INTERREG IVA 2 Seas
Ongoing Evaluation Step 3
"Shaping the future"

CONSOLIDATED FINAL REPORT

December 2012

Presented to:
GEIE GECOTTI – INTERREG IVA 2 Seas
45/D, Rue de Tournai, 5e étage
F59000 LILLE
FRANCE

Evaluation consortium:

Tako Popma	**Pascal Chazaud**	**Georges Mercier**
tako.popma@link-eu.net	pascal.chazaud@cpc-consultant.com	georgesmercier01@hotmail.com
www.link-eu.net	www.europe-territoires-conseil.eu	www.europe-territoires-conseil.eu
+31 6 21125512	+33 6 6048 8218	+33 6 7424 7053

Table of contents

1. Evaluation context

1.1   Introduction

This report presents the results of final stage of the ongoing evaluation of the 2 Seas INTERREG IVA programme for cross-border cooperation (2007-2013). It summarises the findings, conclusions and recommendations generated through an elaborate and interactive evaluation process during the second half of 2012.

The focus of this 3rd and final stage of the ongoing evaluation was on evaluating programme performance to provide guidance for a future 2 Seas programme. It builds on previous stages of the ongoing evaluation (2011) that concentrated on identifying necessary revisions of the programme strategy and documents of the present 2 Seas programme.

1.2   The 2 Seas programme

The INTERREG IVA 2 Seas Programme promotes cross-border cooperation between the coastal regions of 4 EU Member States: France (Nord-Pas de Calais), the UK (south-west, south-east and east of England), Belgium (Flanders) and The Netherlands (south-west coastal area). The programme area is indicated in red on the map in Figure 1.

The 2 Seas programme for cross-border cooperation runs from 2007 – 2013. It is funded from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), with a budget of €167 million EU funding.
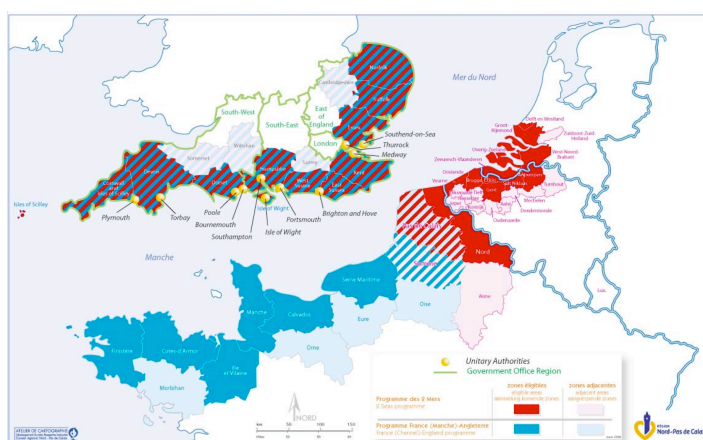

Figure 1. INTERREG IVA 2 Seas programme area

The 2 Seas programme has three thematic priorities, as indicated below. It also shares a common priority with the neighbouring France(Channel)-England INTERREG IVA Programme (targeting the areas in red and blue in Figure 1).

> *Priority 1: Creating an economically competitive, attractive and accessible area*
> *Priority 2: Promoting and enhancing a safe and healthy environment*
> *Priority 3: Improving quality of life*
> *Priority 4: Common priority with the France(Channel)England programme*

Since the start of the programme, 86 cross-border cooperation projects have received funding from 2 Seas. Together these projects involve over 500 partners from the 4 member states. These projects cover all thematic priorities, representing a total invested budget of over €320 million.

1.3   Scope of this evaluation

The aim of this 3rd stage of the ongoing evaluation is to provide an independent analysis of the 2 Seas programme along two (interrelated) lines of investigation. On the one hand it intends to assess the performance and results of the programme in view its initial regulatory and policy context.

On the other hand this evaluation aims at providing building blocks and input for the process of developing a new 2 Seas programme for the period after 2014. The strengths and weaknesses of the present 2 Seas programme are therefore evaluated against the proposed requirements for this new funding period. This serves to identify how the 2 Seas programme performs in view of the new framework and to enable the definition of concrete proposals and recommendations on how to adapt the programme to this new context.

The scope of the evaluation covers nine specific evaluation questions. The fields of analysis covered by each of these questions are shortly introduced below. More specific explanations are presented in the core of this report, where each of these questions will be addressed in detail.

1. *Building on the Programme identity* – assessing the nature and unique selling points of the programme and the role of the maritime border.
2. *Programme framework and future intervention logic* – assessing the programme framework in view of the future requirements.
3. *Future partners and partnerships in 2 Seas projects* – analysing the characteristics of partnerships and potential future improvements
4. *Suggested areas for improvement on Technical Assistance* – assessment of functioning of the programme implementation bodies and their future requirements.
5. *Evaluation of Programme bodies* – assessment of functioning of the programme authorities and management bodies and their future requirements
6. *Programme performance & control* – assessment of the monitoring and control system in view of the future requirements
7. *Project processes from development to project closure* – analysis of tools and processes for project development and implementation.
8. *Programme and Project communication* – assessing communication at programme and project level and proposals for future communication tools
9. *Assessment of Programme evaluation capacity* – assessment of the programme evaluation strategy and tools and inventory of possible future approaches.

