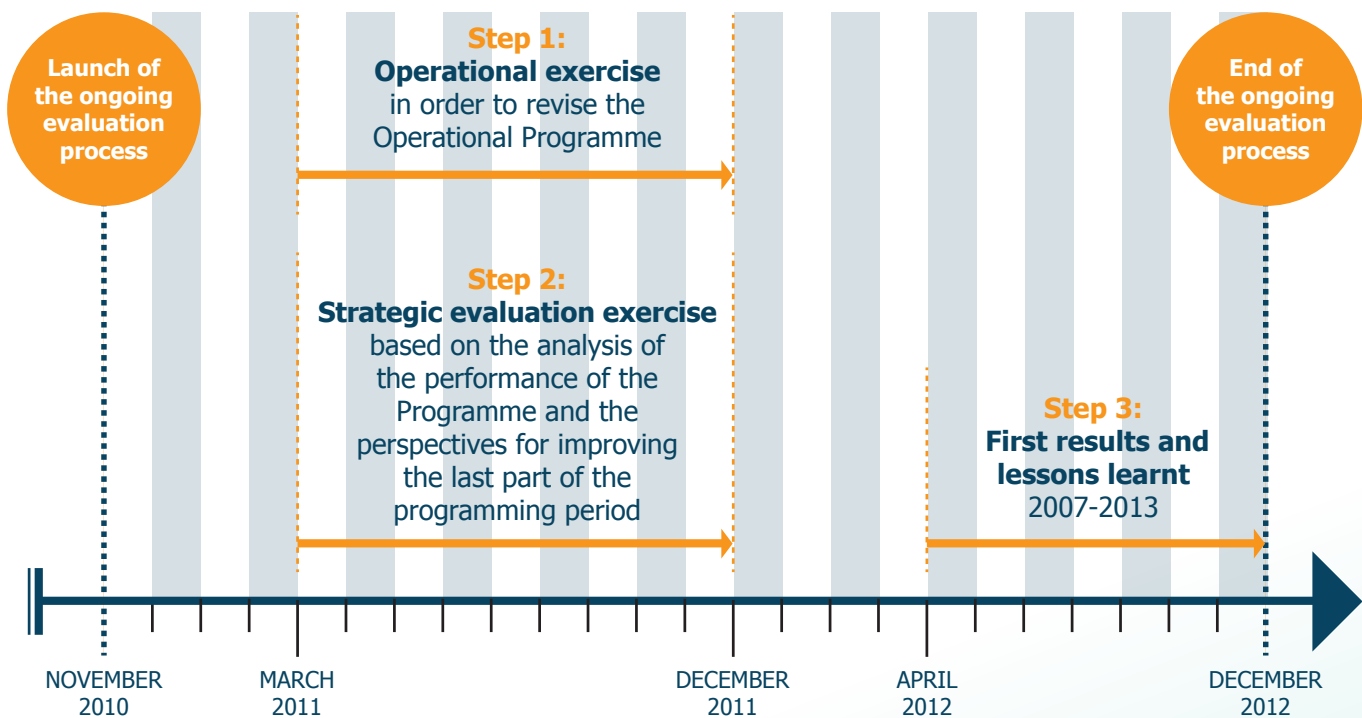




## The three steps of evaluation in 2 Seas



**Firstly, ongoing programme evaluation had an operational nature** as the 2 Seas Operational Programme needed revision on a number of urgent issues.

**Secondly, a strategic evaluation exercise has been carried out** in order to analyse the Programme performance and shed a light on some perspectives for improving the last part of the current programming period 2007-2013.

To this end, external experts analysed the current performance of the programme, they made an in-depth study of the continued pertinence of the Operational Programme and gave recommendations to the future programme direction until the end of the current programming period.

**Finally, the last step of ongoing evaluation focuses on the first results and lessons learnt** of the current programming period in view of the next programming period 2014-2020. Its main objective has been to analyse the present in order to shape the future.

The results of these studies have been published and are available on our Programme website ('Programme Developments' section):

<http://interreg4a-2mers.eu/programme/programme-developments/en>

### What's next ?

The studies will serve as important input to the preparations of the future Programme.

