

**Programme:** Cooperation Programme (Interreg V-A) EL-IT - Greece-Italy 2014-2020

**Contract:** Update of the first assessment of the implementation progress, assessment of the communication and thematic assessment of impact of the interventions which are implemented within the framework of the Cooperation Programme (Interreg V-A) EL-IT - Greece-Italy 2014-2020

**Contracting**

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**C1 - Executive Summary of the conclusions and recommendations of the Assessment in English**

**C2 - Executive Summary of the conclusions and recommendations of the Assessment in Greek**

**C3 - Executive Summary of the conclusions and recommendations of the Assessment in Italian**

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The Project is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by national funds of the countries participating in Cooperation Programme (Interreg V-A) EL-IT - Greece-Italy 2014-2020.

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## **Abbreviations**

CP:	Cooperation Programme
ERDF:	European Regional Development Fund
FLC:	First Level Control
CVE:	Certified Verified Expenditure
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR:	General Data Protection Regulation
ICT:	Information and Communications Technologies
IP:	Investment Priority
JS:	Joint Secretariat
NEETS:	(Young) Not in Employment, not in Education, not in Training
MIS:	Management information system
MA:	Managing Authority
PA:	Priority Axis
RI:	Result Indicator
SO:	Specific Objective
TO:	Thematic Objective
OI:	Output Indicator



## **Preamble**

This document is produced within the framework of the contract *Update of the first assessment of the implementation progress, assessment of the communication and thematic assessment of impact of the interventions which are implemented within the framework of the Cooperation Programme (Interreg V-A) EL-IT - Greece-Italy 2014-2020*, by the sub-contractor MYCOMPANY Projects O.E.

### **1. About the executive summary**

This executive summary includes the summarised findings of the assessment of the implementation progress, the assessment of the communication strategy, and the assessment of the impact of the interventions of the Cooperation Programme (Interreg V-A) EL-IT - Greece-Italy 2014-2020.

## **I. Assessment of the Programme Implementation**

### **A. Effectiveness of the Programme**

The approved projects fall in one of the following 3 priorities (PA): PA1 “Innovation and Competitiveness”; PA2 “Integrated Environmental Management”; and PA3 “Multimodal Sustainable Transport System”.

#### **1. Financial Effectiveness**

The programme budget distribution per priority axis, allocated to PA1 by 29,14%, to PA2 by 43,23%, to PA3 by 19,95% and to PA4 with 4,68% and a total overbooking of 19,62% of the approved Programme budget (61% for PA1, 9% for PA2 and 9% for PA3).



## **Paid and Verified Expenditure**

The total payments made until the 31/12/2021, are 44.397.006,50€, while the sum of the verified expenses is 41.923.291,23€ (94,45%).

Note: Some beneficiaries faced delays in reporting in the PPR (2021b) all latest expenditures and verified expenditures. The actual figure of verified expenditure on the 31/12/2021, was 56.283.807,82€.

Thus, the payments of the approved projects cannot be considered as sufficient.

Based on the findings we have the following:

- The programme is fully activated (**excellent**);
- The programme has overbooked budget (**excellent**);
- The paid expenditures of the programme are moderate (**good**);
- The verified expenditures of the programme are moderate, but very high as per the paid expenditure (**good**);
- SO1.2 and SO2.3 are the best performing SO in terms of payments;
- SO2.2, SO3.1 and SO2.2 are the less performing SO in terms of payments;
- PA1 is the best performing Priority Axis, in terms of payments;
- PA3 is the less performing Priority Axis, in terms of payments.

## **2. Effectiveness of the Physical Object**

There were 9 Calls for proposals: 1 for ordinary projects and 8 for Strategic projects.

The 1<sup>st</sup> call for ordinary projects, was opened for al PAs and SOs, with 60.387.270,50€;

The 1<sup>st</sup> targeted call was opened for PA2 / SO2.1 with 21.115.000,00€;

The 2<sup>nd</sup> targeted call was opened for PA2 / SO2.1 with 6.420.600,00€;

The 3<sup>rd</sup> targeted call was opened for PA2 / SO2.2 with 5.380.000,00€;

The 4<sup>th</sup> targeted call was opened for PA3 / SO3.1 with 17.250.000,00€;

The 5<sup>th</sup> targeted call was opened for PA1 / SO1.1 with 10.000.000,00€;

The 6<sup>th</sup> targeted call was opened for PA2 / SO2.2 with 4.500.000,00€;

The 7<sup>th</sup> targeted call was opened for PA1 / SO1.1 (COVID-19 emergency) with 3.400.000,00€;

The 8<sup>th</sup> targeted call was opened for PA1 / SO1.1 (COVID-19 emergency) with 12.000.000,00€.

