



Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects

The Centre for Cross Border Studies



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Foreword

The *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* and its companion publication, the *Toolkit for Budgeting of Cross-Border Projects* are both part of a strategic package of linked training, animation, mentoring and research activities to support public service deliverers, particularly local authorities. They are both products of the INNICO-2 project (the Ireland Northern Ireland Cross-Border Cooperation Observatory), which was funded under the EU INTERREG IVA Programme. The Aims and Objectives of the INNICO-2 project coincide with the overall objective of the INTERREG Programme to support strategic cooperation for a more prosperous and sustainable region, contributing to the development of a dynamic economy and improving access to services and the quality of life for those living in the Irish cross-border region. The aims of INNICO-2 are:

- To increase and strengthen cross-border cooperation for a more prosperous and sustainable border region and more efficient delivery of public services through addressing information and skills gaps among actors in the region.
- To contribute to the increased social, economic and territorial cohesion of the Irish Cross-Border region through:
 - promoting and improving the quality of Cross-Border Cooperation between public bodies, and between public bodies, business and civil society; and
 - improving the capacity of people involved in social and economic development of the Irish Cross-Border region to better align their objectives and outcomes with the priorities of EU Cohesion Policy and Europe 2020.

In the 2010-2011 period, as part of INNICO-1, CCBS and its partner, the Euro-Institut (based in Kehl, Germany) developed the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*. The *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation* was developed in the context of the joint policy imperatives for cross-border cooperation enshrined in European Cohesion Policy and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation* – the first of its kind in Europe – led to a very significant demand for follow-up training and mentoring in cross-border project planning and identified the need for additional tools to support EU-funded and other cross-border projects.

The *Impact Assessment Toolkit* was formally launched by Mr José Antonio Ruiz de Casas of DG Regio, EU Commission, at the Centre's *Cross-border Training and Impact Assessment in Ireland and Europe* conference in Cavan on 28 October 2011. The speech by the DG REGIO representative, Mr Ruiz de Casas, while launching the *Impact Assessment Toolkit* at the October 2011 conference, also raised a number of issues about the need for a different approach to the evaluation of European Territorial Cooperation programmes (i.e. Peace and INTERREG). Several conference participants referred to the problems projects had in coping with the complexities of the application and monitoring processes of the programmes. Mr Shaun Henry of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) referred to the value of the *Impact Assessment Toolkit* in helping projects to evaluate and reflect on their own work and to bring about “a culture of honesty” rather than a funding-driven environment. Mr Henry commented that from the INTERREG Programme's point of view, it was important that the positive impacts of funded projects are articulated to programme stakeholders – most importantly the taxpayers here and in Europe – but this is a challenge for many projects.

The *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross Border Cooperation* was the first of its kind in Europe, and has been widely welcomed by EU agencies and programmes involved in cross-border cooperation such as SEUPB and INTERACT, the European programme established to provide practical support,

training and advice to European Territorial Cooperation programmes. INICCO-2 has extended this cross-border work with the development of the complementary *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* and the *Toolkit for Budgeting of Cross-Border Projects*. Similarly, in our work with cross-border projects, there has been considerable demand for additional tools and training in project planning, implementation and evaluation. There is, therefore, a well identified need to build capacity among those implementing EU-funded and other cross-border and transnational projects - and potential applicants – in impact assessment/project planning and design and in planning and implementing evaluations.

The *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* and the *Toolkit for Budgeting of Cross-Border Projects* are intended primarily to support funded projects – in private, public or community/voluntary sectors or cross-sectoral partnerships – which are challenged by the requirements of delivering cross-border (or transnational) projects.

These toolkits have been designed to complement and be used alongside the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*. The *Evaluation* and *Budget* toolkits also complement the *Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management Toolkit* published in 2014 in collaboration with the Centre's partners in the Transfrontier Euro-Institute Network (TEIN), funded through the EU Leonardo Programme. These four innovative *Toolkits* together comprise a portfolio of tools to support cross-border cooperation throughout the entire cross-border project life-cycle. We are confident that they will be of benefit to cross-border projects on the island of Ireland, and indeed are easily transferable to other cross-border and transnational projects elsewhere. Through this transfer and adaptation we will contribute to the professionalization of actors, a better quality of projects, more positive attitudes towards transfrontier collaboration and improved working and living conditions for citizens in border areas across the EU and beyond.

