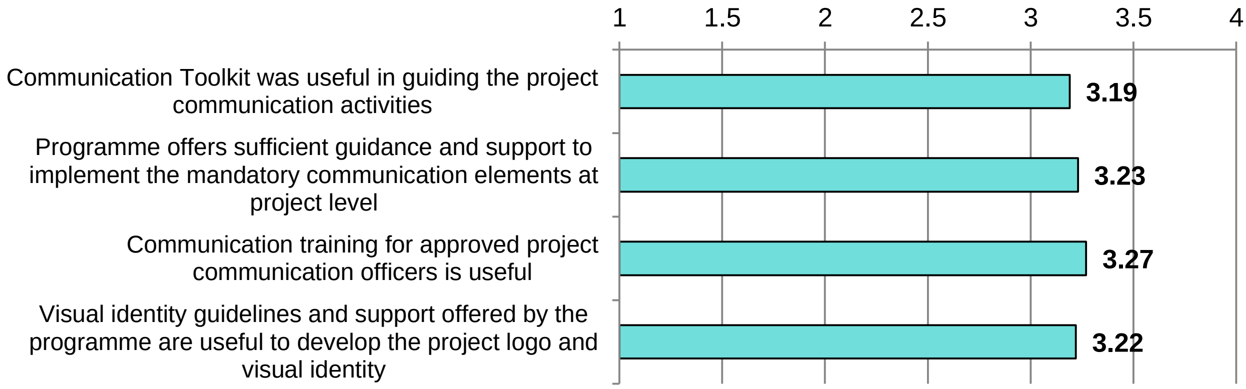


Source: online survey

Effectiveness of support provided by the JS

In general, the beneficiaries who participated in the online-survey rated the support provided by the JS as good. The programme offers sufficient guidance and direct support to implement the mandatory communication elements at project level (kick-off event, project website, posters, templates, closing event). Participants consider the communication training for approved project communication officers as very useful. Also the visual identity guidelines and the support offered by the programme to develop the project logo and visual identity (JS develops the logos) are seen as useful. The satisfaction rate with the communication toolkit is adequate; however, some beneficiaries see potential for improvement.

Table 26. Effectiveness of support provided by the JS (n= 184; rating from 1 – 4, with 4 being the best)



Source: online survey

9.3.3 Conclusions and recommendations D3

Conclusion 1: Qualified communication manager and sound communication plan are in place in most of the projects

- Around 90% of 1st call projects employ a qualified communication manager and produced a sound communication plan. All 54 projects approved demonstrate communication activities (e.g., all provide news per month and all projects implemented events to varying degrees) apart from the compulsory activities (Kick-off event, poster, website and Closing event).

Conclusion 2: The communication officer provides effective support to the (currently limited number of) projects to support them in their communication tasks

- The satisfaction rate by respondents on the support provided is good. However, as the number of approved projects increases, current capacity for support will be insufficient.

Conclusion 3: The hosted standardised project websites can be easily monitored by MA/JS and other stakeholders and are a time- and-cost efficient solution for projects. Many projects, however, underutilise the options offered by the system and so many websites lack of attractiveness

- With intensive support from the communication officer, it was possible to set up a standardized website for all projects. The big benefit is the provision of similar structured information, which is easily accessible to meet the information needs of programme bodies, project partners and other stakeholders. It is also easy to observe the level of project activities and identify “sleeping” projects. The screening showed that the project websites are of very different quality, most of them lack of attractive and relevant visual elements. Lead partners currently underutilise the options offered by the system. The e-newsletter application has potential for improvement.

Short-term recommendations

- The linkage between project website and relevant social media site should be made more visible and easier to find for visitors.
- The user-friendliness of the e-newsletter application should be improved.

10 Task E. Analysis of progress in achieving the results of each specific objective, including potential bottlenecks and capacity of each Specific Objective to generate projects

1.4 Evaluation questions task E

The evaluation assesses the level of achievement of the expected results by analysing the first call projects and the achievements so far and also having a first glance on the second call projects and their planned contribution to the programme results. The evaluation combines statistical analysis, which allows a first assessment, with a qualitative analysis. The assessment is carried out at the level of specific objectives and expected results.

The evaluation will assess the following aspects:

- Key figures on the 1st and 2nd call
- Screening of approved projects
- Progress according to indicators
- Target groups

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- What is the progress in achieving the overall programme goal and the results of each specific objective?
- What is the progress of the programme in relation to milestones and targets defined in the performance framework?
- What is the potential of each specific objective to generate projects?
- Are the relevant target groups of the programme successfully involved as beneficiaries? How is the participation in terms of public and private actors as well as in relation to the geographical coverage of the programme area?
- Have synergies been created between the projects and the EUSDR?

1.5 Evaluation findings task E

Key figures on the 1st and 2nd call

Number of projects – highest in SO1.1, very low in SO3.2

In the 1st and 2nd call 76 projects with an average funding volume of 1.8 million EUR were selected.

The majority of projects are contributing to SO1.1 (14 out of 76), followed by SO2.2 and SO3.1 (each 13 projects).

Very low numbers of projects in contrast are contributing to SO2.4 with only 1 project from the first call and SO3.2 with 3 projects (also from the 1st call).

Very high absorption risk for SO1.2

The amount of approved funds per SO goes along with the number of approved projects. Highest amounts are approved in SO1.1, 2.2 and 3.1. Lowest amounts are approved for 2.4 and SO3.2. In average, projects within SO2.1 and 3.2 receive the highest amounts, with more than € 2 million per project. Lowest funding per project is identified in SO1.2.

Looking at the approval rate and the allocation of funds per SO, one can see that the risk of absorption (low approval rate + high allocation of funds) is very high in SO1.2 and high also for SO2.4 and SO3.2. The main reasons behind the low approval rate could be that applicants did not understand well the topic of these SOs and/or did not put enough effort to develop the application forms, resulting in poorly elaborated projects. If one assumes a constant trend of project generation in the SOs at risk and a constant (low) success rate, the full commitment of available funds in the 3rd call is not very likely (the financial implementation data are analysed in section 5.2.3).

See the table below for more details on the number of projects, partners and funds per specific objective.

Table 27. Key figures on projects, partners and funds per Specific Objective

PA	IP	SO	1st and 2nd call			ERDF+IPA approved 1st & 2nd CfP	Ø per project	Absorption risk (approval rate against allocated funds)
			Projects	Partners (LP and PP, ERDF, IPA, ENI, Associated)	Ø per project			
PA1	1b	SO1.1	14	234	16,7	23.735.245	1.695.375	
PA1	1b	SO1.2	11	184	16,7	17.066.130	1.551.466	Very high
PA2	6b	SO2.1	6	144	24,0	12.774.694	2.129.116	
PA2	6c	SO2.2	13	253	19,5	24.812.761	1.908.674	
PA2	6d	SO2.3	7	150	21,4	13.507.232	1.929.605	
PA2	6d	SO2.4	1	23	23,0	1.678.538	1.678.538	high
PA3	7c	SO3.1	13	281	21,6	24.695.619	1.899.663	
PA3	7e	SO3.2	3	63	21,0	7.344.530	2.448.177	high
PA4	11a	SO4.1	8	164	20,5	14.045.783	1.755.723	
Total			**76**	**1.496**	**19,7**	**139.660.532**	**1.837.639**	

Source: MA/JS, own calculation

Low success rates in SO1.2 and 2.4 (1st call)

A more detailed analysis of first call projects shows that also the success rate (number of approved projects by the number of Expressions of Interest (EoI)) is lowest in SO1.2 and SO2.4, where less than 5% of the projects that submitted an EoI in the first step were finally approved.

High success rates, in contrast, are found within the two specific objectives 1.1 (14.6% success rate) and 3.1 (26.8% success rate). The table showing the number of applications and success rates by SO (1st call projects) is presented in the annex.

Around 20 partners per project

Including all Lead Partners, Project Partners (ERDF, IPA) and Associated Partners, almost 1,500 partners were selected for the first and the second call. This is an average of 19.7 project partners per project. In average, projects in SO2.1 count the highest number of partners (24) per project.

First call projects counted for 1,052 partners. A comparison between the first and the second call shows that the average number of project partners slightly raised with the second call. First call projects pictured an average of 19.5 project partners, with a minimum of 12 partners and a maximum of 39 partners per project.

The geographical distribution shows that only the three partner states Austria, Hungary and Slovenia account for most of the lead partners. The distribution of project partners is more even, most of them coming from Hungary, Austria and Romania. A graph on the geographical distribution of partners has already been shown in Task B1. Further tables on the distribution of partners by country and distribution of partners by specific objective (1st call) are presented in the annex.

Screening of approved projects from the 1st and 2nd call- Estimate the potential contribution of the 76 approved projects to the 40 programme results

The cooperation programme is structured across 5 priority axes (including a priority axis for Technical Assistance) and 10 specific objectives. For each specific objective a number of expected results were defined which the programme seeks to achieve. These planned results are an important reference point for the assessment of achievements.

The different specific objectives in DTP defined different number of expected programme results (number is varying between1-8); these in total numbers 40 expected results (ER) are listed in the Annex. In some cases the CP defined too comprehensive expected results, that's why splitting of the result was applied.

The assessment of the potential contribution of the approved projects is based on the assessment of the Application Form (Part 3/Project Description – Section 3.3 Project Intervention Logic), in which the applicants are requested to describe the project's contribution to the programme priority specific objectives and to specify max. 3 project specific objectives. The projects are also asked to specify the project's main result and its contribution to the programme result indicator (qualitatively).

Based on Section 3.3 of the application forms (AF), the evaluators screened whether the SO specific expected programme results match with the specific objectives explained by the applicants. The more there is matching between the two categories, the bigger is the possibility of the potential contribution to the expected results. Of course we should take into account, that an AF is always written with the intention to convince the assessor, so the wording of the AF usually reflects the expected terminology used by the programme documents.

The following 3 tables summarise the matching topics between the expected programme results (ER) and the number of projects, expressing the intention to tackle the topic of the expected result. Although the applicants could explain max. 3 specific objectives, the number of addressed topics could be more than 3/project.