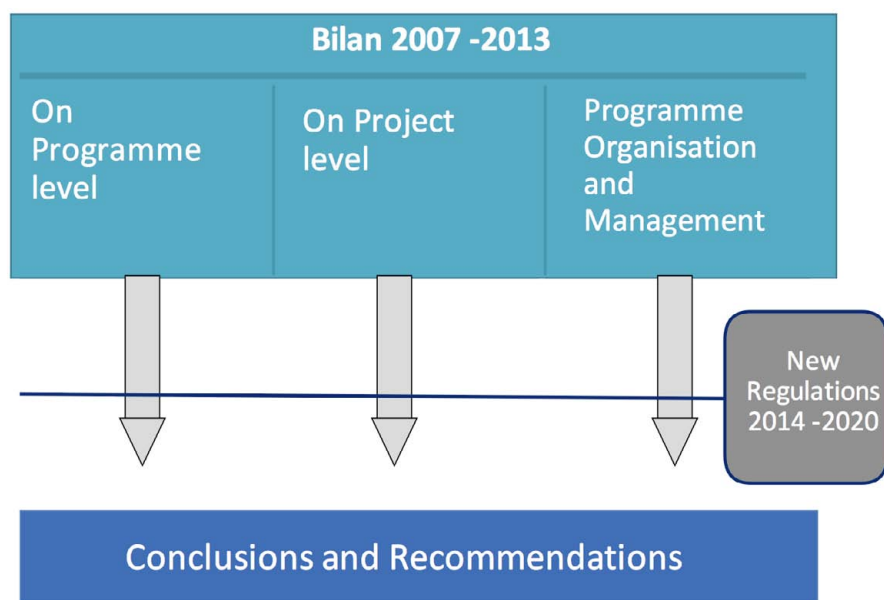
Findings and recommendations will be further analysed and discussed by the Programme Preparation Group. The outcomes of the nine questions presented in this newsletter are therefore the result of research done by external evaluators and do not reflect in any way the final Programme or JTS position.

## Step 3: First results and lessons learnt

The main aim of the third and last step of ongoing programme evaluation has been to give recommendations for the future of 2 Seas in the period 2014-2020. In this part, evaluators were asked to thoroughly assess the current Programme, sum up main findings, indicate strengths and highlight possible improvements.

At the same time, evaluators were asked to take into consideration the shifting context of new draft regulations 2014-2020, ongoing negotiations about the future of European Territorial Cooperation both within the EU institutions and between the EU and the Member States. They must keep an eye on the first discussions to define the contours of a V A 2 Seas. The lessons learnt today should serve tomorrow's Programme.

### Overall Objectives Step 3



## Which methods have been used?

The evaluation findings and recommendations are based on:

- **Desk-based research** of programme documents and statistics, the future regulatory package and relevant reference documentation.
- An **on-line survey** among the Lead Partners and partners of all approved 2 Seas projects (total response: 220 = 40%). The survey also targeted representatives of rejected projects (response: 24, representing 20 projects ( $\pm$  15%).
- **Round table sessions** in all 4 Member States with a delegation of national, regional and local level stakeholders of the 2 Seas Programme.
- **Interviews with representatives of the main programme bodies:** Managing Authority, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, European Commission, Joint Technical Secretariat and Territorial Facilitators. The Managing Authority and Joint Technical Secretariat of the France (Channel)- England programme were also interviewed.



## 9 questions: main findings and recommendations for the future

9 questions have been the backbone to assess main lessons learnt about the current programme and recommendations for the future. They were centred around three fields of working: **evaluation on Programme level**, **evaluation on Project level** and an **assessment of the Programme organisation and management**:

### 1. Building on the Programme identity: a maritime Programme?



The INTERREG IV A 2 Seas Programme was created as a new programme for the 2007 – 2013 period. In this first period the Programme has developed its own specific characteristics regarding thematic orientation, partnerships, types of cooperation projects etc. In other words the Programme has established its own programme identity.

This part of the evaluation aimed to capture the identity the programme has developed over these first years, explored which role the **'sea border'** can play for the cooperation area and identified differences and specific qualities compared with the numerous overlapping INTERREG IV A and IV B programmes in the area.