1.4 Framework for European Territorial Cooperation 2014 - 2020

The framework for the 2014-2020 European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes is provided by a package of (draft) regulations and various supporting documents from the European Commission. This framework has provided an important building block for this evaluation, in view of its future oriented mission to provide guidance for a next 2 Seas programme.

This legislative package still has to be formally adopted by the European Council (expected mid 2013). However, several key requirements for future ECT programmes are already clear. These include the need for programmes to focus on a limited number of thematic objectives and investment priorities that are related to the Europe 2020 Strategy[1]. Programmes should have a stronger orientation on results and enhanced performance, i.a. by identifying solid indicators and targets for several milestones during the programme period. Programme authorities also have to simplify administrative requirements and procedures.

1.5 Evaluation process and methodology

This evaluation was performed between August and December 2012. In this period three consecutive evaluation steps were implemented, each resulting in an interim evaluation report, as follows:

- Evaluation of the programme level (1st interim report, covering evaluation questions 1 and 2)
- Evaluation of the project level (2nd interim report, covering evaluation question 3)
- Evaluation of 2 Seas organisation and functioning (3rd interim report, evaluation questions 4 - 9)

These reports were presented to and discussed with the 2 Seas Joint Technical Secretariat and to representatives of the Member States, during meetings of the Programme Monitoring Committee or working groups of the Member States.

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 (± 15%).

---

[1] The EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

- 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.

The following chapters of this consolidated final report each address one of the evaluation questions presented in 1.3 above. Each chapter briefly introduces the scope of the evaluation question, followed by a concise overview of the main findings and conclusions and related key recommendations.

2 Building on the programme identity

2.1 Scope

The 2 Seas INTERREG IVA 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 aims to capture the identity the programme that has developed over these first years, explores which role the 'sea border' can play for the cooperation area and identifies differences and specific qualities compared with the numerous overlapping INTERREG IVA and IVB programmes in the area.

2.2 Key findings and conclusions

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[2] in the area are:
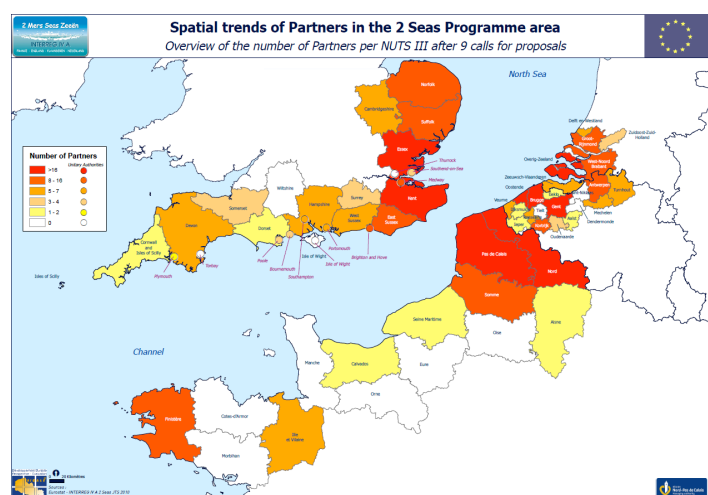
- The importance of the maritime dimension in terms of the quantity of projects (25%) and the volume of ERDF invested (29%).
- The predominance of multilateral cooperation projects: 75% of all projects involve 3 or 4 countries.
- The budget volumes are considerably higher both per project (10%-120%) and per partner (40%).

Still many similarities exist with other cross-border cooperation programmes in the area. In particular the themes addressed by projects outside the maritime sphere are the same for all programmes in the area.. These projects are not characterised specifically by the sea-border that defines the 2 Seas programme and as such they could also have taken place in one of the cross-border cooperation programmes along the land borders.

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:

Figure 2. Origin of 2 Seas project partners

- 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.
- 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 (see Figure 2), the France(Channel)-England cooperation concentrates in the south-west/south-east UK.

---

[2] Comparison with the overlapping INTERREG IVA programmes: France (Channel)-England, France-Wallonia-Flanders and Flanders-The Netherlands

2.3   Recommendations for the future programme

1. 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. The most noticeable ones are important future themes:
     - 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. Another key question for the future programme relates to the composition of the programme area. In the present situation there are two overlapping and thematically similar cross-border programmes on the maritime border, 2 Seas and France (Channel)-England one can say that efficiency, focus and potential impact of the arrangements for (maritime) cross-border cooperation are sub-optimal.

   Based on the analysis of the coexistence of the two programmes, the following considerations are made regarding this issue:
   • The clearly distinct patterns in geographic origin of actors from the UK involved in the two programmes strongly suggest the existence of two separate functional cross-border areas in the combined Channel and southern North-Sea areas, which partly overlap in the south-east of the UK.
   • The Common Priority shared by both programmes can be seen as a case study for the potential for functional cooperation on maritime issues in the combined territories. Patterns in geographical origin of project partners in this priority do not significantly differ from those mentioned above[3], putting in question the potential for an enlarged cross-border functional area along the entire maritime border.
   • Programme actors in the 2 Seas do not experience the present 2 Seas territory as one whole functional cross-border area.