### **Output indicators**

CV1 Value of personal protective equipment purchased, achieved by 31.12.21: 103%

CV2 Value of medical equipment purchased, achieved by 31.12.21: 7%

CV5 Value of grants for R&D into COVID-19, achieved by 31.12.21: 97%

CV6 Items of personal protective equipment (PPE) , achieved by 31.12.21: 108%

CV7 Ventilators to support treatment of COVID-19, achieved by 31.12.21: 75%

CV8 Additional bed space created for COVID-19 patients, achieved by 31.12.21: 50%

O0515 Number of supported innovation-related cross border cooperation structures and networks, achieved by 31.12.21: 280%

O0516 Number of innovation support tools/approaches/techniques introduced through cross-border co-operation, achieved by 31.12.21: 1240%

O0517 Number of supported cross-border knowledge transfer structures and networks for SMEs, achieved by 31.12.21: 200%

O0518 Number of incubators supported (business plans, feasibility studies, etc.) , achieved by 31.12.21: 540%

CO26 Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions, achieved by 31.12.21: 248%

O0519 Number of jointly developed management and support tools in the field of natural and cultural heritage, achieved by 31.12.21: 885%

O0520 Number of jointly developed management and support tools in the field of biodiversity and environmental protection, achieved by 31.12.21: 40%

O0521 Number of supported cross border cooperation structures and networks in the field of environmental technologies, achieved by 31.12.21: 92%

CO09 Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions, achieved by 31.12.21: 505%

O0522 Number of supported cross border cooperation structures and networks in the field of maritime mobility and transport, achieved by 31.12.21: 50%

O0523 Number of development plans/initiatives in the field of maritime mobility and transport, achieved by 31.12.21: 50%

O0524 Number of supported cross border cooperation structures and networks in the field of environmentally-friendly mobility and transport, achieved by 31.12.21: 220%

The output indicators that are significantly over achieved, should be better calculated in the next programming period.

## **Result Indications**

R0501 Level of capacity of businesses and innovation stakeholders to utilise the available innovation support services and clusters, achieved by 31.12.21: increase

R0502 Number of enterprises in NACE sections J and M, achieved by 31.12.21: 14%

R0503 Level of capacity for the stakeholders in the fields of natural and cultural heritage protection and tourism to sustainably valorise natural and cultural heritage as a growth asset, achieved by 31.12.21: increase

R0504 Total protected site areas in the eligible Programme regions, achieved by 31.12.21: 25%

R0505 Level of capacity of regional and local authorities and public utilities operators to integrate environmental friendly processes and technologies in their operations with special attention to the coastal and maritime zones, achieved by 31.12.21: increase

R0506 Maritime transport of passengers: Number of passengers embarked and disembarked in Programme Area Ports (in 1000), achieved by 31.12.21: 384%

R0507 Annual road freight transport loaded in the Programme Area (in 1000), achieved by 31.12.21: 2%

The performance for certain indicators, such as R0502 / R0504 / R0507<sup>1</sup> and O0520 / O0522 / O0523 is not sufficient, while others achieve the target and even more, such as R0501 and O0516 / O0517 / O0518 / CO09.

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<sup>1</sup> The submitted proposals related to R0507, were very few and in some cases with issues regarding their contents.

Targeted Calls (Emergency Calls 7 & 8) directly related to the pandemic COVID-19, present relatively good performance.

Complicated projects present more and longer delays in performance, especially for public entities and even worst for projects that include infrastructure and works. It is suggested the beneficiaries to be guided to prepare the procurement procedures prior to the signing of the subsidy contracts. Furthermore, for projects that which are expected to face longer procedures, it is recommended to consider longer implementation lifetime from the beginning, as that is reflected also in the respective sub-contracts.

## **B. Performance Framework of the Programme**

The output indicators of PA1 are in general in good progress. There's moderate consideration about the indicators of PA2, and especially O0520. There's higher consideration about the indicators O0522 - Number of supported cross border cooperation structures and networks in the field of maritime mobility and transport, and O0523 - Number of development plans/initiatives in the field of maritime mobility and transport. Delays in better achievements until the reporting date are related to the unforeseen force majeure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also affected the financial performance. Also, some projects had more complicated procedures than others, for the achievement of certain indicators.

The output indicators in higher risk for 100% achievement, are the following: O0522, O0523, followed by moderate risk for O0520.