The INTERREG IVA 2 Seas programme delivers cross-border cooperation projects across the sea border of the North Sea/Channel. Through its projects, the programme addresses a very wide and diverse range of themes. Specific characteristics of the 2 Seas programme, compared to other cross-border cooperation programmes in the area are:

- The importance of the **maritime dimension** in terms of the quantity of projects (25%) and the volume of ERDF invested (29%).
- The predominance of **multilateral cooperation** projects: 75% of all projects involve 3 or 4 countries.



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- The budget volumes are considerably higher both per project (10%-120%) and per partner (40%).
- The geographical distribution of partners from the UK, where both programmes fully overlap, differs. Where **2 Seas mainly sees cooperation involving south-eastern and eastern England**, the France (Channel)-England cooperation concentrates in the south-west/south-east UK.

A more precise comparison with the overlapping maritime cross-border programme France (Channel)-England shows that the two programmes are quite similar in many respects. Specific differences that can be identified are:

- Maritime projects in the 2 Seas tend to focus on **ports, the maritime economy and heritage** and have more **applied nature**. In France (Channel)-England maritime projects tend to focus more on marine ecosystems and energy and have a strong research orientation.

### Which 2 Seas Programme for the future?

The 2 Seas programme has a very wide-ranging thematic strategy, and at project level a considerable variety of themes is addressed. Programmes for the 2014-2020 period are expected to have a much

stronger thematic focus. Building on the identity of the present 2 Seas programme, the following elements can provide guidance for achieving more thematic focus:

- The 2 Seas programme 2014-2020 can build on the main unique selling point of the programme in thematic sense, which is the maritime dimension. The new programme could concentrate on the opportunities and challenges related to the sea and coast that define the border for this cross-border cooperation programme, leaving cooperation on non-maritime subjects to the other European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes in the area.
- Based on the numbers of projects currently supported, 2 Seas has shown a potential for cross-border cooperation linked to the following thematic priorities:
  - strengthening research, technological development and innovation;
  - promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;
  - promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;



On the other hand several future priority themes are less developed presently:

- supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;
- protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;
- Focus can be strengthened also by selecting only thematic objectives and investment priorities that are relevant for all four countries involved in the programme area, to build on the strong multilateral dimension of the programme.

- Strong coordination should be ensured with the preparation of overlapping/neighbouring ETC programmes, in particular the other cross-border cooperation programmes, already in an early stage of the preparation process. This will make it possible to maximise complementarity and reduce similarities of these largely overlapping programmes.

## 2. Programme framework and future intervention logic: which priorities to focus on?



The current INTERREG IVA 2 Seas programme tackles a wide array of potential cooperation priorities and operational objectives. On this basis, it was assessed what are the key lessons from the programme implementation, how consistent was the intervention logic and the indicators system.

The European Commission will look for more focused, integrated and strategic programmes in the future period 2014-2020. It has to be analysed how the future requirements such as the new intervention logic more focused on the results, the new indicators system and the

new territorial approaches to programme delivery could impact the future framework and how to get prepared for this major shift.

We can observe a relatively high consistency between the "overall strategic relevance" of some key thematic priorities and the reality of the programming process, based on cooperation needs and interest from projects promoters, except for energy efficiency / Renewable energies and Low Carbon Economy.

The bottom-up process was appropriate in order to stimulate this emergence of

cooperation projects on a wide variety of topics, but the OP didn't exploit all the opened possibilities in terms of projects generation, in particular as regards strategic projects generation in spite of a lot of investments made by the JTS and the rather advanced process of agreement between the MS representatives.

**It would have been relevant to go a step further to stimulate for instance the development of projects on renewable marine energy or maritime pollution, by inviting the key actors to be partners or to participate as observers.**