Table 28. Screening of approved projects of the 1st call

SO	No. of projects	ER 1	ER 2	ER 3	ER 4	ER 5	ER 6	ER 7	ER 8	ER topics addressed	
1.1	12	5	6	6	7	3	3			6/6	100%
1.2	5	2	4	2	2	4	3	1		7/7	100%
2.1	3	3	3	3						3/3	100%
2.2	9	9	-	-	9					2/4	50%
2.3	2	2								1/1	100%
2.4	1	1								1/1	100%
3.1	11	10	4	3	5	7				5/5	100%
3.2	3	1	1	2	3	3				5/5	100%
4.1	8	6	4	3	2	4	2	-	3	7/8	88%
TOTAL	54										

Table 29. Screening of approved projects of the 2nd call

SO	No. of projects	ER 1	ER 2	ER 3	ER 4	ER 5	ER 6	ER 7	ER 8	ER topics addressed	
1.1	2	-	1	1	2	1	1			5/6	83%
1.2	6	-	5	1	2	5	5	3		6/7	86%
2.1	3	3	3	3						3/3	100%
2.2	4	4	-	-	4					2/4	50%
2.3	5	5								1/1	100%
2.4	-	-	-	-							-
3.1	2	-	1	-	2	2				3/5	60%
TOTAL	22										

Table 30. Summary of approved projects of the 1st and 2nd call

SO	No. of projects	ER 1	ER 2	ER 3	ER 4	ER 5	ER 6	ER 7	ER 8	ER topics addressed	
1.1	14	5	7	7	9	4	4			6/6	100%
1.2	11	2	9	3	4	9	8	4		7/7	100%
2.1	6	6	6	6						3/3	100%
2.2	13	13	-	-	13					2/4	50%
2.3	7	7								1/1	100%
2.4	1	1								1/1	100%
3.1	13	10	5	3	7	9				5/5	100%
3.2	3	1	1	2	3	3				5/5	100%
4.1	8	6	4	3	2	4	2		3	7/8	88%
TOTAL	76										

Source: Assessment by multicontact

The screening confirms the selection of projects with a high potential to contribute to the expected programme results – 93% of programme results are addressed

The overall results of the screening demonstrate that the 1st call was very selective and produced potentially high quality projects. In almost all SOs the selected projects contribute (as it is envisaged at the ex-ante stage) to all expected results.

Although the 2nd call includes significantly fewer selected projects, they nevertheless contribute to a high degree to the programme results.

Overall, only 3 programme results (in SO 2.2 and SO 4.1) out of 40 programme results are not directly addressed in the screened part of the Application Forms. These are:

- SO 2.2: Sustainable tourism based on reduction of resource and energy consumption; sustainable tourism based on sustainable mobility management;
- SO 4.1: Improved capacities of public institution and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in cooperation on safety, justice and security.

As mentioned before assessment was made for the explicit description of the SO specific expected programme results in the screened section of the AFs. Anyhow it is probable, that these programme results are addressed indirectly, not as primary focus or are integrated into the projects on different level through different activities in the WPs

Specific objective 1.1. - Improve framework conditions for innovation (14% of total funds allocated)

The Cooperation Programme formulated six different expected results for this very complex thematic field, covering e.g.

- improved strategic frameworks and cooperation to build up excellent research infrastructure;
- more effective, competent networks for commercialisation of R&D result, for technology transfer, access to knowledge;
- improved coordination in cluster policies;
- better access to innovation finance/IPR knowledge for SMEs;

Further to the listed expected results, the following cross cutting issues are also expected to be integrated into the projects on different level:

- eco-innovation, social innovation and service innovation

In the 1. call the 12 approved projects targeted all of the listed expected results, and even the cross cutting issues, only the service innovation was not addressed at all. The most frequently formulated expected results were: "more effective collaborative research & innovation activities and support of competent networks between enterprises, R&D centres, education and higher education and the public sector to broaden access to knowledge", followed by the expected results to foster technology transfer and enhance commercial use of research results. 9 out of the 12 projects tackled cross cutting issue of "better integration of actors and organisations from less developed regions of the Danube area". In the 2. call the 2 selected projects targeted IPR and cluster issues, which also represent high added value toward potential contribution to increasing intensity of cooperation of key actors.

SO 1.1 covers a wide range of framework of innovation related expected results. Based on the AFs the projects will contribute to the transnational and international dimension and connections between enterprises, R&D's and public administration both on strategic and operational level, which gives a big potential to get closer to the programme result goals.

Specific objective 1.2 - Increase competences for business and social innovation (14% of total funds allocated)

The expected results formulated in the Cooperation Program covered e.g.

- improved policy learning and practical solutions to better adapt human resources to technological change;
- entrepreneurial culture and learning;
- high-quality primary and secondary schooling;
- strengthening capacities of the so called supporting organizations;
- improved environment, skills and competences to advance social innovation and social services;
- joint educational offers in specific fields of interest
- and improved systems for institutional learning and building capacities of public administration.

Taking into account both calls, the projects expressed their contribution mostly to “improvement of entrepreneurial culture and learning”, and “building joint educational offers in specific fields of interest” (e.g. dementia, social innovation, young women). At the same time improving high-quality primary/secondary schooling and institutional learning and capacity building for the public administration was targeted less by the projects. Both topics have added value when speaking about programme specific result.

Specific objective 2.1 - Strengthen transnational water management and flood risk prevention (6% of total funds allocated)

All the 6 selected projects expressed their contribution to the expected results, namely

- better integrated plans and developed solutions to further protect and enhance the status of all waters;
- to ensure the sustainable, long-term use of water resources in the Danube region
- and coordination of water management with sound flood risk management.

The several areas of targeted activities from development of framework to coordination support have connection to each other, one build on the other. The only remark is that two projects from the 1.call and one from the 2. call are dealing with sustainable transnational sediment management in the Danube River Basin, the actions of which hopefully could have synergic results to monitor the quantitative and the qualitative elements of the sediment related pollution in a harmonised way.

It can be predicted with confidence, that the intensity of cooperation will be improved through the implementation of the selected projects.

Specific objective 2.2 - Foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources (15% of total funds allocated)

All approved projects will contribute to the expected results in the field of

- improved frameworks, capacities and solutions for sustainable tourism development in the Danube region based on protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources
- improved strategies and tools for sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage and resources for regional development in order to avoid or limit use conflicts.

At the same time, the sustainable tourism based on reduction of resource and energy consumption and the sustainable tourism based on sustainable mobility management were not directly addressed by the applicants in this SO. In the 2nd call there are bike trail development projects (AoE Bike and EcoVeloTour), which themselves represent high contribution to the sustainable green tourism and it is possible, that e.g. mobility management is also tackled as integrated part of project activity. As also stated in the Cooperation Program mobility management may be supported under investment priority 6c as integrated part of sustainable tourism development.

The network of PPs will intensify their cooperation in governance, knowledge and innovation in the field of unexplored or underutilised natural and cultural heritage, so they contribute to the specified programme result.

Specific objective 2.3 - Foster the restoration and management of ecological corridors (6% of total funds allocated)

This SO has 1 expected result, covering improvement of the strategic framework and development of concrete solution in connection with ecological corridors. All the selected projects (2+5) aim to develop both the strategic framework and concrete solutions on the ground to restore, conserve and improve a network of green infrastructures/ bio-corridors in the Danube region. The approved projects targeted cooperation both in more coherent management of specified bio-corridors (coopMDD, DANUBEparksCONNECTED), and more specific issues (invasive alien species in Sava, migratory fishes, forest management). The cooperation in this SO will be intensified by the network of PPs.

Specific objective 2.4 - Improve preparedness for environmental risk management (6% of total funds allocated)

The one and only selected project will contribute to the expected result in the area of drought risk assessment. Planned activities cover of “development of joint strategies and action plans”, “common knowledge base” and “capacity building for more effective management to improve strategic and operational cooperation and interoperability among the emergency response authorities and stakeholders at all levels” in the Danube countries in the domain, resulting in increased cooperation level of the stakeholders.

Specific objective 3.1 - Support environmentally-friendly and safe transport systems and balanced accessibility of urban and rural areas (14% of total funds allocated)

Almost all projects (10 out of 13) contribute to the development of a “better connected and interoperable environmentally-friendly transport system” and “better organisation of public transport links and other sustainable modes of transport for better connectivity” (9 out of 13). Evidently waterways are of high importance, so 5 out of 13 projects focus on waterways specific cooperation, while other projects have the potential for increased cooperation in multimodal hubs, and road safety. All listed expected results are addressed by the selected projects and all projects are willing to increase the level of cooperation.

Specific objective 3.2 - Improve energy security and energy efficiency (7% of total funds allocated)

The selected 3 projects cover the transnational cooperation in energy planning, energy storage and energy distribution as well as integration of renewable energy sources for a higher energy efficiency and an increased security of energy supply in the Danube region.

Increased level of cooperation is awaited from the implementation of the selected projects.

Specific objective 4.1 - Improve institutional capacities to tackle major societal challenges (7% of total funds allocated)

The 8 selected projects (1. call) will contribute to improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges especially in migration challenges; followed by education systems and participatory planning process. Demographic change and labour market policies are also addressed but mainly horizontally and not as direct or main focus. The expected results in connection with urban/rural cooperation and administrative issues are tackled indirectly by some projects. The projects, dealing with increasing institutional capacity both for special domains (e.g. Danube navigation) and more general focus (e.g. higher education, migrants, romas) will have the opportunity to contribute to increasing cooperation level in the SO.

Summarising the findings of assessment:

- The assessment confirms the selection of projects with high relevance and potential to contribute to the expected programme results laid down in the Cooperation Programme. This is backed by the screening findings, showing that the topics/areas of expected programme results are definitely addressed in the specific objectives of the projects.
- The contribution to the programme specific result indicators is based on the transnational partnership of the key actors and stakeholders and their presented willingness to cooperate in the implementation of the projects' main goal and specific objectives. All projects declare their intention to increase the level of cooperation during and after project implementation, having a clear theoretical contribution potential to the defined programme specific result indicators for the SOs.
- Due to the fact, that baseline indicators were not quantified at project level, the quantification of the project level change/contribution to the programme specific result indicator will not be possible. The programme indicators will be assessed based on specific survey of the whole context (as defined in the Cooperation Programme).

Progress according to indicators (1st call)

Most of the targets exceeded by far

Output Indicators show that in total 483 tools, 296 pilot actions and 200 strategies are carried out by the projects. In comparison with the set targets one can see that already with the approval of the first call, the total targets are by far exceeded. Only a few numbers of strategies are missing in SO1.2, 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 as well as some tools in SO2.3 and 2.4 and 1 pilot action within SO2.4.

The table “main types of action” in the annex shows the distribution of types of action by specific objective. One can see that tools are the main type of action within the most of the SOs. However, some of them show a different distribution, for instance in SO1.1 where the main type is pilot actions. Strategies are less common in all SOs with the exception of SO4.1, where they are the main types of action.

Also for the other indicators, the targets are exceeded by far:

- P07 number of documented learning interactions in finalised operations: 703 (target: 252)
- CO26 number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions (EU): 511 (target: 450)
- CO04 No of enterprises receiving non-financial support: 865 (target: 450)

Main involved target groups (1st call)

A screening of the project application forms show that different target groups are addressed by the projects.

- Main involved target group is the national public authority, which is addressed by more than half of the projects (33 out of 54).
- Also local public authorities as well as higher education and research (each 27) are important target groups,
- followed by regional public authorities (26) and interest groups including NGOs (25).