It is estimated that with many of the goals of the performance framework being achieved, the pending goals, including the ones with the little progress,

can be covered until the end of the programming period, subject to speeding the actions of the approved projects which are in delay<sup>2</sup>.

The performance framework of the Programme, is directly linked to the procedures of contracting and implementation of the funded projects in each Specific Objective. The Joint Secretariat and the Managing Authority followed up closely the progress of the implementation of the envisaged actions of the approved projects, participated in technical meetings with the beneficiaries of the projects (face to face and online) to follow up the progress of the activities and contribute to speeding of the procedures. JS and MA were constantly encouraging the project beneficiaries to contact and discuss all issues raised, in order to avoid considerable delays.

### **C. Efficiency of the Programme**

The efficiency of the implementation of the programme is considered as relatively good, especially taking into consideration the severe long lockdown periods due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Time Efficiency**

Time efficiency is related to the management procedures of the Programme and the approved projects. The duration of the Calls was:

1st ordinary Call (July-December 2016), 146 days of open call;

1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> targeted Calls (November – December 2018), 44 days of open call;

5<sup>th</sup> targeted Call (November 2018 – January 2019), 47 days;

6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> targeted Call (July – August 2020), 30 days;

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<sup>2</sup> The projects AGRIFARM and CREATIVE CAMPS (R0502) had achieved by 31.12.2021 none, with respective target values 75 and 16 (enterprises). The project FRESH WAYS (R0507) had achieved by 31.12.2021, the value of 10,33 with target value being 333 (tons).

8<sup>th</sup> targeted Call (September – October 2021), 15 days.

A significant number of projects requested and received extension of the initial duration period of implementation, due to COVID-19 pandemic and delays in their internal procedures<sup>3</sup>. The introduction of the advanced digital signature in the documents, improves significantly the time needed for the procedures and improve the actual implementation time of the projects.

The signing of the subsidy contracts of the approved projects takes long time, especially for the non-targetted calls.

### **Financial Efficiency**

The total payments made until the 31/12/2021, are 44.397.006,50€, while the sum of the verified expenses is 41.923.291,23€ (94,45%).

Note: Some beneficiaries faced delays in reporting in the PPR (2021b) all latest expenditures and verified expenditures. The actual figure of verified expenditure on the 31/12/2021, was 56.283.807,82€.

SO1.2 and SO2.3 have a better financial efficiency in terms of paid and verified expenditures, as per the respected approved budget. The worst performance if for SO2.2, SO3.1 and SO2.1<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Particularly public entities, perform tendering procedures (preparation, finalization of tender dossiers, launch, evaluation, sub-contracting procedure control and signing of the sub-contracting) that last many months, which is a significant part of the project lifetime. Probably in very specific cases, a task force would be a solution to speed up the procedures. Furthermore, the beneficiaries could start preparation for sub-contracting, from the day of receiving the information for approval of their project and not from the day the subsidy contract is signed.

<sup>4</sup> SO2.1 has 12 projects in progress in 2022, out of 19 projects, with a sum budget of 44,84millionEUR out of total 51,06millionEUR. From those, the strategic project THE ROUTE NET, covers 21,12millionEUR and end in September 2022. SO2.2 projects AETHER (Call I7), BEST (Call I4) and SUSWATER (Call I1.2) are in progress. The first until October 2023, the next one until June 2023 and the last one until April 2022. They cover (all three)10,8millionEUR out of a total of 14,4million EUR.

The payments of expenditures of the approved projects, are not sufficiently good, 2 years before the full completion of the programme, reaching 37,28% of the programme allocated budget (PA1, PA2, PA3). A key issue was for the projects that had activities which from their nature require long-lasting procedures of gaining permits. Due to the overbooking<sup>5</sup>, it is expected that the financial goals of the programme will be achieved.

### **Views of the beneficiaries**

According to the project beneficiaries, the programme tools, the preparation events, and the FAQ were very useful, while the establishment of the partnership and the harmonization with the programme priorities, the use of MIS were easy and the support by the programme authorities was also good.

The beneficiaries consider that the projects are very useful for their areas.

## **D. Update of the intervention logic of the Programme**

The intervention area, is on its way out of the long-lasting fiscal crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, but the general environment is not in favour, with conflicts<sup>6</sup> around and inflation. The signs of recovery of the business sector and the small enterprises are not substantially significant due to many risks for new entrepreneurial initiatives.

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SO3.1 projects are in progress with the project AI SMART (Call I5) being in progress until July 2023 and covering 17,3millionEUR out of total of 25,3millionEUR.