   For the delimitation of the programme area for the 2014-2020 period these points raise arguments in favour of the creation of two separate cross-border cooperation programmes along the maritime border. These programmes could each concentrate on a coherent functional cross-border area, and develop specific thematic priorities relevant to their respective territories. This would suggest maintaining the present separation of the two areas on the continental side, while dividing the territory on the UK side into two (partly overlapping) sections.

---

[3] Note that with 7 projects in the Common priority, the sample size is very small.

3 Programme framework and future intervention logic

3.1 Scope

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.

3.2 Key findings and conclusions

In spite of the late approval of the new OP by the EC, the Managing Authority jointly with the MS representatives succeeded in giving existence to this new area and facilitating the emergence of cross-border cooperation among partners throughout the programme area. The maritime dimension exists in a significant number of approved projects, which is in line with the overall objective of the OP The wide scope of eligible thematic allowed projects on many different issues to develop and appealed to a great variety of project applicants' needs. This has contributed to the rapid dispersion of the 2 Seas programme in its first programme period.

However, the eligible thematic and topics resulted from the aggregation of national preferences, and lacked for higher concentration on a limited set of themes. This can be linked (at least in part) to the fact that the programme was new and the partners needed time to find common understanding.

Based on approved projects, a thematic capitalisation was carried out by the Programme in 2012. It shows a relatively high consistency between the "overall strategic relevance"[4] of some key thematic priorities and the reality of the programming process, based on cooperation needs and interest from projects applicants. However, a stronger emphasis should be put in the future on some underdeveloped themes such as energy efficiency and renewable energies as well as the low carbon economy considering their high importance in the thematic orientation of Cohesion Policy 2014-2020.

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 project 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.

3.3 Recommendations for the future programme

1. In order to achieve more tangible results in the logic of maritime cross-border cooperation, it is highly advisable to select a limited number of thematic objectives. The way of doing so should be as consensual as possible, with possibly inputs from external sources only as assistance for the decision-making process. A more coordinated and complementary approach should be developed with overlapping OPs (strands A and B) for a good articulation when selecting the most appropriate themes.

2. The new approaches to programme delivery need to be further explored as they require the preparation of a number of specific management and steering arrangements at programme level

---

[4] Defined as the relevance of the programmes' thematic priorities for both the present and future Cohesion Policy context

to ensure their smooth functioning, as well as relevant and solid demand from coordinated territories located on each side of the seas.

3. It would be essential to improve the quality of the socio-economic diagnosis on cooperation needs, remaining obstacles or barriers, difficulties in order to have a more territorial integrated area.

4. During the whole process of preparing the future framework, it is highly advisable to establish closer links with regional/local public policies, especially those designed in the regional OPs. For instance, the involvement of decision-makers in charge of the regional OPs could be invited to some meetings during the consultation process of the future cross-border cooperation OP.

5. Overall, the method of designing the future cross-border cooperation OP should involve much more the decision-makers from each country and jointly at key steps of the process.

4 Partners and partnerships

4.1 Scope

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 cooperation 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 what adaptations could be considered.

4.2 Key findings and conclusions

Projects in the 2 Seas programme on average have between 6 and 7 partners (in a range from 2 to 29 partners). Most of these partners are either local authorities (45%) or non-profit organisations (30%).

The composition of partnerships tends to be rather homogenous. Of all projects, 45 % involves only two different categories of partners[5] (Figure 3).

On average, a 2 Seas project involves partners from 4 to 5 NUTS3[6] territories out of the total 48 NUTS3 regions in the programme area. And no project involves partners from more than 10 NUTS3 areas. Projects tend to gather partners on the basis of project-driven needs from a limited number of territories with similar or complementary cross-border issues. On the other hand it should be noted that a majority of projects (57%) implement at least part of their activities in NUTS3 regions other than the ones where their partners are based, thus extending the territorial scope of their impact.

Figure 3. Involvement of different partner types
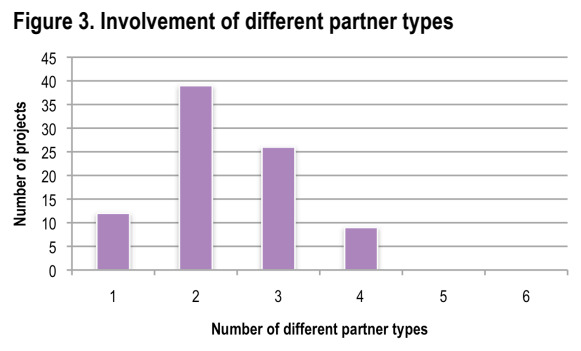
The distribution of partners is not equally spread over the whole programme area. Especially in the early calls for proposals a concentration of partners in a limited number of territories was observed (Kent CC (UK), Nord and Pas-de-Calais (FR)). This area of most intensive involvement gradually expanded to cover most territories on the mainland side and those of the south-eastern and eastern parts of the UK.

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.
Private bodies are not well represented as project partners[7]. They intervene mainly in Priority 1 projects related to entrepreneurship, innovation and economic activities.

Project partners are generally very content about 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.