Following the different thematic and expected results of the specific objectives, the target groups are not distributed equally in each SO. For instance, SMEs and business support organisations play a major role for projects within SO1.1, but are less relevant for other projects. On the other hand, interest groups (NGOs) or the general public play only a minor role in SO1.1 but are more common in most of the other specific objectives. Public authorities of the different levels are mostly addressed in SO3.1.

International organisations, education/training centres and schools as well as enterprises except SMEs are less involved in first call projects.

A table with the distribution of target groups per specific objective is presented in the annex.

1.6 Conclusions and recommendations task E

Conclusion 1: It can be expected that the projects selected in the 1st and 2nd call contribute to a large extent to the planned programme results. The screening confirms the selection of projects with a high potential to contribute to the expected programme results – 93% of programme results are addressed.

Short-term recommendation

- The high selectivity of the calls should be maintained. A stepwise application process contributes to higher-quality applications.

Conclusion 2: It is unlikely that the potential for high-quality projects in SO 1.2, 2.4 and 3.2 will improve in the short term. The programme should consider to

tackle the absorption problems by a combination of re-allocation of funds and activation measures (e.g. top-down initiative to foster project generation).

Based on the low success rate it is likely, that in SO 1.2, 2.4 and 3.2 the absorption risk is high or very high. Possibly, these SOs are not well understood by the potential applicants, as one of the reasons behind could be that the focus has not been addressed by previous programmes and calls. This is evidently the cause in the case of SO 1.2, as innovative learning systems (directly connected to innovation) were not addressed before and applicants failed to capture the expected focus of the transnational activity. It cannot be expected that this potential will improve in the short term. Still a longer-term development work is necessary to promote these topics. Therefore, it is recommended for the 3rd call to find a solution to foster generation of high-qualitative projects. The solution can be either to shift the remaining funds to SOs with higher expectation of high quality projects, or to apply a more targeted approach (e.g. a top down approach) for certain priority topics in the Danube region.

Short-term recommendation

- MA/JS should elaborate a strategy to which SOs the remaining funds should be re-allocated and how the predefined priority topic can be addressed by a strategic call. A basic condition is that good projects can be expected in these SOs.

Conclusion 3: Currently it is not possible to net out the CP-effects on the change in the programme specific result indicators (focusing on cooperation intensity) since the change is not observed and mirrored on the project level. On basis of that it will be very difficult to conduct a meaningful impact evaluation as required by EC guidance and the evaluation plan.

Short-term recommendation

- Collect information on the project level (e.g. at midterm and after closure) to capture the change towards a more intensified and better structured cooperation.

  According to the DTP evaluation plan (section 3.2 impact evaluation) the programme will monitor the progress of the result indicators (related to the intensity of cooperation of key actors) against the baseline situation and will analyse the contribution of the programme to the observed change.

  In order to net out the change, it is proposed to observe the change in the cooperation intensity both at the macro level (in the programme area including non-beneficiaries) and at the micro level of benefitting projects in order to be able to make a comparison and to identify concurrent or opposite trends.

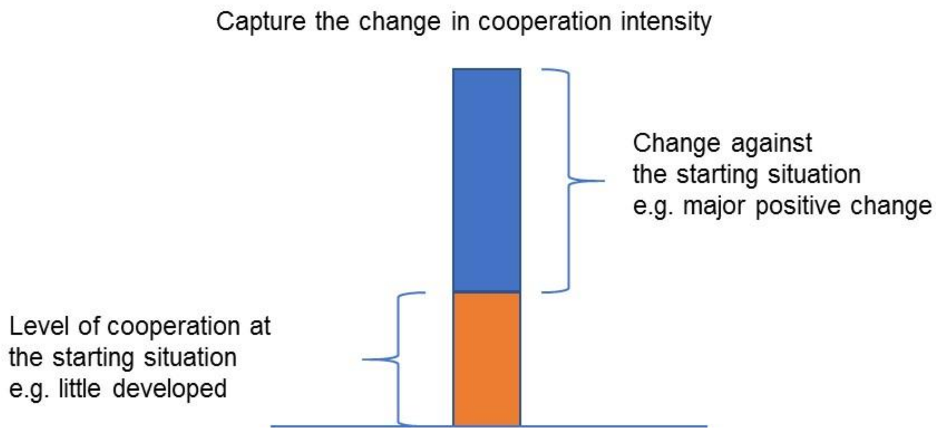
  The micro-level addresses the change in the intensity of cooperation between project partners and stakeholders against the baseline situation in order to achieve the main project result according to the application (section 3.3 Project Intervention Logic).

  The micro-level results can also be used independently to demonstrate the success of the programme. Hence, it is proposed to conduct the micro-level observation anyway even if it is not yet clear whether the micro-macro comparison will lead to meaningful results.

  For this purpose, all project partners should make a self-assessment at least once during the project period. The self-assessment rates the level of cooperation at the starting situation and the achieved change by using a categorisation. This is supported by a justification through project outputs. The cooperation is assessed at the level of different types of action. The categorization allows an aggregation of results at the project level and at the level of the specific objectives (using a weighted average).

A proposed template for the self assessment is annexed (see section 12.9).

Figure 29. Illustration of the change in cooperation intensity to achieve the main project result (data are collected at project level and then aggregated)



Source: Metis

11 Summary of conclusions and recommendations

11.1 Effectiveness and efficiency of the programme management structures (Task A)

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
MA/JS established a functioning integrated management structure and proved to fulfil the assigned tasks.	
Bottlenecks in MA/JS staff capacity and lacking capacity building can lead to reduced effectiveness in particular in the 2nd implementation phase. Appropriate countermeasures to update the management structure and capacity are under implementation.	**Short-term recommendation** • It is necessary to fully implement the planned MA/JS staff increase and first part of the training plan by end 2018. • The workload about each position within MA/JS, the related HR measures, possible bottlenecks in IT equipment as well as the effectiveness of administrative procedures related to the hosting institution should be further analysed by an expert. • Needs and benefits to use modern communication tools (e.g. Skype, Webinar software) should be further explored
The Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority are operational and fulfil their tasks. Overall coordination with MA/JS is good. The CA is restricted by the eMS, which is of limited usability for financial management.	Recommendations related to eMS are outlined under task C
Despite its complex composition, the MC has proven its ability to work and to fulfil its functions. The MC, however, underutilizes its function as a strategic body and devotes too much time on operational aspects programme implementation, which should be left in the hands of the MA/JS.	**Short-term recommendation** • The division of work between MC and MA/JS needs to be modified. A shift of focus towards more strategic discussions requires imposing certain limits on discussions of the details of programme implementation. MA should elaborate a proposal on how to amend the Rules of Procedure to achieve a better division of work.
The majority of the MC members are satisfied with the support by MA/JS, which acts as the secretariat of the MC. Some members, however, state a lack of sound information policy in various fields.	**Short-term recommendation** • Develop a bundle of measures to improve MC meeting organisation, information policy and the delivery of information, including confidence-building mesures.

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
Almost all NCPs contribute to the programme implementation within the given framework conditions with good support provided by MA/JS. Weak points are the access of NCPs to project data, lacking NCP capacities to disseminate project results and poor exchange activities within the NCP bodies and with EUSDR actors and other Interreg programmes.	**Short-term recommendation** • The NCPs access to DTP project data needs improvement, possibly through the improvement of eMS reporting capabilities to provide data and statistics specific to a partner state. • Recommendations on dissemination and capitalisation are part of task D. • The DTP programme should find ways to support networking between within NCPs and with other stakeholders. • MA/JS should consider to coordinate more strongly and directly the work of the NPCs.
The national controllers in 12 partner states succeeded to verify expenditures in the first and second reporting period. However, there are less well performing FLC systems that are currently unable to meet the 60-day verification of expenditures deadline to a greater extent. These are CZ, HU, RS, AT, SI. This contradicts the control guidelines and poses a great risk for the timely execution of the entire verification process. A systematic flaw in the system is caused by the fact that although FLC is a core process, MA / JS have little scope to intervene in the process since the FLC system is an individual responsibility of the partner states.	**Short-term recommendation** • MA / JS should continue an ongoing analysis of the process duration of the verification of costs on the basis of eMS data. • The Slovenian FLC who does not consider the CG as binding document has a clear obligation to comply with MC resolutions. The chair of the MC (or any other relevant programme body) should write a statement to the FLC and its hosting body calling for compliance with common rules established by the programme.
The DTP takes the support for EUSDR very seriously and provides substantial funds and support. For legal reasons, however, the tools that the programme can offer are not well suited for the funding of institutional support. Also EUSDR support binds a lot of work resources from MA / JS.	**Short-term recommendation** • Support to EUSDR should be reviewed to avoid an unproportioned extra workload for all actors involved. Additional staff must be provided for the EUSDR support at the MA/JS. If this fails, it is advisable to reduce the EUSDR support and to put the focus on the handling of normal calls. **Long-term recommendation** • For the next programming period, appropriate legal tools should be provided for a transnational programme to support a macro-regional strategy.

11.2 Effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the entire project cycle (Task B)

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
The applicants are mostly satisfied with the support for project generation and application. The weak point is usually the support provided by the NCPs (e.g. information does not go beyond what is posted on the DTP website). Big national differences in the capabilities of NCPs exist which cannot be influenced by the DTP. Therefore, the main responsibility for support and consultation lies with MA / JS. The tools for support provided by MA/JS should be continuously developed and improved.	**Short-term recommendation** • MA / JS should apply modern communication tools such as skype and live Webinars to better advice applicants on a daily basis in a resource-efficient manner.
The distribution of applicants across the programme area is very uneven. In particular, the involvement of German project partners is low. The potential of German partners is under-used.	**Long-term recommendation** • It seems necessary to consider thoroughly the promotion of Germany's participation at the DTP and to identify the bottlenecks of non-participation in detail.
The application process works and is very well supported by MA / JS. The assessment criteria are transparent for applicants. The relevance filter introduced in the 2nd call helped the MA/JS to better allocate their scarce staff resources and select programme-relevant proposals. Challenging is the lack of support by NCPs to applicants, whereby major national differences can be noted. The application form has room for improvement. The assessment criteria are over-complex and difficult to communicate to all assessors. A stepwise selection process favours the result orientation and is fair to applicants.	**Short-term recommendation** • Inform MC on interim results of the assessment steps. As the assessment process takes a long time, it is useful to keep the MC informed about the intermediate results. **Long-term recommendations** • Better structuring and consistency of the project application form. The modification of the application form should go hand in hand with the further improvement of harmonised implementation tools offered by Interact. • Ongoing improvement of the assessment criteria and assessors capacity: The quality assessment should be more based on a common understanding within JS staff and external experts.
Overall, the support for project implementation is adequately organised and works well for most of the beneficiaries. Two points need more consideration by the programme: the flexibility for project changes is very limited; and so far in many cases the timeframe for expenditure verification until the payment is too long.	**Short-term recommendations** • MA/JS should critically reflect the flexibility rules for (major) project changes. • See the short-term recommendation on the implementation of the FLC verification process.