Like their companion toolkits, both the *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* and the *Toolkit for Budgeting of Cross-Border Projects* are user-friendly, practical resources that will guide both experienced and less experienced cross-border project promoters through the steps of:

- preparing a budget for their project and setting up appropriate financial monitoring and reporting mechanisms; and
- planning for the project evaluation – including managing both self-evaluations and external evaluations.

Both toolkits draw upon existing good practice from the island of Ireland, Europe and elsewhere as well as the considerable expertise of the three project partners – CCBS, Pobal and the Euro-Institut. On behalf of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, I would like to once again thank our partners for their important contribution to the success of the project.

RUTH TAILLON

Director, The Centre for Cross Border Studies

January 2015

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Introduction

Why this Toolkit?

There is a wide range of toolkits, manuals and guides relating to evaluation, with a similarly wide range of potential users. However, this *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* is aimed specifically at those involved in the implementation of cross-border interventions, and is informed by the context of the Ireland-Northern Ireland cross-border territory, although its contents are generally applicable in other European cross-border contexts. INTERACT recently produced an updated version of its extremely valuable *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*,¹ but the present Toolkit is singularly focused on the cross-border project level rather than the programme level. As will be discussed later, however, cross-border projects need to be closely informed by the logic and objectives of their relevant programme, and cross-border project managers need to be aware of the programme evaluation context.

This Toolkit, therefore, provides a step-by-step guide to the design of an evaluation plan for a cross-border project, highlighting the specific issues that must be taken into account when evaluating an intervention that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. Although many of the concepts and methods employed in other evaluation contexts are applicable in cross-border projects, there are particular challenges and needs that have to be addressed from a cross-border perspective, and that is what this *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* does. By their very nature, cross-border projects imply a dual (or in some cases, even multi) jurisdictional scope, involving stakeholders and project recipients from both sides of the border and, therefore, from different cultural contexts. In terms of evaluation, for example, this also means that you are dealing with data for monitoring purposes that is not always readily compatible from one side of the border to the other, and this is an issue that your evaluation will have to address.

The *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects*, therefore, is part of an essential portfolio of Toolkits that follows the entire life-cycle of cross-border project management, consisting of the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, the *PAT-TEIN Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management*, and the *Toolkit for Budgeting of Cross-Border Projects*.

How to use the *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects*

Ideally, this Toolkit should be used as you begin to plan and design your cross-border project, as evaluation should be at the heart of any cross-border intervention, and thinking about how you will evaluate the degree of change your project has brought about will be invaluable to your achieving the most coherent intervention logic. In other words, being able to trace back *how* your cross-border project achieved its intended change through the results of its outputs (actions) is inextricably associated to the evaluation process, as we will see later.

¹ INTERACT, 2012.

Even if you are not at the design stage of your cross-border project, however, and may even be coming towards the final evaluation stage, this Toolkit will nevertheless assist you in ensuring that you have the best possible evaluation process for your intervention.

Section 1, therefore, sets out the policy context for evaluation of cross-border projects, as well as some of the principal concepts, methods and issues relating to evaluation. It also highlights some of the main general factors you will have to consider when planning for the evaluation of your project, including your organisation's own capacity for evaluation and the scope of your evaluation.

Section 2 corresponds to the project planning and pre-implementation phases, and can equate to some extent to the *ex ante* evaluation stage at programme level and for larger projects. Here we will look at evaluation as both a tool for assessing the general feasibility of a planned cross-border project, and as a vital element of the project itself that needs to be planned for from the outset.

Section 3 looks at the implementation stage of a cross-border project and how evaluation can help you assess how well your project is progressing towards the intended change, allowing you to make operational modifications where necessary. It will also help you to ensure that your interim evaluation asks the relevant questions in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

Section 4 focuses on the final (or *ex post*) evaluation of a cross-border project. It will place this within the context of the time-limited nature of a cross-border project whose full impacts will usually only be seen some time after the termination of the project and, therefore, after the final evaluation has taken place. Additionally, this section will offer guidance on compiling the Terms of Reference for an external evaluation of a cross-border project, and how to address the issue of the final evaluation report.