Thus, significant reasons for the delay is that the achieved values are either not reported until 31.12.2021 and that a significant part of the those SO is in progress and is expected to report the achieved values at a next progress report.

<sup>5</sup> The overbooking was allocated +60,89% in PA1, +8,61% in PA2, +9,38% in PA3 and in total +19,62%. The overbooking approach was adopted in order to absorb the savings of the projects that are implemented (discounts, non-spend amounts, etc.)

<sup>6</sup> e.g. The war in Syria and war against ISIS; the tension and the Russian invasion in Ukraine.



The programme was properly adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to the confrontation of the disease. As a result of the revision of the programme, relatively significant changes between PAs occurred. So, the weight of the Specific Objectives of the programme was reconsidered in order to respond in the health crisis and other related conditions. The new needs that were created, were considered and the fast reaction of the Programme Authorities, allowed the appropriate adaptation. The latest goals remain valid.

The programme on the 31.12.2021 was in its version 3, after the last modification in 2020 (EC decision on 12 November 2020). The main adjustment to COVID-19 pandemic updated significantly also the intervention logic, as health issues were not directly addressed by the programme and its specific objectives.

## **1. Characteristics of the intervention area**

### **Demography**

The population of the intervention area did not present significant changes in the period 2014 – 2021.

### **Economy**

The GDP in the eligible area was increasing from 2014 to 2019 (from 86bnEUR to 95,6bnEUR) and faced a significant reduction in 2020 (to 85,6bnEUR) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Greek Regions were in worst GDP levels than 2014, while Puglia was between 2014 – 2015 levels.

Puglia and Ionian islands are the richest, with a significant gap to the other 2 regions, which leads to discrepancies and inequalities which could be factors for differentiation in the respective regional strategies.

The agriculture in the four intervention areas had minor fluctuations in the last decade, and continues to contribute significantly in the intervention area, with approximately the same land use.

The secondary sector of economy is also important as it follows the primary sector and had minor fluctuations between 2014 and 2019.

The intervention area, is mainly a marine investments area therefore the blue economy should be part of separate discussion. The share of the blue economy Gross Value Added (GVA) of Greece in the national economy, is almost 5% and the respective figure for Italy is 1,5%. Regarding the jobs of blue economy in national employment, in Greece they are at 15%, and in Italy they are at 2,1%. Both countries contribute significantly at EU level in Blue Economy, while the largest contribution of blue economy in the GVA, is from the tourism sector, followed by maritime transport.

Greece is in position 25 in Competitiveness Index and Italy in position 8. The ranking is significantly higher than the average, for both countries. The overnight stays in the eligible area in Greece, increased from 2013 to 2019, by 53,43%. The Region of Ionian Islands has the largest portion of tourism (between 75% -79% of the total tourism in the eligible area). In the Region of Puglia, the overnight stays increased between 2013 and 2019, by 15,59%. The vast majority of tourists in the Greek eligible side are from abroad (approx. 73%), while in Italy (Puglia) they are mostly from the same country (appr. 80%). It is concluded that tourism has increased significantly until 2019, while the seasonality remains a serious issue.

The unemployment rate is significant in the area. (approx. 15% in Greece and 10% in Italy, with the EU average being at 7%).

The employed labour force is distributed per economy sector, differently between regions (75% in services in Ionian Islands and 51% in Western Greece; 26% in agriculture in Western Greece and 9% in Pulgia, etc.

Most of the companies in the intervention area, are SMEs and there are also many micro-enterprises, particularly in Greece. Among them there are also few social enterprises / cooperatives.

The economy in the eligible area, is low in the ranking of competitiveness, with Puglia being in less bad position compared to the other regions.

The intervention area is a moderate innovator. Greece managed to have great improvement from 2018, due to improved performance for Broadband penetration, Venture capital, Product innovators, Job-to-job mobility of Human Resources in Science & Technology (HRST), and Medium and hightech goods exports and the best ranked strengths are: **Innovators, Linkages and Employment impacts**. Italy managed to have great improvement from 2019 to 2021, due to improved performance on the indicators using innovation survey data and Broadband penetration and the best ranked strengths are: **Innovators, Employment impacts and Environmental sustainability**.

### **Environment, Protected Areas and Natural Disasters**

The Sea Environment is relatively good in the intervention area. There's a considerable number of events with the prime involvement of the communities on marine litter, mainly in Italy. The air pollution evolution in Greece and Italy has been reduced significantly from 2015 to 2019.