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
Reducing the administrative burden for project implementation is on the long-term agenda of all Interreg-programmes to allow beneficiaries to redeploy their personal resources from administration to content development. However, this depends mainly on the legal framework conditions, which can hardly be influenced by the programme.	**Long-term recommendations** • Further development of the HIT – Tools for project implementation Redirect resources for reporting from overly detailed outputs towards result-oriented implementation. • The control system of Interreg programmes needs to be reformed. • The framework conditions set by the EC-regulation should allow pre-financing.

11.3 Effectiveness and efficiency of the programme monitoring system (Task C)

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
eMS was implemented as “Plan B”, but what it promises it does fairly well.	
The poor reporting functionality of eMS is the biggest challenge for the programme management bodies.	**Short-term recommendations** • Weaknesses in the reporting functionality of eMS are most easily made up for with the use of custom-made scripts to produce desired reports. Having the Hungarian State Treasury do such scripts for standard (regularly required) reports is fine, although the definition and development of such reports can easily prove to be a lengthy and complicated procedure. For ad-hoc reports, flexibility and reaction time are much more important considerations. For these, options include employing internal staff with the necessary programming skills to write such scripts, or deploying specialized software for data analysis.
eMS lacks a sophisticated user interface and important functionalities are missing.	**Short-term recommendation** • For possible improvements in eMS, compare the reduction in HR costs, decrease in risks of human errors and other benefits likely to result from such improvements to the cost of software development, maintenance and support before making a decision on whether to implement those improvements.
Open source software, eMS is easy to keep up to date.	**Short-term recommendation** • The MA/JS should consider different possible models of channelling IT-related knowledge into the management of the programme, including employment of a dedicated IT officer or relying more on external IT expertise. When considering these options, the potential benefits should be compared to the expected increase in HR/consultancy costs. **Long-term recommendation** • DTP should start considering possible models for providing IT support to programme implementation for the next programming period between 2021-2027. Several **options** are presented.

11.4 Implementation of the Communication Strategy (Task D)

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
Staff resources for communication at programme level are very scarce and communication is not fully embedded as horizontal issue in MA/JS.	**Short-term recommendations** • More human resources would allow for more focus and less multitasking with a division of tasks between programme promotion, project support and assistance to the EUSDR. Alternatively, more resources could promote specialisation in different communication areas such as graphic design, video-making, event organisation, social media etc. • More communication trainings for project officers (by external experts) would be very useful to anchor the communication as a horizontal topic (e.g. how to integrate communication in every phase of the project life cycle).
The communication strategy and the annual work plans are well developed.	
All planned communication instruments have been implemented (except the automatic transfer of information from eMS to project websites) and work well. Ongoing improvement is needed in some points. A weakness is the low numbers of website traffic for some countries, which indicates lacking promotion. In addition, lead partner seminars in 2017 were judged critically. The project related communication instruments pose a specific challenge.	**Short-term recommendations** • In order to attract applicants from the less active countries, some online and offline communication strategies could be carried out. • Concerning social media, an analysis of target groups could be done in order to understand their most preferred social media tools to keep informed. • Social media posts could be made more attractive by including images, gifs and videos. Posts including these features tend to be more engaging and make a stronger impact. • Some specific e-newsletters issues could be released to specific target groups in order to improve the open rate. • Instead of guidance papers and manuals, the production of videos and or screencasts would be a more attractive way to reach audiences. • Communication workshops could be complemented with the use of live webinars. • Considering that DTP is going to produce a promotional video, it would be a good occasion to use part of the footage to replace the static homepage image. • In order to have a strong visual harmonisation, DTP could produce or ask the Interact Programme for a relevant set

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
	of images to illustrate the content of its products. • Conduct of Lead Partner seminars in smaller working groups
So far, the target indicator values of the communication strategy have been achieved largely. The performance control of the communication tools works in most cases.	
The NCP resources and their knowledge to communicate project achievements actively to national stakeholders and national public are very limited. The DTP cannot fill this resource gap by increased TA funds spent to NCPs. Therefore, the role of NCPs as described in the programme communication strategy needs redefinition in a realistic way.	**Short-term recommendation** • The DTP should work with the NCPs to identify ways in which NCPs can contribute to communication in a highly targeted manner with low costs. • As pilot initiative, social media accounts could be created by selected NCPs to disseminate information at a national level.
Qualified communication manager and sound communication plan are in place in most of the projects.	
The communication officer provides effective support to the (currently limited number of) projects to support them in their communication tasks.	
The hosted standardised project websites can be easily monitored by MA/JS and other stakeholders and are a time- and-cost efficient solution for projects. Many projects, however, underutilise the options offered by the system and so many websites lack of attractiveness.	**Short-term recommendations** • The linkage between project website and relevant social media site should be made more visible and easier to find for visitors. • The user-friendliness of the e-newsletter application should be improved.

11.5 Progress in achieving the results of each specific objective, including potential bottlenecks and capacity of each Specific Objective to generate projects (Task E)

Conclusion	Recommendation (short title)
It can be expected that the projects selected in the 1st and 2nd call contribute to a large extent to the planned programme results. The screening confirms the selection of projects with a high potential to contribute to the expected programme results – 93% of programme results are addressed.	**Short-term recommendation** • The high selectivity of the calls should be maintained. A stepwise application process contributes to higher-quality applications.
It is unlikely that the potential for high-quality projects in SO 1.2, 2.4 and 3.2 will improve in the short term. The programme should consider to tackle the absorption problems by a combination of re-allocation of funds and activation measures (e.g. top-down initiative to foster project generation).	**Short-term recommendation** • MA/JS should elaborate a strategy to which SOs the remaining funds should be re-allocated and how the predefined priority topic can be addressed by a strategic call. A basic condition is that good projects can be expected in these SOs.
Currently it is not possible to net out the CP-effects on the change in the programme specific result indicators (focusing on cooperation intensity) since the change is not observed and mirrored on the project level. On basis of that it will be very difficult to conduct a meaningful impact evaluation as required by EC guidance and the evaluation plan.	**Short-term recommendation** • Collect information on the project level (e.g. at midterm and after closure) to capture the change towards a more intensified and better structured cooperation.

12 Annex

12.1 Titles of Specific objectives

Table 31. Titles of Specific objectives

PA	IP	SO	Short title	Long title
PA1	1b	SO1.1	1.1 - Improve framework conditions for innovation	1.1 - Improve the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions and policy instruments for research & innovation to ensure a broader access to knowledge for the development of new technologies and the social dimension of innovation
PA1	1b	SO1.2	1.2 - Increase competences for business and social innovation	1.2 - Foster innovative learning systems to increase competences of employees in the business sector, to strengthen entrepreneurial culture and learning contributing to better meet social needs and the delivery of services in the general interest.
PA2	6b	SO2.1	2.1 - Strengthen transnational water management and flood risk prevention	2.1 - Strengthen joint and integrated approaches to further develop and implement River Basin Management Plans in the Partner States in line with the overall Danube River Basin Management Plan in order to improve transnational water management and flood risk prevention contributing to the sustainable provision of ecosystem services.
PA2	6c	SO2.2	2.2 - Foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources	2.2 - Strengthen joint and integrated approaches to preserve and manage the diversity of natural and cultural heritage and resources in the Danube region as a basis for sustainable development and growth strategies.
PA2	6d	SO2.3	2.3 - Foster the restoration and management of ecological corridors	2.3 - Strengthen effective approaches to preservation, restoring and management of bio-corridors and wetlands of transnational relevance to contribute to the better conservation status of ecosystems of European relevance.
PA2	6d	SO2.4	2.4 - Improve preparedness for environmental risk management	2.4 - Establish and develop a more effective governance system for environmental protection addressing emergency situations and improve the preparedness of public authorities and civil protection organisation contributing to the reduction of risks and impact on ecosystem services, biodiversity and human health.
PA3	7c	SO3.1	3.1 - Support environmentally-friendly and safe transport systems and balanced accessibility of urban and rural areas	3.1 - Improve planning, coordination and practical solutions for an environmentally-friendly, low-carbon and safer transport network and services in the programme area contributing to a balanced accessibility of urban and rural areas.

PA	IP	SO	Short title	Long title
PA3	7e	SO3.2	3.2 - Improve energy security and energy efficiency	3.2 -Contribute to the energy security and energy efficiency of the region by supporting the development of joint regional storage and distribution solutions and strategies for increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage.
PA4	11a	SO4.1	4.1 - Improve institutional capacities to tackle major societal challenges	4.1 - Strengthen multilevel- and transnational governance and institutional capacities and provide viable institutional and legal frameworks for more effective, wider and deeper transnational cooperation across the Danube region in areas with major societal challenges.
PA4	11b	SO4.2	4.2 - Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR	4.2 - Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR (short title). Improve the governance system and the capabilities and capacities of public institutions and key actors involved in complex transnational project development to implement the EUSDR in a more effective way.
PA5	TA	SO5.1	5.1 - Ensure the efficient and smooth implementation of the Danube Transnational Programme.	5.1 - Ensure the efficient and smooth implementation of the Danube Transnational Programme.

Source: Cooperation programme

12.2 List of evaluation questions

Table 32. List of evaluation questions according to the ToR

Evaluation questions (ToR)
Task A: Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme management structures
Are the programme management system and related structures set up in an effective and efficient way allowing for reaching the set programme objectives and results?
How are the interactions between the programme bodies (MC, MA/JS, CA, AA, NCPs, national controllers), are their functions and responsibilities clearly established?
Have the MA and JS sufficient capacities for fulfilling their tasks? Is the allocation of human resources for the programme implementation adequate? (Special attention should also be given to Specific Objective 4.2. which includes new financial support elements for the EUSDR).
How is the hosting body of the MA/JS effectively ensuring the implementation of the related tasks?
Are decision-making processes at programme level clear and transparent?
Is the implementation of the decisions on programme level fast and efficient?
Is the cooperation and communication between the programme bodies and the EUSDR main stakeholders (NCs, PACs) effective and efficient? Are the coordination mechanisms between the MA/ JS and the EUSDR managing bodies providing a proper contribution of the Programme to the Strategy?