Section 5 considers the steps that should be taken after the final evaluation report has been produced. Evaluation becomes futile if it does not lead to a learning process that is integral to the full project and organisational life-cycle. The lessons learned at the end of one project should inform the design of your next project.

Sections 2 to 5, therefore, follow the progression of a cross-border project as set out here:



These Sections are complemented by two case studies. The first looks in some detail at the evaluation process set out in this Toolkit in relation to the Border Lives cross-border project, whereas the second uses the Aspire project as a means for you to answer some of the principal questions arising from the establishment of an evaluation framework for a cross-border intervention.

Do I have to? Why undertake evaluation?

Project evaluation can often be seen as an unavoidable burden. It is something that is normally required by funders and is therefore a task that has to be carried out whatever other organisational

pressures a project team may be under. The term “evaluation” can also be suggestive of judgement, and therefore as something that can throw a project or an organisation under a negative and potentially damaging light.

“Evaluation is not only about looking back to rate success or failure and allocate blame”.

EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development (2013), p.26

To evaluate, however, also means to assess choices and to learn how they help a project to make the changes it was designed for. When it becomes an integral function of an organisation, evaluation becomes a more encompassing process that allows you to take the lessons learnt from a previous project and use them to improve the design and implementation of your next one, and also to enhance your chances of success when looking to secure funding.

Nevertheless, as will be explained later in this Toolkit, evaluation should not become an overwhelming exercise for your organisation. The nature of any evaluation will depend, among other factors, on the capacity of your particular organisation (whether in terms of budgetary capacity or skills, for example), as well as the scope of the particular project you are evaluating.

Remember: The quality of an evaluation is not necessarily guaranteed by the amount of resources allocated to it, but proper planning and the design of a good evaluation plan will significantly increase your chances of ensuring a valuable evaluation exercise.

“Budgetary resources should not be a factor limiting the quality of an evaluation. However, there are diminishing returns. [...] The quality of monitoring and evaluations that have been undertaken rather than the budget per se is likely to be the main limiting factor”.

EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development (2013), p.38

The 2014-2020 EU funding period will see an increased demand from the European Commission for Managing Authorities to evaluate the overall effectiveness of programme implementation, including European Territorial Cooperation programmes. In the Ireland-Northern Ireland context, the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) emphasised this point in its 2014 Consultation Information Document.

“The programmes are required to clearly identify the intended results and outputs, so that we can easily answer the questions: what did we spend our money on and what changed as a result of the programme?”

SEUPB, European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020, p.7

Whilst it is not the responsibility of individual projects to provide for the evaluation of any funding programmes, projects that can demonstrate that the evaluation of how they have contributed to the desired change was integrated into their design will perform a useful function for programme managers. Of course, this does not mean that a project with an excellent evaluation plan will be more likely to be funded if its projected results and outputs are not in line with those of the programme to which it has applied, but one whose intended outcomes clearly contribute to the programme’s priorities *and* can demonstrate that it will measure how it has effected change will potentially fulfil important policy objectives.

“If you don’t care about how well you are doing or about what impact you are having, why bother to do it at all?”

Evaluation is a tool for learning that should be viewed as essential for any organisation that is interested in finding ways of improving the activities it delivers in order to fulfil its mission. Therefore, knowing how to undertake an evaluation – and specifically, in our case, in a cross-border context – is crucial to achieving that goal.

1. The Context for evaluation

1.1 The policy context at the European level

Over the last few decades European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes have been the main funding impetus for cross-border projects on the island of Ireland. Principal among these have been the INTERREG and PEACE programmes, now entering their fifth and fourth programming periods respectively, covering the years 2014 to 2020. As programmes funded by the European Union, they must operate under the EU's overarching policy aims and accompanying regulations as set out, for example, in paragraph 5 of Regulation 1299/2013:

Cross-border cooperation should aim to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions, such as: poor accessibility, especially in relation to information and communication technologies (ICT) connectivity and transport infrastructure, declining local industries, an inappropriate business environment, lack of networks among local and regional administrations, low levels of research and innovation and take-up of ICT, environmental pollution, risk prevention, negative attitudes towards neighbouring country citizens and aim to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas (development of cross-border research and innovation facilities and clusters, cross-border labour market integration, cooperation among education providers, including universities or between health centres), while enhancing the cooperation process for the purpose of the overall harmonious development of the Union.²