---

[5] Six categories of partners are identified: local authority, regional authority, other public body, university/research/knowledge, non-profit, private company
[6] NUTS3 regions are a standardised subdivision of the European territory for statistical purposes.
[7] It should be noted that private companies are also involved in 2 Seas projects in other capacities than partners (such as observers in projects, members of project user groups, members of project evaluation committees etc.).

4.3 Recommendations for the future programme

1. 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. Their involvement on these issues is already well developed.

   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 (see below).

2. In view of the tendency of to cooperate mainly with similar types of partners, which is particularly observed among local/regional authorities, NGOs and Universities/research centres, it could be relevant to actively promote cross-sector cooperation in future projects to further strengthen the multi-level governance and cross-sector nature of projects of the new 2 Seas programme.

3. To increase private sector involvement, a number of interrelated actions is proposed:

   a. Facilitate private partners by further developing dedicated support (e.g. on state aid, project administration) and administrative simplifications (e.g. flat rates for staff and overhead costs).

   b. Documenting and actively communicating effective approaches to private sector participation as alternatives to formal project partnership. Tried and tested approaches include project outputs and activities benefitting private actors (training, matchmaking), implementation of voucher systems[8], and involvement of private actors as external expert or as 'observer'.

4. The 2 Seas programme defined a set of specific hallmarks for "strategic projects". The evaluation of partnerships shows that 2 Seas projects developed through regular open calls for proposals, in many cases may struggle to meet some of these hallmarks. In particular the requirement to cover a large part, or the whole of the programme area. This suggests that the generation of future "strategic project" partnerships, through open Calls for Proposals will require dedicated support in project generation. Also alternative mechanisms for generating projects could be envisaged.

5. In addition to the regular open Call for Proposals, the future programme could also define Calls for Proposals of a more targeted nature to have a more direct influence on the emergence of certain projects or the development of certain thematic fields. Three possible variants are identified here:

   a. A Call for Proposals can be issued with the distinct purpose to generate one or more specific projects that the programme bodies see as essential initiatives to achieve certain strategic programme aims. In this case elaborate Terms of Reference of the Call describe specifics of the expected partnership, activities and outputs and other requirements for a particular project.

   b. Calls for Proposals targeted on specific fields of intervention, for instance one of the programmes' investment priorities, or rather a transversal theme of the OP (e.g. maritime cooperation). Applicants can submit proposals according to their own needs and ideas, provided they are in line with the thematic focus of the Call.

   c. A Call for Proposals laying down specific requirements for the type of activity and/or outputs to be achieved by projects, allowing the programme to steer the nature of cooperation and promote certain types of cross-border interaction (e.g. cluster projects).

---

[8] In this system the project partners grant vouchers (or cheques) that they can use to acquire specific support or advice (up to a certain value) from relevant providers - either project partners or external experts.

5 Technical Assistance

5.1 Scope

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 consisting in 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).

5.2 Key findings and conclusions

The Managing Authority is assisted by the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) team which size expanded progressively by reaching a relatively high number of staff, justified by the volume of implemented tasks. It consists now in 14.5 FTEs based at the JTS premises in Lille, complemented by 5.5 territorial facilitators (TF) managed by and/or based at their own host organisation.

The JTS, jointly with the network of TF, has taken up the challenge of performing its tasks with effectiveness, competence and independence while it started from scratch in 2007 and had to manage all the information in three languages.

The JTS is sometimes perceived as too directive, without leaving enough possibilities for Committee members to react properly. On the other hand, this type of "driving force" is often needed to make things happen in the steering arrangements of an ETC programme, with MS/Committee members being relatively remote from the day-to-day practice of the programme.

The role played by the facilitators was essential to facilitate the involvement of partners, notably those who do not belong to the "INTERREG community". Networking activities with potential applicants really provided added value. The roadmap documents defined by the JTS have improved a lot the internal functioning of the whole team, with increased communication between them.

Respondents to the survey judge positively the support and guidance provided by both the JTS and TFN. Their assistance is even more appreciated during project preparation, somewhat less during project implementation. However, some respondent 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.

The existing architecture between JTS and TFN is not fully satisfactory because TFN are not directly employed by the Programme, but partly or entirely by their host organisation. Consequently, territorial facilitators are considered as neither inside nor outside the programme, which at times generates some unclarity about their exact roles and tasks.

5.3 Recommendations for the future programme

1. Assuming the continuation of the network of territorial facilitators, a similar structure between JTS and TFN could be used, but with clarifications in some countries as regards to whom they answer first. A higher degree of confidence between JTS and TFN, preferably employed on a full time basis, is necessary to have more effective and pro-active facilitators.

2. Considering the overall approach for cohesion policy 2014-2020, substantial adaptations in terms of internal expertise should be anticipated. It relates mainly to higher thematic focus on more technical issues, more strategic programming geared to results and strengthened territorial approaches

3. Operational improvements in the functioning of the TFN:
   • Ensure that TFN has access to all documentation and correspondence related to projects in order to fully fulfil a task as extension of the JTS, in particular in project monitoring
   • Ensure that the TFN can be clearly distinguished (regardless of the institutional set up in the new programme) as representatives of the programme JTS. Practical improvements in this direction would include even better communication of the TF availability and role. And also ensuring that all TF communicate via a 2-Seas e-mail address
   • Systematise arrangements that enable facilitators to work a part of their time on the JTS (e.g. a few days a month) to get a better feel of what is going on there.