## **2. Findings and relevance to the Programme Strategy**

**SO1.1** “Delivering innovation support services and developing clusters across borders to foster competitiveness”

The SO1.1 remains timely and affects the login of the programme intervention. It would be suggested to update the title of the SO, to include the wordings “advanced technologies” and “research”.

The cooperation of the economy actors (enterprises, unions, associations, etc.) in the intervention area, is a key element for local and regional development. Such active cooperation adds value in the growth strategy of the regions of the intervention area and contributes to reduction of unemployment and social exclusion.

The programme, based on the EU announced directives to confront COVID-19 pandemic, carrying the title “Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII)”, adjusted successfully the title of the SO1.1 to “Delivering innovation

support services and developing clusters across borders to foster competitiveness and COVID-19 emergency” in order to fund health projects.

**SO1.2** “Supporting the incubation of innovative specialized micro and small enterprises in thematic sectors of interest to the Programme Area”

The support of micro and small enterprises is important and the SO1.2 remains timely as the area of intervention has a very large number of such legal entities. Although it has high entrepreneurial performance, it is suggested to update the title of the SO and include “digitalization”, “competitiveness” and “growth”.

**SO2.1** “Valorisation of cultural heritage and natural resources as a territorial asset of the Programme Area”

The cultural and natural assets of the intervention areas remain important factors of growth. The SO2.1 remains fundamental for the development of the eligible area of the programme.

**SO2.2** “Improvement of joint management and governance plans for biodiversity of coastal and rural ecosystems, paying attention on natural resources and protected areas and development of environmental protection measures”

The climate crisis leads to high risks for the biodiversity in the protected areas and the areas that are not in a status of protection. Therefore it is suggested to update the title of the SO and add the wordings “prevention of disasters”, “resilience”, “mitigation of consequences” and “adaptation to climate change”.

**SO2.3** “Developing and testing of innovative technologies/ tools to reduce marine and air pollution”

Marine and air pollution are critical factors of the climate crisis. It remains timely. It could however be extended to cover “circular economy” and “zero carbon policies”/“carbon neutral policies”.

**SO3.1** “Boosting maritime transport, short-sea shipping capacity and cross-border ferry connectivity”

This SO could be abandoned in the future programme as higher priorities, like sustainable and zero-carbon transport might be promoted.

**SO3.2** “Improving cross-border coordination among transport stakeholders on introducing multimodal environmentally-friendly solutions”

Although cooperation needs in the sector of multimodal transportation do exist, the measuring procedure for indicators within SO3.2 is too complicated and requires a lot of time efforts to perform accurate results within the project implementation period, therefore it is suggested either this SO to be abandoned or to be accompanied with special training of beneficiaries (of this SO).

Output indicator **CO09** “Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions”

The indicator CO09 is too complicated to be measured with credibility and justified as directly improved because of a project, therefore it does not contribute in terms of credibility and is suggested not to be used, unless the beneficiaries reporting this indicator receive special training with the support of JS/MA on how to deal with it.

**New indicators**

It is suggested to create a new output indicator “Target Groups communicated”, which will include unique presence of each body/entity and another new output indicator “People reached” referring to people reached through communication in general. For both indicators, it is suggested to create a common database in the MIS to record and monitor the figures at project and programme level.

The result indicator RI3.1 / R0506 “Maritime transport of passengers: Number of passengers embarked and disembarked in Programme Area Ports”

The result indicator R0506 is too complicated to be measured and justified as actual result of a project, therefore it is suggested not to be used.

The result indicator RI3.2 / R0507 “Annual road freight transport loaded in the Programme Area”

The result indicator R0507 is too complicated to be measured and justified as actual result of a project, therefore it does not contribute in terms of credibility and is suggested not to be used.

The other result indicators are assessed as useful for gaining better results.

### **Achievement of the result indicators**

With consideration of the Result indicators presented in Chapter I in this document, it is estimated that by the end of the cooperation programme (31.12.2023) R0501, R0503, R0504, R0505 will be achieved, while R0502, and R0507<sup>7</sup>, are not expected to be achieved as their declared target value is far less than the target value of the programme. The result indicators need to be considered further.

Excluding the indicators CO09, and R0507, all other indicators, do contribute to the logic of the programme.

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<sup>7</sup> The submitted proposals related to the indicator, were very few and in some cases with issues regarding their contents.