Evaluation questions (ToR)
Is the FLC system efficient in terms of human capacity compared to the number of beneficiaries and allows the validation of expenditures in time, considering the possibility to always ask further completion/clarifications from the beneficiaries?
How is the programme perceived by beneficiaries?
Task B: Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the entire project cycle (project generation, assessment, selection, monitoring, reporting, reimbursement). The tasks include the analysis of the normal projects, but also the support to the EUSDR schemes. Furthermore, the answers to the questions should provide a clear picture on the level of integration of IPA and ENI, etc. The answers to the following questions should distinguish clearly between the two.
Is the programme using the right tools for reaching the applicants?
How transparent and effective is the application process in terms call of procedures, tools provided and support to applicants?
Are the project selection criteria and assessment procedure sound, transparent and fair, effectively supporting the selection of the best quality transnational projects?
How well is the programme supporting the beneficiaries during the project implementation?
Is the reporting and monitoring process set up in an efficient way? (e.g. allowing the qualitative monitoring of the outputs, verification of the project progress and achievements, reimbursement of the beneficiaries in due time, reducing the risk of decommitment and financial corrections)?
Has the programme set adequate measures to reduce the administrative burden of applicants and beneficiaries?
Task C: Monitoring System: analysis of the functionality and effectiveness of the programme monitoring system
How is the program management system functioning? Is the monitoring system effectively supporting the management system of the programme?
How can the monitoring system support the information activity? How can it be improved?
Have all important data been collected and included in the system?
Task D: Analysis of the implementation of the Communication Strategy
Is the strategy for programme communication and the yearly plans sound?
Does communication contribute to reaching the specific programme objectives?
How effective are the approaches and activities for reaching the communication objectives (e.g. for involving competent partners)?
How does communication at national level contribute to the implementation of the overall communication strategy?
How is it possible to improve the visibility of the programme in all Partner States?
How effectively is communication planned and carried out at project level for involving relevant target groups and achieving the planned project outputs and results as well as supporting their transfer and sustainability?
Are all the indicators foreseen in the Communication Strategy fulfilled at this stage of the programming period?
Task E: Analysis of progress in achieving the results of each specific objective, including potential bottlenecks and capacity of each Specific Objective to generate projects. The evaluators are not expected to go into depth in analysing the impact of the programme but a clear answer to the following questions is expected, including recommendations:

Evaluation questions (ToR)
What is the progress in achieving the overall programme goal and the results of each specific objective?
What is the progress of the programme in relation to milestones and targets defined in the performance framework?
What is the potential of each specific objective to generate projects?
Are the relevant target groups of the programme successfully involved as beneficiaries? How is the participation in terms of public and private actors as well as in relation to the geographical coverage of the programme area?
Have synergies been created between the projects and the EUSDR?

12.3 Documents provided for applicants and project partners

Table 33. Documents provided for applicants for each call

Call	Procedure , specifics	Content of application package	Supporting documents
1. Call	1st step	1.Cooperation Programme 2.Expression of Interest (EoI)) 3.Applicants Manual combined 4.Call Announcement	1.Concept Note, DTP Project Ideas Consultation (applicable during the 1st and 2nd step): for purposes of individual consultation with the Joint Secretariat via e-mail on their project ideas 2.Excel-based financial tool, not mandatory 3. Information on the control systems in the partner states of DTP 4.Information on the national co-financing systems in the partner states of DTP 5. For finding relevant information concerning EUSDR: EUSDR Targets and Actions
	2nd step	1.Application Form (in PDF and in Excel forms) (AF) 2.Guidelines to the AF 3.Declaration of Co-financing 4.State Aid Declaration 5.Declarations for International Organisations (if applicable) 6.ASP Declarations (if applicable) 7.Partnership Agreement 8.Subsidy Contract (version December 2016)	
1. PAC call	1 step	1.Call Announcement PAC 1CfP 2.Applicants Manual 3.Application Form 4.Guidelines for the AF 5.PACs Call-Targets and actions 6.Declaration of pre-financing and co-financing 7.ASP Declaration 8.State Aid Declaration 9.Subsidy Contract 10.Partnership Agreement template Annexes: a) Bank statement separate b) Bank statement single c) Output Factsheet	1.Danube Implementation Manual

Call	Procedure, specifics	Content of application package	Supporting documents
		d) Declaration of withdrawal template e) Declaration of Commitment Joint Protection Template f) Request for project modification template g) PR template PAC h) Logo specifications i) The use of three logos	
2. Call	1 step	1.Cooperation Programme 2.Applicants Manual combined 3.Call Announcement 4.Application Form (in PDF and in Excel forms) 5.Guidelines for the Application Form 6.Declaration of co-financing; 7. State Aid Declaration 8. ASP Declaration (if applicable), 9.Declaration for International Organisations (if applicable) 10.Partnership Agreement 11.Subsidy contract Submissions of applications must be done through an online form, available: http://www.interreg-danube.eu/calls/calls-for-proposals/second-call-for-proposals/dtp-second-call-for-proposals-application-form	1.Concept Note, DTP Project Ideas Consultation (applicable during the 1st and 2nd step): for purposes of individual consultation with the Joint Secretariat via e-mail on their project ideas 2.Excel-based financial tool, not mandatory 3.For finding relevant information concerning EUSDR: EUSDR Targets and Actions 4.Information on the control systems in the partner states of DTP 5.Information on the national co-financing systems in the partner states of DTP 6.Factsheet on the Associated Strategic Partners 7.Factsheet on the Moldovan and Ukrainian institutions‘ involvement in DTP
1. SMF Call	1 step	1.Call Announcement 2.Programme Manual 3.Application Form template and ist declarations: a) Lead Partner Confirmation b) Declaration of Alignment c) Declaration of co-financing d) State Aid declaration e) Declaration of International Organisation (if applicable) f) ASP declaration (if applicable) 4.SMF eMS Guidelines 5.Subsidy Contract 6.Partnership Agreement 7.Annexes: a) Output 1 template b) Output 2 template c) Output 3 template	1. Cooperation Programme

Source: MA/JS, DTP website, analysis by Mulitcontact

Table 34. Guidance for LP and PP to implement the project

Call	General guidance	Guidance for lead partners	Guidance for project partners
1.Call	• Applicants Manual Combined, 2017	• Implementation Manual v2.0 (91 pages) + annexes • Guidelines for Data Modification in eMS v1.0 (8 pages)	Not specific for this call but for all regular ones
1. PAC call	• PAC Implementation Manual v2.0, (66 pages) • PAC eMS Guidelines for PPR • PAC eMS Guidelines for Partner Report • PAC additional information eMS template	• PAC Guidelines for Project Progress Report v1.0 (30 pages)	• PAC Guidelines for Partner Report v1.0 (19 pages)
2. Call	• Applicants Manual Combined, 2017 (117 pages)		Not specific for this call but for all regular ones
1. SMF Call	• SMF Programme Manual 2017 (96 pages)		• SMF eMS Guidelines, (29 pages)
Non-call specific	• Danube implementation Manual v2 (91 pages)	• Guidance for project progress report, version 2.1 (34 pages) + templates • DTP project webpages User Manual	• Guidance for partner report v1.0 (22 pages) • DTP Visual identity guidelines for projects (27 pages) • DTP Communication Toolkit version December 2016 (59 pages)

Source: MA/JS, DTP-website

12.4 Programme communication results and impact

Table 35. Programme communication results and impact

Indicator		Target	Achievement	Target reached
Events				
Number of participants in the events	annual events	Min. 300	2015: 496 (+ 100 followers online) 2016: 260 2017: 1,000 (Joint DTP-EUSDR Forum)	2015: yes 2016: no 2017: yes
	other events	Variable (in function of the event)	2016: Lead Applicant seminars: 180 2017: Lead Partner seminars: 322 Communication training: 78 Lead Applicant seminars: 144 SMF launch event: 120 Joint DTP-EUSDR Forum: 1000	
Number of events	Kick off	1	1	yes
	Annual conference	1/year	1/year	yes
	Lead Applicant event	When a call is launched	2016: 2 (1. call + PAC call) 2017: 2 (2. call + SMF call)	yes
	Lead Partner seminars	After each call	2017: 3 (1. call + PAC call)	yes
	Thematic events	Min. 4	2016: 1 (annual event) 2017: 1 (SMF launch event)	no
	Communication trainings	At least biyearly	2017: 1 2018: 1	yes
	Others	To be determined according to demand		
	Number of events when the programme was presented	Min. 3/year	The programme was presented in a wide range of events. Thematically-related: Green Week (Brussels, 2016)	yes
Publications				
Number of publications printed	Flyer	1800	2600	yes
	Poster	400	400	yes
	Brochures and programme catalogues	To be determined	To be produced in 2018 and 2019	
Number of publications distributed	Newsletter (online)	At least 500 persons per issue	11 issues (2015 – 2017) 10,165 contacts 1,400 - 2,000 users who opened the newsletter	yes
	Flyer	Min 600/year	2600	yes

Indicator		Target	Achievement	Target reached
	Poster	Min 25/year	200	yes
	Brochures and programme catalogues	To be determined – according to demand	-	
Promotional materials				
Number of materials printed/produced		Variable, in function of materials and to cover the number of participants in the events	Rubik cubes: 600 produced and distributed Notepads: 2400 produced and 2200 distributed Folders: 1700 produced, 1000 distributed Pens: 1800 produced, 1700 distributed Umbrellas: 1000 produced, 700 distributed Bags: 600 produced and distributed	
Number of materials distributed				
Website and social media				
Number of unique visitors/users	Website	Variable	See data on online analytics	
	Social media			
Transparency				
Number of approved projects that fulfilled the information and communication requirements		100%	54 (100%)	yes
Number of communication plans at project level		100%	54 (100%)	yes
Project communication				
Nr of information and promotional materials produced and distributed (brochures, flyers etc.)		At least 2 communication tools used per project, according to project needs and capabilities	Most (if not all)	Yes (will be reached until the end of the project implement-ation)
Nr of events organised				
Nr of projects advertised in the media				
Media				
Number of articles about the DTP / DTP projects published in the media		Min. 2 articles/ year per country	Difficult to track At programme level: several HU media mentioned the programme in articles about the Kick-off event 2015 and the EUSDR Annual Forum 2017	
Reference to the programme in the published articles		100%		

Source: Communication strategy, communication officer

Table 36. Overall satisfaction with events rated by participants (on a scale from 1 to 5; with 1 being very poor / completely dissatisfied and 5 being excellent / completely satisfied)