4. Establish a standardised communication system between JTS & Territorial Facilitators on one side and project partners on the other side. This should ensure all information is always shared with the LP ('carbon copy'). In that respect, appointing a project support person (or team) from the programme (e.g. a Territorial Facilitator), that meets the partners several times (at the start of project and once every year) to discuss and advise progress and tackle problems early on, should help.

6 Evaluation of Programme Bodies

6.1 Scope

The 2 Seas programme has a governance structure that consists of several programme bodies and committees, each assigned specific responsibilities and tasks. Figure 4 below visualised the interrelations between these programme bodies. This part of the evaluation concentrates on the way these programme bodies function, 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.

6.2 Key findings and conclusions

The three programme authorities: Managing Authority, Certifying Authority and Audit Authority have generally functioned well and in line with the expectations of the main programme stakeholders. The authorities qualify their mutual cooperation as satisfactory. Regarding the Audit Authority some comments were made that a more interactive attitude (e.g. by participation in PMC meetings) would be welcome to get a better understanding of their view on the programme.
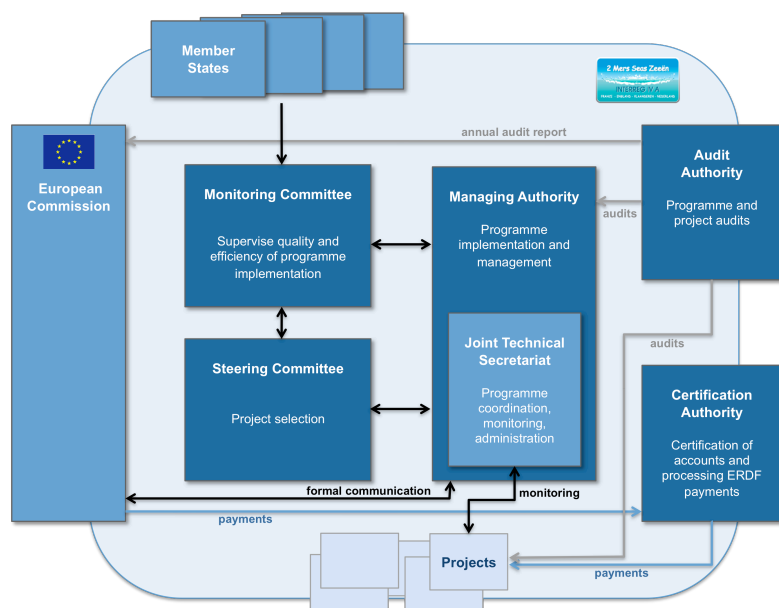
The Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC, responsible for supervision and strategic steering of the programme) has functioned in good cooperation spirit. Meeting documents and presentations were generally well developed and very detailed.

PMC 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.

Figure 4. Programme bodies and their main task and relations

The Programme Steering Committee (PSC, responsible for selection of projects) has functioned well. Overall, the members of the committee are rather content 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 and try to come to agreement in an informal setting.

While the clearness and transparency of decision making on project selection is generally adequate in the opinion of approved Lead Partners, a vast majority of rejected Lead Applicants qualify this as being 'poor'.

6.3   Recommendations for the future programme

1. The draft regulations for the 2014-2020 period propose the integration of Certifying Authority tasks under the responsibilities of the Managing Authority. In case this provision will indeed remain part of the definitive regulatory package, the Conseil Régional Nord - Pas de Calais as the anticipated Managing Authority for the 2014-2020 "2 Seas" programme, would need to prepare for a considerable additional workload. Moreover, this type of activities is not necessarily part of the core activities of the Conseil Régional.

   At the time of writing, the draft regulations for the future programming period 2014+ are not final and may still evolve at this point. It is nevertheless advisable to make an early start preparing for this possible new task by:

   • Mapping the human resource capacities and skills needed for the task, as well as (gaps in) their availability in the present organisation.
   • Exploring possible organisational models, either within the MA organisation or by externalising (parts of) the tasks.
   • Identifying the work processes and internal procedures related to the CA task.

   It is advisable to work closely with the current Certifying Authority to build on their experience and explore possible ways forward. Also it will be very important to closely involve the members of the PMC in this process from the start, to make sure all steps and decisions can count on the backing of the Member States.

2. The main challenge for strengthening the functioning of the PMC lies in facilitating a more strategic debate among its members, leading to a stronger joint strategic vision for the programme.

   The main pre-requisite for increased strategic debate and visioning is of course the willingness, ability and mandate of the members of the PMC to come to strategic choices that truly steer the course of the cross-border programme and develop the cross border territory. Here lies an important role for each of the individual PMC delegations to consider what resources and capacities they dedicate to the preparation and participation to the Committee.