## 3. Partners and partnerships in 2 Seas projects: who are the key actors?



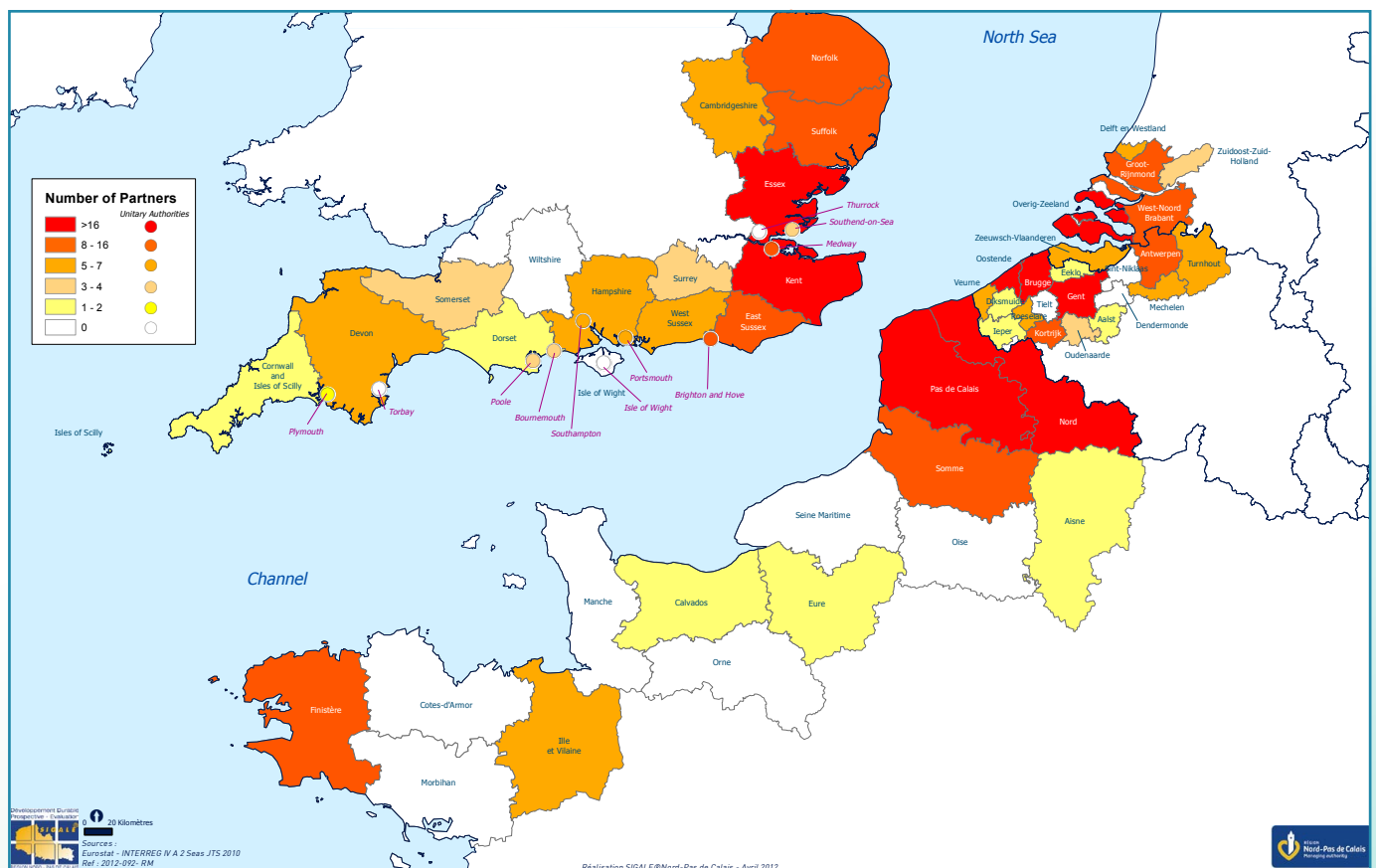
The potential for the 2 Seas programme to make an impact on the ground in the cross-border territory depends to a large extent on the partners involved in co-operation projects. **An analysis of the nature of partners and partnerships** is key to understanding the essence and effect of cross-border cooperation in the

2 Seas. It also explores how these partnership characteristics fit the future programme framework for 2014-2020 and which adaptations could be considered.

The distribution of partners is not equally spread over the whole programme area. Especially in the early calls for proposals

a concentration of partners in a limited number of territories was observed (Kent CC (UK), Nord and Pas-de-Calais (FR)). This area of most intensive involvement gradually expanded to cover most territories on the mainland side and those of the south-eastern and eastern parts of the UK.