Event	overall assessment (with 5 being best)						
	weighted average	1	2	3	4	5	n
Kick-off event 'A stream of cooperation' (Budapest, 23-24/09/2015)	**4.27**	0	3	15	38	49	105
Annual Event 'Blue Danube' (Bucharest, 29/09/2016)	**4.12**	1	3	7	34	24	69
Lead applicant seminar addressed to potential applicants to the **1st call** (Budapest, 11/04/2016)	**4.17**	0	1	5	22	14	42
PAC call **Lead applicant seminar** (Budapest, 07/09/2016)	**4.00**	0	1	1	3	3	8
PAC call **seminar** addressed to all **Lead partners** of the PAC projects (Budapest, 24/01/2017)	**5.00**	0	0	0	0	2	2
Lead Partner seminar addressed to **1st call** approved projects (Budapest, 25/01/2017)	**3.93**	0	1	3	21	3	28
Lead Partner seminar addressed to **1st call** approved projects (Budapest, 28/06/2017)	**3.32**	0	7	14	8	5	34
Communication training addressed to 1st call approved projects communication officers (Budapest, 26/01/2017)	**4.42**	0	0	1	12	11	24
Lead Applicant seminar addressed to potential applicants to the **2nd call** (Budapest, 09/02/2017)	**4.00**	0	3	4	13	10	30
Seed Money Facility launch event (Vienna, 27/09/2017)	**4.30**	0	1	3	5	11	20
Co-organisation of the 6th **EUSDR Annual Forum** (Budapest, 18-19/10/2017)	**4.59**	2	3	15	45	161	226

Source: data provided by MA/JS; analysis by Metis

12.5 Online performance of communication tools

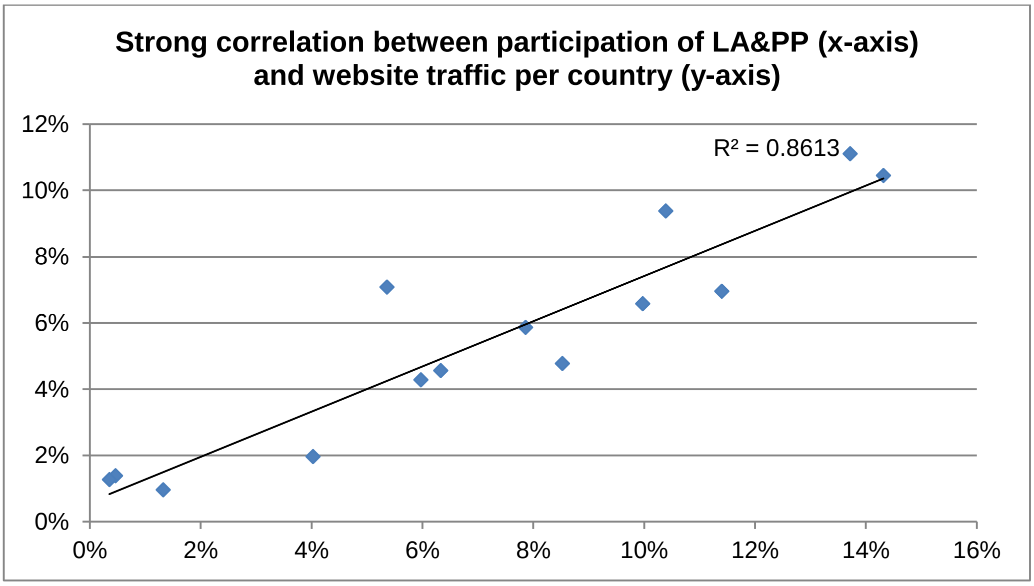
Table 37. Online performance of communication tools

Website audience	2016	2017
Website sessions (visits)	78,580	229,222
Website unique users	31,177	91,572
Website page views	279,832	892,787
Bounce rate	41.73%	46.33%
New visitors	75.7%	77.5%
Returning visitors	24.3%	22.5%

Website traffic sources	2016	2017
Direct acquisition (bookmarks, URL typing)	30.51%	29.48%
Organic search (online searches about DTP)	45.04%	42.66%
Referral (links to DTP website on other platforms)	19.93%	17.58%
Social media	Total: 4.52% Facebook: 79.82% Twitter: 4.83% LinkedIn: 13.96%	Total: 10.11% Facebook: 87.65% Twitter: 4.54% LinkedIn: 7.19%

Website traffic per device	2016	2017
Desktop computer	89.01%	81.72%
Mobile phone	9.32%	16.24%
Tablet	1.67%	2.04%

Website traffic per country	2016	2017
Austria	5.86%	6.90%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.96%	3.80%
Bulgaria	9.38%	7.55%
Croatia	4.77%	7.24%
Czech Republic	4.56%	3.94%
Germany	7.08%	7.67%
Hungary	10.45%	9.96%
Moldova	1.38%	1.42%
Montenegro	0.96%	1.28%
Romania	11.10%	11.53%
Serbia	6.58%	9.02%
Slovakia	4.28%	4.29%
Slovenia	6.95%	6.99%
Ukraine	1.27%	1.73%



Most visited website pages in 2016	Views	Most visited website pages in 2017	Views
Homepage	63,641	Homepage	100,726
/calls/calls-for-proposals/first-call	22,173	/calls/calls-for-proposals/second-call-for-proposals	53,968
/calls/calls-for-proposals	14,638	/relevant-documents/documents-for-project-implementation	23,685
/approved-projects	10,976	/approved-projects	21,321
/news-and-events/programme-news-and-events	8,695	/calls/calls-for-proposals	20,253
/about-dtp/programme-priorities	8,352	/ /relevant-documents/programme-main-documents	13,463
/relevant-documents/programme-main-documents	6,874	/login	13,090
/calls/project-ideas	5,820	/calls/calls-for-proposals/seed-money-facility-call	11,510
/news-and-events	5,228	/about-dtp/programme-priorities	11,115
/relevant-documents/documents-for-project-implementation	5,145	/calls/project-ideas	10,502

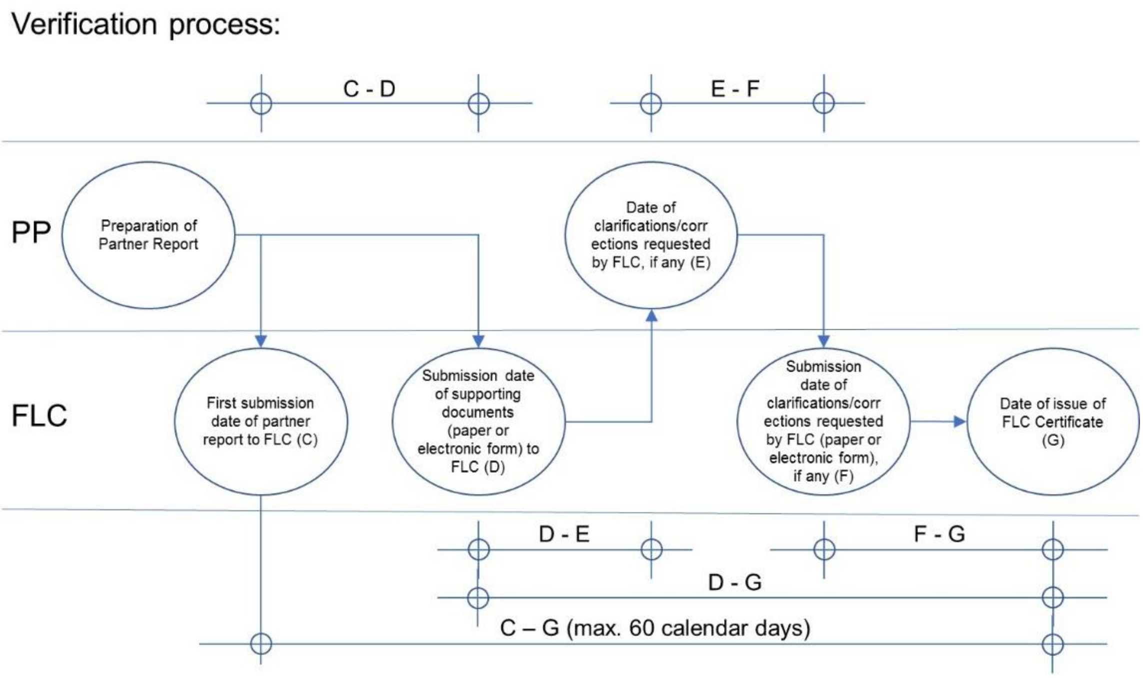
Social media	2016	2017	Total
New Twitter followers	N/A	N/A	715
Tweets and retweets	38	75	182
Twitter engagement	371	1,543	N/A
Twitter listeds	N/A	N/A	23
New Facebook likes (followers)	N/A	681	2,038
Facebook posts	57	130	187
Facebook engagement	3,752	18,331	22,083
New LinkedIn followers	N/A	N/A	1,435
LinkedIn posts	N/A	N/A	114
New YouTube subscribers	4	41	45
YouTube videos	0	18	18
YouTube views	0	4,993	4,993

e-newsletters	2016	2017	Total
Total database contacts	N/A	N/A	10,165
e-newsletters sent out	4	4	8
Open/view rate	7,373	7,463 (18.8% for the last newsletter)	N/A
Click-through rate	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, Twitter Analytics and YouTube Analytics

12.6 Analysis of FLC data on 2nd reporting period 2017

Figure 30. Steps in the verification process



Source: Metis based on eMS

Table 38. For all 460 cases which have been certified

Partner Country	Number of submitted partner report to FLC C)	Average time span (calendar days) between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate (C to G)	Average time span (calendar days) between first submission of partner report to FLC and submission date of clarification/ correction requested by FLC (C to F)	Average time span (calendar days) between submission date of clarification/ correction requested by FLC and issue of FLC certificate (F to G)	No of cases where the time span (calendar days) between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate exceeds 60 days (C to G)	% of cases where the time span (calendar days) between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate exceeds 60 days (in % of submitted partner reports)
CZ	21	79	72	6	18	86%
HU	63	64	57	9	34	54%
RS	42	61	55	8	21	50%
AT	59	57	47	12	25	42%
SI	42	55	51	9	15	36%
HR	42	51	45	6	9	21%
SK	36	48	43	5	12	33%
RO	62	47	40	9	11	18%
BA	16	38	31	7	0	0%
DE	34	36	30	8	2	6%
BG	38	32	26	6	3	8%
ME	5	29	20	9	0	0%
Total	**460**	**52**	**47**	**8**	**150**	**33%**

Source: eMS, analysis by Metis

Table 39. For all 395 cases where supporting documents (paper or electronic form) were submitted to the FLC

Partner Country	Number of submitted partner reports to FLC in the 2nd reporting period 2017 (C)	Average time span (calendar days) between first submission date of partner report to FLC and date of issue of FLC certificate (C to G)	Average time span (calendar days) between submission date of supporting documents to FLC (can start it´s work) and date of issue of FLC Certificate (D to G)	Number of cases where the time span (calendar days) between submission date of supporting documents to FLC (can start it´s work) and date of issue of FLC Certificate exceeds 60 days (D to G)	% of cases where the time span (calendar days) between submission date of supporting documents to FLC (can start it´s work) and date of issue of FLC Certificate exceeds 60 days (% of submitted partner reports)
CZ	18	82	67	14	78%
HU	54	66	57	25	46%
RS	34	63	56	15	44%
AT	53	57	49	12	23%
SI	37	56	54	12	32%
HR	36	51	47	9	25%
SK	31	50	43	8	26%
RO	54	47	44	8	15%
DE	30	37	35	2	7%
BA	15	37	31	0	0%
ME	3	36	37	0	0%
BG	30	31	22	0	0%
Total	**395**	**53**	**47**	**105**	**27%**