   A second important element is the way in which strategic debate can be facilitated and encouraged in the setting of the PMC. This can be enhanced by a few interventions:

   • Clearly dedicating a part of the agenda of every PMC meeting to strategic discussions on the vision and course for the programme. Discussions on programme strategy should be a recurring feature during every meeting and should not necessarily be connected to certain imminent decisions or choices that need to be made. PMC delegations could for instance present and discuss their key policies and debate the possible contribution of the 2 Seas programme. PMC delegations should play an active part in preparation this approach to increase their commitment to and ownership of the strategic debate.
   • It is worth considering if the Consolidation Group could also help to improve strategic debate and steering from the PMC, by preparing operational management decisions and as an informal platform to prepare the strategic section of the PMC.
   • The involvement of the political level may work as a catalyst for more strategic debate. However, this requires long term and equal participation of political representatives from all regions, in order to build up trust and understanding that are needed for developing an joint strategy. So far, experience shows that this continued and intensive political commitment from all sides has been very difficult to mobilise in INTERREG programmes. The involvement of political level representatives in a single programme related event may be feasible, provided there is an attractive programme and platform for them to speak out on their cross-border achievements and ambitions. The annual conference may provide an opportunity for that.

7 Programme performance & control

7.1 Scope

During this programming period, avoiding automatic decommitment has remained the golden rule for programme managers. On the other hand, assessing the quality of cross-border cooperation had not been subject of similar requirements from the EC. Consequently, programme bodies haven't been strongly mobilised on the establishment of detailed intervention logic with the corresponding indicators system. In spite of these weaknesses, programme bodies have paid due attention to the overall quality and potential contribution from approved projects to the achievements of programme objectives.

If the requirements in terms of sound financial management and control system should remain top priorities for the future period, the EC also indicated in draft regulations for the next period that the programmes should be assessed in the light of the proposed performance framework for the future, in order to ensure the programme and the projects meet the milestones that will be set at the onset. Consequently, approved projects should be more result-oriented, in order to increase the added value of ETC programmes. The implications of such evolutions are analysed in the section dedicated to the future perspectives.

7.2 Key findings and conclusions

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 nationals systems which make life more difficult for many projects partners, especially the less-experienced ones of small size organisations.

In terms of first level control, none of coexisting centralised and decentralised systems proved to be fully satisfactory.

Centralised system	Flanders
Decentralised system	France Netherlands England

Some deficiencies such as the lack of strong expertise or even independence from external companies have been reported in the case of decentralised system. In the current context of increasing budgetary constraint in public administration, the centralised system does not appear as a viable option for the future of those having chosen a decentralised system in the current period.

The way of measuring the programme effects was not adequate enough in view of assessing the whole intervention logic. Such kind of quantitative approach is clearly not the suitable way to report on the added value of cooperation projects. Capitalisation activities recently launched should provide a valuable complementary contribution, provided projects partners accept to pool results with other projects on the same thematic. This may prove more complicated on thematic related to innovation, research and SMEs development because of the frequent underlying competition principle.

The Programme Monitoring System (PMS) represents a great step forward for monitoring and control. It could benefit from the experience of other ETC programmes coordinated by the same Managing Authority, making use of the same tool.

7.3   Recommendations for the future programme

Some technical adjustments in terms of administrative procedures and first level control, such as changes in the reporting timeframe, the use of more appropriate format for reporting documents, etc., should be part of the overall process of simplification, beyond those proposed by the EC. These simplifications should be significant enough not to discourage projects promoters to apply in the future programme.

Being more result oriented and making a stronger emphasis on programme performance in the future programme will suppose a stronger involvement from MS representative in the strategic orientations to be decided. For that purpose, the creation of a specific group deriving from the PMC with potentially additional experts should be envisaged. A short term working group involving a limited number of MS representatives, MA and JTS representatives as well as a few projects partners among the most experienced ones in EU projects should be put into place to appropriate this complex issue and to be able to properly monitor the future activities related to programme drafting and ex-ante evaluation.

Beyond reporting through indicators, a more qualitative approach should also be encouraged as a complementary tool to assess the programme delivery. In that respect, capitalisation activities via for instance thematic clustering should be strengthened in the future programme.

8   Project processes – from development to closure

8.1   Scope

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.

8.2   Key findings and conclusions

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 anticipate 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.

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 to complete. 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 controls 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.

Regarding the **closure of projects** the different steps and requirements are well identified. Reporting requirements are generally comparable to those in on-going monitoring. One specific point on the closure of projects is the need to keep record of an extensive package of information and documents until well after 2015. Some projects may be confronted with specific difficulties regarding the ownership of outputs (especially when research centres or private partners are involved) and possibly with revenues which require specific recording and calculation to finalise ERDF contribution.

8.3   Recommendations for the future programme

1. Regarding the stage of project preparation, improvements can be made in relation to the simplification of forms and of the overall application procedure:

   • The Application form could be simplified and streamlined: questions could be revised i,a, to remove several repetitive parts (applicants have the feeling that they answer several times the same questions). The form should not be based on strict "character limits" but instead could

indicate the maximum number of pages for answering certain (categories of) questions. Good examples of such forms are found in the Intelligent Energy Europe and Framework programmes.