### Spatial trends of Partners in the 2 Seas Programme area: Overview of the number of Partners per NUTS III after 9 calls for proposals



**Overall the 2 Seas programme has mobilised a good variety of actors in a demand-driven way.** Universities and research institutes are concentrated in the objectives dealing with innovation, research and networking. These actors also show interest in environmental issues and risk management. Projects in the operational objective Accessibility involve only local and regional authorities

as partners. In absolute terms, traditional cross-border cooperation beneficiaries (local authorities, NGOs) are strongly involved in projects related to heritage and cultural partnerships.

**Project partners are generally very pleased with their partnership in terms of effective coordination and implementation and the composition of the partnership.**

The survey shows that large partnerships encounter more difficulties in project management and implementation. Partners consider however that larger partnerships allow them to better involve all partners necessary for the realisation of projects aims. Projects involving a higher number of countries (3 or 4) report positive effects on projects achievements.



A stronger focus on a few thematic objectives will affect the type of partners that will be the main target groups of a 2 Seas programme 2014-2020. Without prejudice to the eventual selection of thematic objectives for the 2 Seas programme, one can say that:

a. **Local public authorities will be key cross-border actors** in thematic objectives regarding the economy (e.g. support to SMEs, the low-carbon economy), climate, environment, infrastructures and social themes, while their role would be less prominent in relation to research and innovation.

b. **Knowledge institutes and universities** are key players related to research and innovation. They can also play an important role in objectives related to the low-carbon economy, climate adaptation, environment and education. In the present 2 Seas partnerships these actors are generally well involved in projects related to these objectives.

c. **Private actors** will be key partners for thematic objectives related to innovation, support to SMEs, ICT, the low-carbon economy, resource efficiency and labour. So far their involvement in 2 Seas projects has

been limited, mainly related to economic activities and entrepreneurship. If the 2 Seas Programme selects one or more of these thematic objectives, action would be needed to increase the involvement of private actors in projects.

## 4. Technical Assistance: how to better support the 2 seas projects?



Technical assistance in ETC programmes is crucial in order to involve as many potential applicants as possible and to implement the programme considering the **different national administrative cultures, specific rules, and the diversity of languages** when it was decided not to opt for one unique language.

Beyond all these factors of complexity, the 2 Seas programme had to overcome **two additional major obstacles** which are the new character of this maritime cross-border area and the fact that its implementation started later than in many other cooperation areas.

It was necessary to draw up all the rules and templates, in three different languages, and at the same time to structure the operational organisation of the programme, made up of **the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) staff and the Network of Territorial Facilitators (TFN)**.

Respondents to the survey judge positively the support and guidance provided by both the JTS and TFN. Their assis-



tance is even more appreciated during project preparation, somewhat less during project implementation. However, some respondents do not seem to know about the territorial facilitator on their territory. If the breakdown of roles and tasks between JTS and TFN has been clarified over time, it remains unclear for a significant proportion of respondents.

Fundamentally, beyond administrative reporting, **several projects partners have expressed the need for more regular annual meetings to discuss the implementation of the project and possible new directions.**

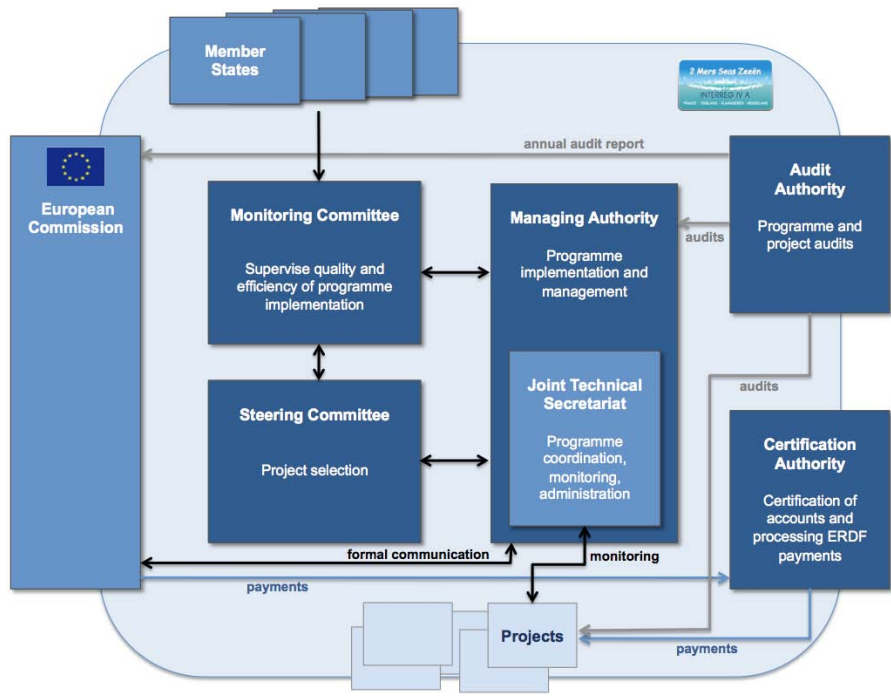
## 5. Programme bodies: an enhanced role?