Source: eMS, analysis by Metis

Table 40. For all 29 cases with not yet issued FLC certificates in the 2nd reporting period

Partner Country	Number of submitted partner report to FLC C)	Number of cases: not yet issued FLC certificates in the 2nd reporting period 2017	% of cases: not yet issued FLC certificates in the 2nd reporting period 2017 (in % of submitted partner reports)
SI	42	8	19%
AT	59	6	10%
CZ	21	5	24%
HU	63	4	6%
SK	36	3	8%
RO	62	2	3%
BG	38	1	3%
Total	**321**	**29**	**9%**

Partner Country	Number of submitted partner report to FLC C)	Number of cases: not yet issued FLC certificates in the 2nd reporting period 2017	% of cases: not yet issued FLC certificates in the 2nd reporting period 2017 (in % of submitted partner reports)

Remark: SK partner from Danube Skills not considered since PR was submitted to FLC with 0 amount

Source: eMS, analysis by Metis

Table 41. For all 460 cases which have been certified: No of requests by FLC and submissions of clarifications/ corrections per partner report

Partner Country	No of submitted partner reports to FLC C)	Total no of requests by FLC and no of submissions of clarifications/ corrections (Sum E+F)	No of requests by FLC and submissions of clarifications/ corrections per partner report (E+F / C)
CZ	21	54	2,6
AT	59	145	2,5
HU	63	133	2,1
BA	16	27	1,7
SK	36	54	1,5
RS	42	55	1,3
HR	42	52	1,2
RO	62	50	0,8
SI	42	32	0,8
DE	34	22	0,6
BG	38	13	0,3
ME	5	1	0,2
Total	**460**	**638**	**1,4**

Source: eMS, analysis by Metis

Table 42. For 313 cases with complete data: Response times

Partner Country	No of submitted partner report to FLC C)	Average time span between first submission of partner report to FLC and submission of supporting documents to FLC (calendar days) (C-D)	Average time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of clarifications/corrections requested by FLC, if any (D - E)	Average PP response time: Time span between date of clarifications/corrections requested by FLC to submission date of clarifications/corrections requested by FLC (E-F)
CZ	18	10,3	60,3	5,8
SI	27	2,3	45,7	2,9
RS	31	6,8	44,5	4,5
HU	51	9,2	39,6	8,6
HR	32	4,5	33,0	8,4
AT	47	8,4	32,5	6,0

Partner Country	No of submitted partner report to FLC C)	Average time span between first submission of partner report to FLC and submission of supporting documents to FLC (calendar days) (C-D)	Average time span between submission date of supporting documents to FLC and date of clarifications/corrections requested by FLC, if any (D - E)	Average PP response time: Time span between date of clarifications/corrections requested by FLC to submission date of clarifications/corrections requested by FLC (E-F)
SK	24	6,7	31,4	8,1
RO	37	4,6	27,8	6,2
DE	18	4,8	22,6	4,3
BA	14	5,4	19,3	6,2
ME	1	0,0	19,0	21,0
BG	13	10,5	13,5	2,5
Total	**313**	**6,8**	**35,0**	**6,3**

Source: eMS, analysis by Metis

Table 43. Number of controllers (data from eMS in May, 2018) and the estimated number of partner reports expected under the 1st call projects in each reporting period

Country	No of FLC users (Registered FLC users per country)	No of PRs expected under the 1st call reporting period
AT	44	81
BG	21	60
HR	13	59
CZ	16	34
DE	30	41
HU	12	100
RO	16	94
SK	5	55
SI	25	68
BiH	4	25
MNE	3	8
SRB	10	66
MD	0	0
UA	0	0
TOTAL	**199**	**691**

Source. MA/JS

12.7 MC main agenda points

Table 44. MC main agenda points

Item	1st MC 09/15	2nd MC 03/16	3rd MC 09/16	4th MC 12/16	5th MC 06/17	6th MC 11/17
Programme level, general items						
Agenda	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rules of Procedure of the MC, Minutes of the MC	x					
Endorsement of agreements taken by the DTP PC affecting the implementation process	x					
Programme management	x		x			x
Communication	x	x	x		x	x
General information from the MA		x				
CP modification			x			
State Aid			x			
Work plan 2017				x		x
Work plan 2018						x
Programme implementation framework					x	
Post 2020					x	x
Seed Money Facility (SMF)					x	
Danube Strategy Point (DSP)					x	
Modification of the TA Manual, TA budget and TA projects						x
SO 4.2: Support to the EUSDR	x	x	x	x	x	x
Project level						
First call for proposals/EoI	x	x				
Pre-selection of proposals		x				
Second step 1. call for proposals		x	x	x	x	
Selection of proposals			x			
Projects implementation			x			
Final approval of proposals				x		
Contracting and implementation of approved projects (1st Call and PAC Call)					x	

Source: MC minutes, analysis by Metis

12.8 Key figures on the 1st and 2nd call

Table 45. Number of lead applicants and project partners per country

Call	1st call - 1 Step		1st call - 2 Step		2nd call		Total	
Partner State	**No of LA**	**No of PP**	**No of LA**	**No of PP**	**No of LA**	**No of PP**	**No of LA**	**No of PP**
Hungary	115	707	18	163	29	181	162	1,051
Romania	97	699	9	150	26	181	132	1,030
Slovenia	93	570	20	124	23	136	136	830
Bulgaria	72	557	4	93	19	135	95	785
Croatia	43	450	3	95	5	126	51	671
Czech Rep.	41	363	5	66	3	58	49	487
Austria	35	386	18	125	7	95	60	606
Slovakia	24	332	2	82	5	61	31	475
Germany	24	246	12	77	11	84	47	407
Serbia	3	590		114		138	3	842
Bosnia Herzeg.		239		39		63	0	341
Montenegro		84		12		16	0	112
Moldova						39	0	39
Ukraine						30	0	30
Total	**547**	**5,223**	**91**	**1,140**	**128**	**1,343**	**766**	**7,706**

Source: MA/JS, Metis

Table 46. Number and proportion of lead applicants and project partners per country

Call	Context		1st call - 1 Step		1st call - 2 Step		2nd call		Total	
Partner State	**Population in million**	**share**	**No of LA+PP**	**share**	**No of LA+PP**	**share**	**No of LA+PP**	**share**	**No of LA+PP**	**share**
Hungary	9,8	9%	822	14%	181	15%	210	14%	1.213	14%
Romania	19,8	18%	796	14%	159	13%	207	14%	1.162	14%
Slovenia	2,1	2%	663	11%	144	12%	159	11%	966	11%
Bulgaria	7,2	6%	629	11%	97	8%	154	10%	880	10%
Croatia	4,2	4%	493	9%	98	8%	131	9%	722	9%
Czech Rep.	10,6	9%	404	7%	71	6%	61	4%	536	6%
Austria	8,7	8%	421	7%	143	12%	102	7%	666	8%
Slovakia	5,4	5%	356	6%	84	7%	66	4%	506	6%
Germany part	23,7	21%	270	5%	89	7%	95	6%	454	5%
Serbia	7,1	6%	593	10%	114	9%	138	9%	845	10%
Bosnia Herzeg.	3,3	3%	239	4%	39	3%	63	4%	341	4%
Montenegro	0,6	1%	84	1%	12	1%	16	1%	112	1%
Moldova	3,6	3%	0	0%	0	0%	39	3%	39	0%
Ukraine part	6,0	5%	0	0%	0	0%	30	2%	30	0%
Total	**112,1**	**100%**	**5.770**	**100%**	**1.231**	**100%**	**1.471**	**100%**	**8.472**	**100%**

Source: MA/JS, Metis, Eurostat

Table 47. Number of projects and success rate by SO (1st call)

PA	IP	SO	No of expected Projects	EoI 1st step	Appli-cations 2nd step	approved projects	success rate 1st step	success rate 2nd step	Success rate total
PA1	1b	SO1.1	14	82	19	12	23%	63%	14,6%
PA1	1b	SO1.2	13	110	11	5	10%	45%	4,5%
PA2	6b	SO2.1	5	34	4	3	12%	75%	8,8%
PA2	6c	SO2.2	14	119	19	9	16%	47%	7,6%
PA2	6d	SO2.3	6	17	3	2	18%	67%	11,8%
PA2	6d	SO2.4	5	34	3	1	9%	33%	2,9%
PA3	7c	SO3.1	13	41	15	11	37%	73%	26,8%
PA3	7e	SO3.2	7	50	7	3	14%	43%	6,0%
PA4	11a	SO4.1	7	56	10	8	18%	80%	14,3%
PA4	11b	SO4.2	63						
		unknown		4					
Total			**147**	**547**	**91**	**54**	**17%**	**59%**	**9,9%**

Source: MA/JS, own calculation

Table 48. Distribution of partners by specific objective (1st call)

PA	SO	Projects	Partners	Ø	Min.	Max.	Main Partner States involved
PA1	SO1.1	12	195	16,3	13	20	RO (23x), HU (22x), AT (21x), SI (21x)
PA1	SO1.2	5	81	16,2	12	20	HU (10x), RS (10x), AT (9x), RO (9x)
PA2	SO2.1	3	68	22,7	17	28	AT (12x), RO (12x), HU (11x)
PA2	SO2.2	9	176	19,6	12	39	HU (30x), AT (25x)
PA2	SO2.3	2	46	23	21	25	AT (9x), HR (9x)
PA2	SO2.4	1	23	23	23	23	AT (5x)
PA3	SO3.1	11	236	21,5	13	39	AT (40x), RO (39), HU (35)
PA3	SO3.2	3	63	21	18	23	HU (11x), HR (10x), SI (10x)
PA4	SO4.1	8	164	20,5	16	25	SI (20x), SK (19x)
Total		**54**	**1,052**	**19,5**	**12**	**39**	**HU (144x), AT (138x), RO (125x)**

Source: MA/JS, own calculation

Table 49. Distribution of 1st call partners by country

ID	MS	Lead	ERDF	IPA	ENI	Associated	Total
1	AT	15	68	0	0	55	**138**
2	BA	0	0	25	0	7	**32**
3	BG	1	59	0	0	20	**80**
4	HR	1	59	0	0	33	**93**
5	CZ	0	33	0	0	12	**45**
6	DE	7	34	0	0	21	**62**
7	HU	11	89	0	0	44	**144**
8	MD	0	0	0	0	13	**13**
9	ME	0	0	8	0	3	**11**
10	RO	5	87	0	0	33	**125**
11	SRB	0	0	65	0	27	**92**
12	SK	2	53	0	0	24	**79**
13	SI	12	56	0	0	35	**103**
14	UA	0	0	0	0	12	**12**
	Others					23	
Total		**54**	**538**	**98**	**0**	**362**	**1,052**