- The overall application process, as well as the eligibility check could be simplified and lightened for both applicants and the JTS by requesting the use of only one language version (English) for full application forms and require summaries in the other languages of the partnership.
- The introduction of an on-line application system[9] would make a strong improvement in the user-friendliness of the application procedure. Several models are already available and used by INTERREG programmes and other EU programmes. The use of such a system should also be expanded to the project monitoring stage (progress reports, modifications). In any case it will be essential to avoid the use of Excel for programme forms, other than for financial data.
- It is advisable to ask potential future applicants to test forms and templates that will be used for 2014-2020 and incorporate their feedback to ensure user-friendliness of forms.

2. Concerning the assessment process, one key issue highlighted by applicants and project partners is "transparency", meaning to have better exchange of information between applicants (successful or not) and programmes' authorities. Recommendations to achieve this are:

- In order to manage expectations of applicants it could be considered to provide clear and concise explanations on the reason for certain aspects of the application and assessment process (for instance, to explain the duration of the selection process or why it is not possible to allow for individual presentation of projects).
- In specific cases (e.g. for top-down strategic projects) a more interactive application process could be considered, for instance by allowing applicants to make a presentation of their project to a selection/approval board, or allowing for additional written explanations.
- In view of the strong thematic focus required in the future programme, it should be considered to involve in specific cases external experts to give their opinion on technical projects at the programme level.
- Also on operational matters, for instance related to state aid issues, additional expertise should be mobilised. Facilitators and JTS staff could be further trained on technical issues related to main bottlenecks like state aid, public procurement, etc. And in each member state national correspondents on these matters should be available.

3. Regarding the monitoring and reporting process, the main issues relate to competencies or administrative capacities, timing, administrative burden and coordination. Especially, financial monitoring proves to be quite heavy and costly for projects partners.

- Competencies and involvement of First Level Controller can vary from one Member State to another. It would be necessary for the programme to have closer contacts with the FLCs to provide information, guidance and training sessions. In case of a decentralised FLC system, Member State should apply a more demanding and strict validation process.
- To reconsider the timing of reporting periods and deadlines outside the main holiday seasons to make it more convenient for project (Lead) Partners. And to consider a lighter form of reporting once a year and a comprehensive report the other semester.
- To expand the role and mandate of the Territorial Facilitators in concerning the monitoring on the ground (via regular face-to-face meeting for instance).
- To simplify the procedure for major modifications, instead of asking complete new application forms, a corrigendum/addendum could be required. Also more flexibility concerning budget modifications under a certain amount (e.g. below € 20.000) could be envisaged.
- Regarding the reporting forms, improvements similar to those in the application form could be made (simplify, use of on-line system, user-friendly documents, no "character limits").
- To introduce common forms and rules for different INTERREG programmes. This would be essential between the two overlapping cross-border cooperation programmes 2 Seas and France(Channel)England. But also towards other close-by programmes, like France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen, Nederland-Vlaanderen it could be useful.

---

[9] The draft regulations for the 2014-2020 period propose a mandatory introduction of electronic data exchange by 31/12/2014.

9 Programme and Project communication

9.1 Scope

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 to the outside. In order to structure the communication activities, a detailed strategy and action plan was established under the leadership of the MA in the early stage of the 2 Seas programming period. It was approved by the EC in February 2009. The communication plan covers the entire programming period and is carried out on the basis of the Technical Assistance budget assigned to the Joint Technical Secretariat for communication. The communication at project level is also assessed, by making clear whether projects partners have got the necessary guidance to promote their activities. Some successful practices are also highlighted.

The communication evaluation document for the period 2008-2010 produced by the managing authority, as required by the EC regulation, is also taken into consideration. Finally, although not explicitly integrated in the information and communication approach stipulated by the EC, valorisation and capitalisation of projects results are also included in the issue of communication.

9.2 Key findings and conclusions

The communication plan for the 2007-2013 period adds up to almost € 2M, representing 15% of the total budget for the technical assistance. It was designed on-going and lacked some strategic vision. Globally, it had an impact on the subsequent developments of communication activities.

A lot of resources were invested at the beginning of the period to develop communication tools in order to attract as many applicants as possible. They are unanimously acknowledged as a success, especially when considering that this new Programme started from scratch and the requirements to produce all documents in three languages.

If all "classical" communication tools have been successfully implemented, it turns out that they remain rather traditional and institutional, not enough flashy and innovative as experienced in other ETC programmes over the period 2007-2013.

Communication on the common priority has remained weak, in spite of some actions implemented by the 2 Seas programme. It is probable this has had an impact on the slow start of applications. This shared responsibility with the MA of the France (Channel)-England programme should be reconsidered in case a similar pattern of common priority(ies) is in vigour over 2014-2020.

Guidance for projects beneficiaries was published rather late, notably for projects approved in the first calls. Programme guidance to projects partners was rather standard and not tailor-made in order to better address the different categories of target groups.

Valorisation of projects results as part of capitalisation activities under the leadership of the JTS to promote is considered as promising by programme bodies. It is expected that it contributes significantly to promote the programme as a whole towards the press media. Politicians and decision makers should be one of the target groups in order to convince them of the interest of ETC as most of them underestimate its potential, often by lack of a clear knowledge of its added value.

9.3 Recommendations for the future programme

1. 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 promoters 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.