## E. Update of the Programme

The strategy of the programme, has to incorporate the RIS3 strategies for the eligible regions of the two countries, which in **Epirus** include primary sector and food processing; tourism and culture; health & wellness; and academic institutions, ICT and youth entrepreneurship, in **Ionian Islands** include primary sector - agrifood & gastronomy; marine economy - fishery - aquaculture & marine tourism; and tourism and culture, **Western Greece** include ICT; energy applications; agriculture - fisheries – gastronomy; tourism and culture; and materials – microelectronics, and **Puglia** include sustainable manufacturing; health and the environment; and digital, creative and inclusive communities.

The time for the completion of the Programme is less than 24 months, thus, any update, if needed, would be preferred to be targeted to existing partners.

### Specific Objectives

It is suggested for the next programming period, to take out the specific objectives:

- (i) SO3.1 “Boosting maritime transport, short-sea shipping capacity and cross-border ferry connectivity”; and
- (ii) SO3.2 “Improving cross-border coordination among transport stakeholders on introducing multimodal environmentally-friendly solutions”

Because the context of the first one is surpassed by other, major priorities and the second one is too complicated and requires a lot of time efforts to perform results within the ordinary project period of implementation.

### Output Indicators

It is suggested to take out the output indicator CO09 “Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions”, as it is not easy to justify with credibility that any increase in travelling, is due to the project.

It is suggested to create two new indicators for the target groups (stakeholders) and the participants in events and those figures to be reported in MIS with a specific model.

### **Result Indicators**

It is suggested to take out the result indicators:

- (i) R0506 “Maritime transport of passengers: Number of passengers embarked and disembarked in Programme Area Ports”; and
- (ii) R0507 “Annual road freight transport loaded in the Programme Area”,

as they are too complicated to be measured and justified as actual result of a project.

### **Funds’ Allocation**

There’s no current need to revise the programme budget, as the real implementation of projects is less than 24 months and there is already a significant overbooking<sup>8</sup>.

### **Further Suggestions**

In SO1.1 to improve the wording of the title of the SO and include, direct connection of the entrepreneurship with the knowledge carriers of the area and promote innovation in business and the approach “research to business” for enhancing the capacity of the local enterprises and the local economies and employment.

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<sup>8</sup> The overbooking was allocated +60,89% in PA1, +8,61% in PA2, +9,38% in PA3 and in total +19,62%.



The SO1.2 to improve the wording of the title of the SO and include, the digitalisation the competitiveness and the growth.

In SO2.2 to improve the wording of the title of the SO and include, the climate crisis which leads to high risks for the biodiversity in the protected and non-protected areas, prevention of disasters, the resilience of the ecosystem, the adaptation to the climate change and the mitigation of consequences.

The SO2.3 to include in the context, and respectively improve the wording of the title of the SO, the approach to the circular economy and zero carbon policies.

The above changes and the Performance Framework are suggested for consideration in the new Programme.

## **II – Assessment of the Communication Strategy**

The website and social media of the programme are very useful tools and the JS/MA organized several events to promote the calls and support the potential proposals and the beneficiaries during implementation of the projects.

Regarding the communication of the projects, some of them were not in good pace while others had a well implemented communication plan. Some projects do not ensure existence of websites for a minimum of 5 years after completion of the project.

The Communication Guide for beneficiaries was not updated to cover the changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There's lack of a database identifying the target groups and stakeholders, their approach and type of approach, at project level and at programme level, in order to get good quality measurements of the communication performance. It is suggested to be prepared and all project beneficiaries to be obliged to fill that in, regularly.

The communication plan of all projects, should include all key elements and its timeline to be followed and assessed regularly in every progress report.

The project beneficiaries should be guided for more intensive presence in the Internet and Social Media and set specific indicators for their presence in social media and Internet, people reached, followers and other related indicators, checked through analytics tools.

### III – Assessment of the Impact of the Programme

The selected specific objectives for the assessment of the impact of the programme in the intervention area, are:

- SO2.1 “Valorisation of cultural heritage and natural resources as a territorial asset of the Programme Area”
- SO2.2 “Improvement of joint management and governance plans for biodiversity of coastal and rural ecosystems, paying attention on natural resources and protected areas and development of environmental protection measures”
- SO2.3 “Developing and testing of innovative technologies/ tools to reduce marine and air pollution”
- SO3.2 “Improving cross-border coordination among transport stakeholders on introducing multimodal environmentally-friendly solutions”

#### SO2.1

The Programme budgeted 36,35% of the total approved amount of projects.

The output indicator O0519 “Number of jointly developed management and support tools in the field of natural and cultural heritage” at the level of the Programme was set at the target value of 20 (2023), while the approved projects had a consolidated target value of 185 and by the 31.12.2021 had reported the achievement of 177, which is the 885,00% of the target value<sup>9</sup>.