The 2 Seas Programme has a governance structure that consists of several programme bodies and committees, each assigned specific responsibilities and tasks. This part of the evaluation concentrates on the way these programme bodies functioned, independently and in their interaction, in order to steer and manage the programme. It analyses the roles of these authorities against the background of the proposed regulatory framework for ETC programmes to identify lessons and recommendations for the future programme structures.

PMC (**Programme Monitoring Committee**) meetings dealt mainly with operational management issues, and less with topics related to the strategic course of the programme. A lack of in-depth strategic debate, and as a result a lack of a joint strategic vision for the programme is perceived by many of its members as the main weakness of the PMC.

The **Programme Steering Committee** (PSC, responsible for selection of projects) has functioned well. Overall, the members of the committee are rather



satisfied with the debate and results of the PSC. Even if in individual cases PSC members sometimes had different views on the quality and relevance of proposals, they managed to make decision by consensus. The installation of a Consolidation Group, where PSC meetings were

prepared by the member states in an informal setting, has been an important factor in this effective functioning, by allowing the PSC members to explore and understand each others' positions.

## 6. Programme performance and control



During this programming period, avoiding automatic decommitment has remained the golden rule for programme managers.

The general assessment concerning the capacity of the programme to manage ERDF funding in conformity with the EC requirements is positive. The MA and JTS have succeeded in putting in place

a system without any major shortcoming. However, some deficiencies and weaknesses can be highlighted such as too many time consuming procedures, double checks and differences in national systems which make life more difficult for many projects partners, especially the less-experienced ones of small size organisations.





## 7. Project processes: a project's life from development to closure



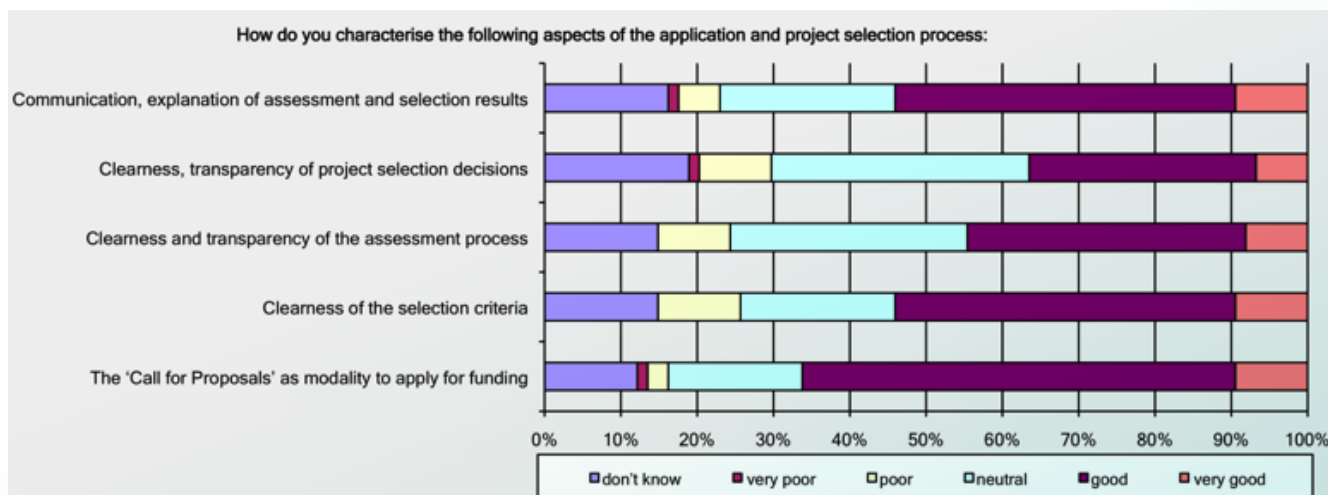
The preparation and implementation of 2 Seas projects are governed by various procedures to ensure proper planning and follow-up of the activities and finances. These procedures form a considerable workload for both project partners and the staff of the programme secretariat. This part of the evaluation assesses the 2 Seas programme application and implementation systems and procedures in view of the overall aims at EU level to

put a stronger emphasis on project results, on performance and on the simplification of processes for the next programming period.