2. The top-down approach for communication of the programme should be brought up to date and more tailor made to projects needs; on the other hand, there are expectations from many projects to be more active in bottom-up approaches. Due attention should be paid to a significant reduction of the administrative burden (in terms of reporting for instance) because in such a case more would be left to use communication tools.

3. Support and assistance to approved projects should be strengthened along two directions: 1) reorientation of tasks or additional resources at the level of officer(s) in charge of communication; 2) stronger involvement from territorial facilitators in communication and valorisation activities. Globally, a stronger emphasis should be put on assessing the key project achievements on the ground and via face-to-face meetings instead of extended reporting on this issue.

4. A better interaction between ERDF co-funded programmes from regional to transnational scales in terms of valorisation of projects achievements should be encouraged. Besides, targeted actions from regional and local authorities in order to promote a wide range of ERDF funded projects on their territory should be encouraged since it appears essential to have a strong territorial basis for the benefits of the population.

5. Local authorities should increasingly act as information relays in direction of press and general public. They should use their own communication tools (website, press Department, local events organisation) to emphasize the 2 Seas Programme actions and results. Especially for annual events, attention must be paid to communicate to local press relays with the help of host Member States or local authorities.

10 Evaluation Capacity of the programme

10.1   Scope

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. 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.

10.2   Key findings and conclusions

Evaluation of the 2 Seas programme developed step-by-step during the programme period. The programme Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) performed evaluation activities related to operational aspects and programme performance (needs analysis regarding project types, communication, events). A comprehensive ongoing evaluation was performed by external experts in 2011-2012. All necessary and mandatory evaluations were implemented in a coordinated way.

An overarching Evaluation Plan was introduced only in 2011. This created the framework binding all evaluation efforts together. Due to its timing,-that coincided with the start of the ongoing evaluation-the evaluation plan is primarily a compendium of evaluation activities rather than a strategic plan for the long-term evaluation aims and strategy.

Coordination of the 2 Seas programme evaluation by the JTS functioned effectively due to a flexible approach, in order to allow evaluation work to adapt quickly to evolving circumstances in the programme implementation. The information base of available programme data and statistics is good, allowing for effective and informed evaluations. The JTS is also well equipped to perform statistical analysis and develop programme intelligence, allowing the effective and rapid performance of certain evaluation tasks in-house, when needed.

The timing of the first stage of the ongoing evaluation (2011) was unfortunate. Its results and recommendations came too late to really influence the programme direction, because at that time programme funds had largely been committed. One should consider however that this evaluation still came only relatively shortly after the start of the first projects (end 2008) and coincided with a strong increase in new project approvals compared to the initial trends.

The two stages of the ongoing evaluation address a wide range of issues related to programme performance, programme strategy, and programme management. These analyses mainly concentrate on the aggregate programme level. Ongoing evaluation does not explore and analyse concrete results and impacts of (a sample of) individual 2 Seas projects to assess nature of the programme impact in the regions. Nor does it investigate the impact of the Common Priority.

The involvement of the Member States in the actual steering of evaluations seems not very strong, suggesting a limited sense of ownership of programme evaluation. The most obvious vehicle for their involvement, i.e. the evaluation working group, was not fully put to use[10].

10.3   Recommendations for the future programme

1. The main driver for evaluation of the future programme will the Evaluation Plan that is a mandatory feature in the next programming period. Developing this plan into a clear long-term evaluation strategy with clear objectives will allow for targeted steering and improving the programme. The development of the Evaluation Plan should be an early priority of work after the approval of a new programme.

---

[10] Evaluation progress was discussed at regular intervals in an evaluation working group and later a capitalisation working group. However these meetings focussed on evaluation outcome rather than on steering evaluation work.

It will be important to identify in advance the main objectives and targets of programme evaluation, covering both programme management and implementation and programme impact. The plan should identify for each of the anticipated evaluations the information (and sources) required, the general methods to be used, a timeline and a strategy for the use of evaluation results (purpose, when and how to incorporate them). The plan should also identify the human and financial resources needed for programme evaluation.

2. To ensure that the Member States and other stakeholders will share in the ownership of the evaluation plan and the actual evaluation work, it is essential to involve them in the preparation of the evaluation plan. It would be advisable to put in place an evaluation working group which shapes the evaluation plan together with the MA/JTS.

   This evaluation working group, or a similar dedicated group of programme stakeholders, should also be in place to guide the actual evaluation tasks as they are implemented over the programme lifetime. This will enable more direct involvement in and guidance of the evaluation work compared to merely presenting (interim) results to the Monitoring Committee.

3. A topic to be considered for the Evaluation Plan would be to include more elaborate evaluation of project level results and impacts. This could be based on case studies of (a sample) of projects, and direct engagement with project (lead) partners to analyse the nature and extent of the impact of 2 Seas projects.

   It may also be interesting to foresee an evaluation of (a sample of) 2 Seas projects from the current IVA period in a few years time (so during the 2014+ period). This approach may reveal the durability of the results and identify long-term effects of projects. Experience shows that the effects of certain INTERREG projects can only be measured a few years after completion (e.g. for nature management projects, training projects, research projects).