The output indicator CO09 “Increase in expected number of visits to

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<sup>9</sup> Over-achieved value.

supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions” at programme level was set at the target value of 20.000 (2023), while the approved projects had a consolidated target value of 100.020 and by the 31.12.2021 had reported the achievement of 101.000, which is the 505,00% of the target value of the Programme<sup>10</sup>.

The result indicator R0503 “Level of capacity for the stakeholders in the fields of natural and cultural heritage protection and tourism to sustainably valorise natural and cultural heritage as a growth asset” at programme level was set at the target value of increase (2023), with baseline value of 65%. By 31.12.2021, 14 out of 19 projects were contributing to this indicator, of which, 3 surpassed their target value, 10 reached it or were near that, 1 was below 40% of its target value and 5 did not report achievement (expected for the next period).

Thus, the contribution of the Programme in the area, was significant by 31.12.2021.

Tourism has increased significantly from 2013 to 2019. The overnight stays in the eligible area in Greece, increased from 2013 to 2019, by 53,43%. In the Region of Puglia, the overnight stays increased between 2013 and 2019, by 15,59%.

The interventions of the Programme, reported the contribution the increase of visits due to their activities, by 101.000, which refers to 2,68% of the total increase of visits. That is a substantial contribution.

The main factor is the involvement of people of the areas of intervention and the beneficiaries. Their involvement for activities and development in the area where they live and create is the boost to include more stakeholders, end users, promoters, etc.

Another important factor is the joint development of management and support

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<sup>10</sup> Over-achieved value.

tools, which the beneficiaries of the approved projects consider of great.

The valorization of cultural and nature assets through innovation initiatives and ICT tools, is another factor that causes positive impact in the intervention area.

## SO2.2

The Programme budgeted 10,23% of the total approved amount of projects.

A project was selected by the European Environment Agency (EEA) as one of the 11 best Nature Based Solutions (NBS) for environment issues.

The output indicator O0520 “Number of jointly developed management and support tools in the field of biodiversity and environmental protection” at Cooperation Programme level was set at the target value of 10 (2023), while the approved projects had a consolidated target value of 20 and by the 31.12.2021 had reported the achievement of 4, which is the 40,00% of the target value of the Programme.

The result indicator R0504 “Total protected site areas in the eligible Programme regions” at programme level was set at the target value of 46000 Km<sup>2</sup> (2023), with baseline value of 42401 Km<sup>2</sup> (2013), a targeted increase of 3599 Km<sup>2</sup> or 8,49%. The approved projects contribute, with a total of 76.157,45 Km<sup>2</sup>. One project (completed) reached 900 Km<sup>2</sup>, which counts the 25,00% of the programme targeted value.

Thus, the contribution of the Programme in the area, was not significant by 31.12.2021, but has the potential to improve that at the final stage of implementation of the interventions.

The approved projects focus on biodiversity and environment protection. 2 out of the 6 approved interventions are targeted, based on the prioritization of the Programme, covering almost the 69% of the total SO projects' allocation

budget.

Thus, until 31 December 2021, the Programme hadn't contributed significantly in the eligible area in the framework of the SO2.2.

The SO2.2 provides improved tools for environmental-friendly solutions to existing problems; use of sophisticated tools to prevent wild fires or mitigate their consequences; common governance strategy by eligible Regions of the Programme.

The Sea Environment is relatively good in the intervention area.

The change that can be observed in the intervention area, is linked directly to the 4 reported monitoring tools, produced and in use, for monitoring and prevention of fires (and consecutively protecting the biodiversity) and monitoring the changes in the coastal ecosystems, respectively.

A key factor is the cooperation of decision makers and policy instrument owners for exchange of good practices but more significantly for preparing common tools to mitigate consequences of natural or technological processes, on the biodiversity and the environment.

The cooperation of the scientific community with the decision makers and the services and other stakeholders is, of critical importance, as the scientific knowledge, the training by servants and other professionals on the use of produced sophisticated monitoring tools, the sensitization of the general population and their involvement, can guarantee the sustainability of the interventions and the evolution through next initiatives.

### **SO2.3**

The Programme budgeted 1,91% of the total approved amount of projects.

The output indicator O0521 "Number of supported cross border cooperation

structures and networks in the field of environmental technologies” at programme level was set at the target value of 12 (2023), while the approved projects had a consolidated target value of 11 and by the 31.12.2021 had reported the achievement of 11. The use of the tools for monitoring by the stakeholders and daily awareness of the decision makers are precious interventions.