The challenges identified above are seen as ones that commonly occur in border regions across the European Union, and European Territorial Cooperation programmes are tools to be used in order to tackle them and contribute towards a more “harmonious development of the Union”. That development, to which ETC programmes must contribute, is in turn informed by the Europe 2020 strategy which was formulated to “turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion”.³

This is the broad policy context at a European Union level in which ETC programmes have to operate, and as such their relative effectiveness in contributing towards the Union's policy goals and achieving the desired change need to be evaluated at the macro level. Thus, for example, the final (or ex post) evaluation of the INTERREG III (2000-2006) programme was undertaken in order to:

establish the impact of the INTERREG III Community Initiative and to provide evidence on whether it succeeded in fostering the development of cross-border, transnational and inter-regional co-operation in order to enhance the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the Community as a whole. At the same time, the evaluation addressed issues at the policy level to inform all stakeholders about the outcomes of INTERREG III and to use the results for influencing the

² REGULATION (EU) No 1299/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal.

³ European Commission, *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (2010), p.3.

ongoing implementation of the current Territorial Co-operation Objective programmes 2007-2013 and for discussing the future of Cohesion Policy after 2013.⁴

Panteia, Ex-Post Evaluation of INTERREG III 2000-2006

Here we cannot only see the value of evaluation for policy-makers who use evaluators' findings to inform the policy objectives and design of future programmes, but we can also begin to see the intimate relation between the evaluation and programme (or project) cycles with – in this case – the final (or ex post) evaluation of one programme being used in shaping its successor. We will look at this cycle in more detail later.

Importantly, for the 2014-2020 programming period, the European Commission has stressed a significant shift in policy relating to evaluation which should be borne in mind by cross-border projects in receipt of EU funding since they contribute towards EU Cohesion policy. This is indicated in a central policy document that “sets out some important changes in the understanding and organisation of monitoring and evaluation”, with the “most important one [being] the emphasis on a clearer articulation of the policy objectives”. According to the document, this is “key to implement a results oriented policy and moving away from an excessive focus on the absorption of funding”.⁵ This point is further clarified:

To date Cohesion Policy evaluations have tended to focus more on implementation issues than capturing the effects of interventions. For the 2014+ period, the Commission wishes to redress this balance and encourage more evaluations at EU, national and regional level, which explore the impact of Cohesion Policy interventions on the well-being of citizens, be it economic, social or environmental or a combination of all three. This is an essential element of the strengthened result-focus of the policy (p.8).

At the European level, therefore, there is a move in the 2014-2020 programming period away from evaluation of the management and modes of implementation of programmes towards a sharper focus on evaluating the extent to which they have effected the desired change in relation to Cohesion Policy.

This shift in focus must also be seen in the light of the EU's move towards a more significant concentration in terms of the use of its funds. This is clearly set out in the regulatory framework for European territorial cooperation:

The major part of the ERDF funding for cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes should be concentrated on a limited number of thematic objectives in order to maximise the impact of cohesion policy across the Union.

Paragraph 17, REGULATION (EU) No 1299/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December

⁴ It is interesting to note that one of the twelve case-study border regions included in this evaluation was Ireland-Northern Ireland. Here, for example, the evaluators found the following: “The programme **Ireland-Northern Ireland** supported a number of energy efficiency projects involving the installation of renewable energy production facilities in various locations at the border. While some of the projects were cross-border because they involved jointly using common resources or through establishing co-operation among partners with complementary skills, others involved a simple duplication of activities on both sides of the border without significant co-operation” (p.42).

⁵ European Commission Directorate General Regional and Urban Policy, “The Programming Period 2014-2020: Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation – European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund – Concepts and Recommendations” (March 2014).