The **application process** of the 2 Seas Programme was structured by frequent calls for proposals (generally 2 times per year). The schedule of all the calls was communicated early on in the programme, allowing partnerships to antici-

pate in their preparation work. The application process is clearly defined and Lead Partners clearly appreciate the possibility to meet during the applicant seminar. Applicants perceive the preparation of projects as complex, and survey response shows a clear demand for simplification of project preparation work.

### Feedback from Lead Partners of approved projects on the application and selection process:



**At the closure of each call for proposals, applications entered a process of assessment.** This process involves a series of checks, first on the completeness of each proposal (eligibility check) and then on the quality and relevance (quality assessment).

Based on a quality assessment report by the Joint Technical Secretariat, the Programme Steering Committee decides on the selection of projects. This stage takes around 4 months. The duration of this process is considered long by applicants in particular as it is uncertain during this stage whether the project can go ahead. Applicants report they would appreciate

having regular updates on the progress of the selection process. Regarding the communication and motivation of project selection decisions applicants are generally satisfied.

During the implementation stage of projects, procedures are in place for **monitoring and reporting**. The workload and staff resources associated are generally seen as very demanding by project (Lead) Partners. Monitoring and reporting systems are not fully standardised as can be observed with the definition of eligibility rules or the organisation of First Level Controllers. Lead Partners point out the heavy monitoring process with con-

trols required at the level of partners, lead partners and the JTS.

**The involvement and the quality of services provided by FLC** is also subject to discussion, and programme bodies and stakeholders in the 2 Seas Member States generally agree on the necessity to ensure higher skills and higher level of services with stronger relations with programmes authorities, information and training sessions. Lead Partners of 2 Seas projects highlight the necessity to provide more user friendly forms and templates to save time on reporting work and improve communication between partners.

## 8. Programme and project communication: new means, new actions



Over the successive programming periods, a stronger emphasis has been put by the EC on communication within European programmes and projects in order to make their achievements more visible. In order to structure the communication activities, a detailed strategy and action plan was established in the early stage of the 2 Seas programming period. The communication at project level is also assessed, by making clear whether projects partners have got the necessary guidance to promote their activities.

It can be anticipated that communication in the future programming period will be facilitated by the current experience, and will benefit in particular from the capitalisation approach and related events emphasizing clustering and synergies among projects. However, there is room for improvements in the way the action plan and tools have been developed so far.



The main recommendations should be:

- to develop more state of the art communication tools (in particular use of social media),
- to organise targeted events aiming at reinforcing the mutual knowledge between different projects and their synergies.
- to showcase the more strategic projects for the area, both towards politicians and the population in general.
- to inform projects applicants and later on approved projects since the very beginning of the programming period of their crucial role in contributing to programme objectives delivery, not only as a means to finance their joint ideas and actions.

## 9. Evaluation capacity: how to improve?



The 2 Seas programme has engaged in several evaluation activities throughout the 2007-2013 programme period.

These evaluations have been an important means for steering the programme strategy and implementation. And the significance of effective evaluation tools will become even greater considering the enhanced focus on result-oriented programming for the 2014-2020 period.

This segment of the ongoing evaluation assesses the approaches used and facilities created for evaluation of the 2 Seas Programme and provides recommendations to further strengthen the evaluation framework of the future Programme.

This newsletter gives you an overview of the evaluation process of the 2 Seas Programme and its main conclusions.

Check out the consolidated reports online:

<http://interreg4a-2mers.eu/programme/programme-developments/en>

Or contact the JTS:  
[contact@interreg4a-2seas.eu](mailto:contact@interreg4a-2seas.eu)



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