Source: MA/JS, own calculation

Table 50. Main types of action

PA	IP	SO	Strategies	Tools	Pilot Actions	P07 (learning interactions)
PA1	1b	SO1.1	33	100	111	427
PA1	1b	SO1.2	9	102	12	
PA2	6b	SO2.1	2	21	5	12
PA2	6c	SO2.2	33	102	39	120
PA2	6d	SO2.3	3	4	34	12
PA2	6d	SO2.4	1	3	2	
PA3	7c	SO3.1	44	91	62	54
PA3	7e	SO3.2	7	7	9	14
PA4	11a	SO4.1	68	53	22	64
PA4	11b	SO4.2				
Total			**200**	**483**	**296**	**703**

Source: Gap analysis after the 1st call results

Table 51. Target groups involved (1st call)

Target Groups	Total	Specific Objectives								
		1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2	4.1
National public Authority	**33**	5	1	2	5	1	1	**8**	**3**	**7**
Local public Authority	**27**	2	3	1	**8**	-	-	6	2	5
Higher Education and Research	**27**	11	**4**	2	5	-	-	2	1	2
Regional public Authority	**26**	10	2	2	3	-	-	5	1	3
Interest Groups including NGOs	**25**	3	1	2	5	2	1	5	1	5
Other	**24**	7	4	2	3	1	-	3	1	3
SME	**23**	**12**	3	-	4	-	-	-	2	2
Business Support Organisation	**18**	11	2	-	1	-	-	2	1	1
General public	**13**	1	-	1	4	2	1	4	-	-
Sectoral Agency	**12**	1	-	1	1	1	1	2	2	3
Infrastructure and (public) Service Provider	**10**	-	-	-	0	1	-	7	1	1
International Organisation	**9**	-	-	1	1	1	1	3	-	2
Education/Training Centre and School	**6**	-	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	2
Enterprise, except SME	**6**	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	1

Source: project application forms 1st call

Table 52. Number and share of LA&PP in DTP 14-20 and LP&PP in SEE 07-13

DTP-Partner State	No of LA&PP in the 1st and 2nd DTP call per country	Share of LA&PP in the 1st and 2nd DTP call per country	No of LP & PP in SEE 2007-2013 after the 4th call (Ecorys, 2013 p 31); only DTP countries are presented	Share of LP & PP in SEE 2007-2013 after the 4th call (Ecorys, 2013 p 31)
Austria	666	8%	128	13%
Bosnia Herzeg.	341	4%	32	3%
Bulgaria	880	10%	144	14%
Croatia	722	9%	59	6%
Czech Rep.	536	6%	0	0%
Germany part	454	5%	0	0%
Hungary	1.213	14%	173	17%
Moldova	39	0%	7	1%
Montenegro	112	1%	25	2%
Romania	1.162	14%	176	17%
Serbia	845	10%	80	8%
Slovakia	506	6%	61	6%
Slovenia	966	11%	124	12%
Ukraine part	30	0%	0	0%
Total	8.472	100%	1.009	100%

Source: MA/JS; Ecorys 2013 (Evaluation of South East Europe Programme 2007-2013, Final report 2013 p 31); analysis by Metis

12.9 Self-assessment template

Table 53. Self-assessment by projects to capture the change in cooperation intensity to achieve the main project result

Types of action to foster cooperation (with gradually increasing intensity): only address the relevant ones	**Level of cooperation at the starting situation: Select from the list (Quantification with points)**	**Rate the degree of change against the starting situation: Select from the list (Quantification with points)**	**Justify by project output: Insert summary text**
Getting in touch with relevant stakeholders in the programme area	• highly developed (3) • moderately developed (2) • little developed (1) • not developed (0) • not relevant	• Major positive change (3) • Moderate positive change (2) • Minor positive change (1) • Stayed the same (no change) (0) • Not addressed	
Exchange of information and knowledge			
Understanding joint problems and challenges			
Finding common views			
Development of powerful networks and partnerships			
Development of joint strategies			
Development of a coordinated approach to implement the strategy			
Development of a joint action plan to implement the strategy			
Development of a joint management structure			
Development of a joint organizational structure			
Creating a common financial basis			
Joint development of tools and services			
Development of joint information and promotion activities			

Types of action to foster cooperation (with gradually increasing intensity): only address the relevant ones	Level of cooperation at the starting situation: Select from the list (Quantification with points)	Rate the degree of change against the starting situation: Select from the list (Quantification with points)	Justify by project output: Insert summary text
Development of joint training and capacity building			
Development of a joint governance system			
Implementation of joint pilot activities			
Implementation of regular joint activities			
Other: please explain			

Source: Metis

12.10 Expected programme results

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Cross cutting issues			
SO1.1	1.1 - Improve framework conditions for innov ation	Improved strategic frameworks and cooperation to build up excellent **research infrastructure** in the Danube region	More effective **collaborative research & innovation activities** and support of competent **networks** between enterprises, R&D centres, education and higher education and the public sector to enhance the **commercial use of research results**.	More effective **collaborative research & innovation activities** and support of competent **networks** between enterprises, R&D centres, education and higher education and the public sector to foster **technology transfer**.	More effective **collaborative research & innovation activities** and support of competent **networks** between enterprises, R&D centres, education and higher education and the public sector to broaden **access to knowledge**.	Improved coordination and developed practical solutions for **cluster policies and transnational cluster cooperation** for innovation development in technological areas and non-technological areas based on **smart specialisation approaches** (RIS3).	Improved strategic frameworks and developed practical solutions to **tackle bottleneck factors that hinder the innovation in SMEs**, e.g. better access to innovation finance, support for innovative start-ups, better assistance with the management of intellectual property rights.	Specific attention is given to **eco-innovation** (e.g. in order to tackle climate change adaption and mitigation and the pressure on resources)	Specific attention is given to **social innovation** (e.g. to meet social needs related to demographic change, ageing population)	Specific attention is given to **service innovation** (e.g. related to strengthening the employment and knowledge intensive cultural and creative industries)	Better **integration** of actors and organisations from less developed regions of the Danube area

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Expected result #7			
SO1.2	1.2 - Increase competences for business and social innovation	Improved policy learning and development of practical solutions to better **adapt human resources to technological change** and market requirements.	Improved policies and practical solutions for **entrepreneurial culture and learning**. Building up a stronger culture of entrepreneurship, improve developing skills and competences for innovative entrepreneurship including gender aspects.	Addressing high-quality primary and secondary **schooling**	Strengthen capacities of the so called **supporting organizations**	Improved environment, skills and competences to advance social innovation and social services to better meet **social needs** and further improve the capacities of regions and public institutions to manage **new challenges** such as those deriving from demographic change, migration and brain drain and to better provide services in the general interest.	Built up **joint educational offers in specific fields of interest** (e.g. in sustainable transport sector)	Improved systems for institutional learning and building capacities of **public administration** to better cope with innovation processes			
SO2.1	2.1 - Strengthen transnational water management and flood risk prevention	Better integrated plans and developed solutions to further **protect and enhance the status of all waters**	Better integrated plans and developed solutions to ensure the **sustainable, long-term use of water resources** in the Danube region	Coordination of water management with sound **flood risk management**.							

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Expected result #7			
SO2.2	2.2 - Foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources	Improved frameworks, capacities and solutions for **sustainable tourism development** in the Danube region based on **protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources**	Sustainable tourism based on reduction of resource and **energy** consumption	Sustainable tourism based on sustainable **mobility management**	Improved strategies and tools for sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage and resources for regional development in order to avoid or limit use conflicts (e.g. with tourism, natural resource consumption).						

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Expected result #7			
SO2.3	2.3 - Foster the restoration and management of ecological corridors	Improved **strategic frameworks** and **developed concrete solutions** to restore, conserve and improve a network of green infrastructures/ **bio-corridors** in the Danube region consisting of natural and semi-natural habitats to help reduce the fragmentation of ecosystems and improving the connectivity between sites in the Natura 2000 network in order to ensure biodiversity									

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Expected result #7			
SO2.4	2.4 - Improve preparedness for environmental risk management	Development of **joint strategies and action plans** for more effective management of natural and an-made disasters, building up a **common knowledge base** and data observation capacities, and mechanisms for the exchange of information; joint development of tools, development and practical implementation of **education, training and capacity building** to improve strategic and operational cooperation and interoperability among the emergency response authorities and stakeholders at all levels in the Danube countries.									

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Expected result #7	Expected result #8		
SO3.1	3.1 - Support environmentally-friendly and safe transport systems and balanced accessibility of urban and rural areas	Contribute to the development of a **better connected and interoperable** environmentally-friendly transport system	Better integrated policies and practical solutions to further developing **waterways** while limiting negative impacts of the transport systems on the Danube ecosystem	Improving coordination and transnational integration among transport stakeholders to further develop **multimodal hubs, terminals and links**.	Contribute to a **safer** transport network	Contribute to a **better organisation** of public transport links and other sustainable modes of transport in functional urban and rural areas and contribute to a **better connectivity**					
SO3.2	3.2 - Improve energy security and energy efficiency	Improved information sharing and practical coordination of regional energy planning to achieve **effective energy distribution**	Improved information sharing and practical coordination of regional energy planning to achieve effective energy **storage**	**Improved information sharing and practical coordination of regional energy planning to achieve diversification** of energy **sources**	promotion of all kinds of **renewable energy sources** in order to contribute to the security of energy supply.	promotion of **higher energy efficienc**y in order to contribute to the security of energy supply.					

SO	Short title	Expected result #1	Expected result #2	Expected result #3	Expected result #4	Expected result #5	Expected result #6	Expected result #7	Expected result #8		
SO4.1	4.1 - Improve institutional capacities to tackle major societal challenges	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in **labour market** policies	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in **education** systems and policies	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in dem**ographic change and migration** challenges	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in **inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups**	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in **participatory planning** process and **involvement of civil society**	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in **urban-rural cooperation** and partnership	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in cooperation on **safety, justice and security**	Improved capacities of public institutions and stakeholders to tackle major societal challenges in **administrative issues.**		
SO4.2	4.2 - Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR	Improved effectiveness of coordination and strategy implementation in each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR by a facility for direct support to EUSDR governance	Increased capacities in the regions for the development of complex strategic transnational projects contributing to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by establishing a seed money/project development fund facility	Strengthened implementation of the EUSDR through the establishment of an EUSDR Strategy Point to facilitate the information flow between key EUSDR actors	Strengthened capacity of the PAC in implementing and communicating the EUSDR through the Strategy Point						

Remark the three results 6, 7, 8 were very softly and indirectly (urban-rural, admin issues) or not at all (safety, …) addressed so far.