The result indicator R0505 “Level of capacity of regional and local authorities and public utilities operators to integrate environmental friendly processes and technologies in their operations with special attention to the coastal and maritime zones” at programme level was set at the target value of increase (2023), with baseline value of 63% and was achieved.

Thus, the contribution of the Programme in the area in the improvement of innovative technologies / tools for the reduction of marine and air pollution, was significant by 31.12.2021.

The Sea Environment is relatively good in the intervention area.

There’s a considerable number of events with the prime involvement of the communities on marine litter, mainly in Italy.

The air pollution evolution in Greece and Italy was reduced from 2015 to 2019.

The implemented projects do not address the air pollution, which is a flaw for the programme.

The 11 tools created through the programme and the improvement of the level of capacity of the stakeholders (increase) are assets for the intervention area.

The use of the tools for monitoring by the stakeholders and daily awareness of the decision makers and owners of policy instruments are also important interventions that contribute in dealing with the marine and air pollution.

The key factor is the sensitization and the participation of the locals, those

who live in the area of application. Also, the exchange of good practices, the training of end users in facilitating the new and sophisticated tools that are produced..

A key factor for the contribution in the change in the area of intervention, is the cooperation between the local and regional authorities with the knowledge carriers.

### **SO3.2**

The Programme budgeted 2,96% of the total approved amount of projects.

The output indicator O0524 “Number of supported cross border cooperation structures and networks in the field of environmentally-friendly mobility and transport” at programme level was set at the target value of 5 (2023), while the approved projects had a consolidated target value of 7 and by the 31.12.2021 had reported the achievement of 11, which is the 220,00% of the target value.

The result indicator R0507 “Annual road freight transport loaded in the Programme Area (in 1000)” at programme level was set at the target value of decrease (2023) by 532 tons (from 2011). Only one project measures this indicator and achieved (Dec’21) 10,33 tons which counts 1,94% of the goal at programme level.

It is concluded that the Programme contributed significantly to the improvement of cross-border coordination between transport operators regarding the introduction of multimodal environmentally friendly solutions.

Until 2016, the marine passengers were reduced (from 11827 thousands in 2013, to 10596 thousands in 2016) and until 2015, freight was reduced (from 45059 thousand tonnes in 2013, to 40669 thousand tonnes in 2015). Then the number of maritime passengers increased slightly until 2018 (to 12845 thousands) and the freight increased until 2019 (to 45431 thousand tonnes).



Air passengers were increasing constantly from 2016 to 2019.

Another important point, is the cruise sector, involved in social, environment and economic aspects. In Greece, by 2019, the Regions of Western Greece and Epirus were affected negatively, while Puglia Region, was in better position.

The preparation and use of sophisticated mobile app to assist passengers minimize waiting hours for public transport is another pure change of the Programme in the area.

The key factor is the cooperation of the different actors in the public transportation sector and the use of sophisticated ICT for the multimodal transportation, with the customer (passenger) moving with ease.

The beneficiaries of the Programme state that there was a direct positive impact in the local communities, which wouldn't be possible to be identified without the implementation of the specific projects. The science community has in general as clear view on how to approach the related issues. For all, the scientific community, the decision makers, and other entities being engaged in the projects' implementations (stakeholders), it is important to continue this cross border cooperation.

The Programme has achieved significant progress with some diversions in some Specific Objectives.

Some delays can be justified because of the relatively big budget of some projects and the fact that some tenders last longer than others.

In general, it is estimated that the Programme will manage to achieve all its goals and objectives, by the end of the programming period, excluding some indicators for which the cumulative declared target values of the approved projects are below the Programme target values.

The Programme was adjusted to incorporate actions in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. For that, new indicators were prepared, reallocation of the budget, new targeted calls and contracting of grants. The reaction of the Managing Authority (decision for modification of the Cooperation Programme and preparation of the related work) is estimated as very efficient. That adjustment with the additional output indicators, remains timely.

As the public procurements take long time to be prepared and the respective contracts be granted, in combination with the fact that they need approved projects (i.e. signed subsidy contracts), there should be a flexible option to allow procedures to start after the approval date and before the subsidy contract is signed, in order to save implementation time.

The Programme may add timeline for the achievement of the target values of the addressed indicators, with intermediate assessment, however, such approach should be decided case per case.

During the evaluation of the proposals and before signing of the subsidy contracts, the target values of the indicators proposed by the beneficiaries, should be well justified to avoid problems in achieving them. Especially for the result indicators, when they refer to percentage at programme level, the measurement method per project should be clearly stated, in order to allow more accurate assessments.

## **Disclaimer**

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