2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal

At least 80 % of the ERDF allocation to each cross-border cooperation and transnational programme shall be concentrated on a maximum of four of the thematic objectives set out in the first paragraph of Article 9 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

Article 6 (1), REGULATION (EU) No 1299/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal

Thematic concentration consequently means a reduced number of investment priorities in order to maximise the impact of cohesion policy. This has significant implications for the selection of cross-border projects to be funded, as each Member State and Managing Authority (which in the case of Ireland-Northern Ireland in terms of the INTERREG and PEACE programmes is the SEUPB) will have to opt for a small number of themes to be addressed and their related investment priorities, and will also have to set out the changes (results) EU funding will bring about:

Investment priorities will be implemented through projects. Result indicators are an expression of the objective of an investment priority. Consequently, **result indicators can inform the decision on project selection criteria because projects should be able to demonstrate how they will contribute to the achievement of the objectives of a priority.**

DG REGIO, "Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation", p.11.

The implications of this are that the implementation of this regulatory obligation will lead to operational programmes with not only a small number of themes, but also with a defined set of intended results and their accompanying indicators that cross-border projects must clearly show they will be contributing to. This, in turn, will mean that there is also a defined policy context for the evaluation of cross-border projects. Given that "projects should be able to demonstrate how they will contribute to the achievement of the objectives of a priority" if they receive funding their evaluation will be *to some extent* conditioned by this obligation.

REMEMBER: Evaluation at the project level should not be solely led by the priorities at EU or programme level. Your evaluation should provide for your own organisational needs – what *you* need to learn!

We can summarise the relationship between intended change at the EU level and the thematic priorities selected to achieve that change as follows.⁶

⁶ Note that the eleven thematic objectives included in the graphic are those set out in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, which begins: "In order to contribute to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as the Fund-specific missions pursuant to their Treaty-based objectives, including economic, social and territorial cohesion, each ESI Fund shall support the following thematic objectives".



It's important to note that the choice of these thematic objectives will have been in part informed by final (or ex post) evaluations of previous programming periods, and it is from these that Member States and Managing Authorities will have to select for their own operational or cooperation (in the case of territorial cooperation) programmes.

1.2 The policy context at the Ireland-Northern Ireland level

The draft *Cross-Border Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland* begins by stating that it is "a European Territorial

Cooperation Programme that aims to promote greater economic, social and territorial cohesion”, and is “informed by the European Union’s key policy instruments, namely the Europe 2020 Strategy (EU2020) and the Common Strategic Framework (CSF)”.⁷ Similarly, the draft PEACE programme for 2014-2020 opens by quoting directly from Article 7 (2) of the regulation on European Territorial Cooperation: “the PEACE cross-border programme and within the thematic objective of promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination, the ERDF shall also contribute to promoting social and economic stability in the regions concerned, in particular through actions to promote cohesion between communities”.⁸ In the latter case, therefore, the PEACE programme is specifically addressing one of the thematic objectives set out in the EU’s Common Provisions Regulation (“promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination”), contributing to the goal of increased social cohesion in the EU.

As for the INTERREG Cooperation Programme (CP) for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland, from the eleven thematic objectives set out in the Common Provisions Regulation four priority axes were selected:

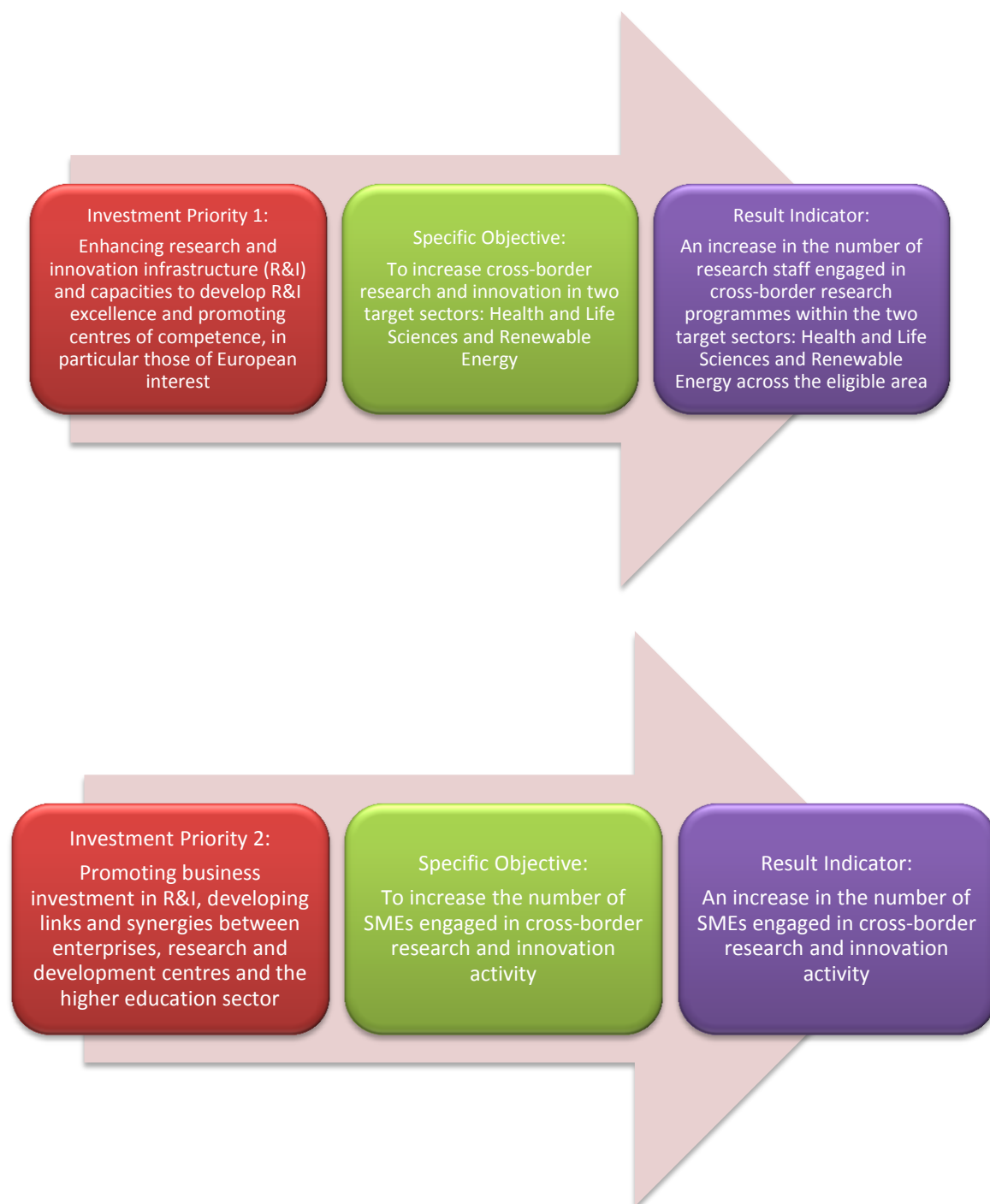
- Research and Innovation (Thematic Objective 1: “strengthening research, technological development and innovation”)
- Environment (Thematic Objective 6: “preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency”)
- Sustainable transport (Thematic Objective 7: “promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures”)
- Health (Thematic Objective 9: “promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination”)⁹

If we look at the first Priority Axis, “Research and Innovation”, the draft CP gives it two investment priorities, each with its specific objective and corresponding result indicator – a description of how the intended change to be brought about by the programme will become visible:

⁷ It also states that it is informed by the European Commission’s position papers on the UK and Ireland. SEUPB, *INTERREG Programme 2014-2020: Cross-Border Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland* (June 2014).

⁸ SEUPB, *PEACE Programme: Cooperation Programme of EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2014-2020, Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland* (June 2014).

⁹ The Investment Priority related to the Priority Axis in the draft INTERREG CP to some extent explains why it is contributing to Thematic Objective 9: “Investing in health and social infrastructure [...] contributes to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access through social, cultural and recreational services and transition from institutional to community-based services” (p.43).



The envisaged change for each specific objective is presented in the draft INTERREG CP as follows:

Specific Objective for Investment Priority 1	Specific Objective for Investment Priority 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of high value jobs across the region • A more productive local economy through increased commercialisation of innovation realised by a partnership approach between the academic, private and public sectors • The development of key sectors with an 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of SMEs that are research and innovation aware • Increased number of research and innovation capacity building and collaboration programmes initiatives aimed at SMEs • Increased number of SMEs co-operating with research institutions

existing critical mass across the region and strong market forecast

- An increased number of patents registered within the region
- Increased research and innovation capacity of regional third level education sector by creating effective partnerships between established actors and those with more limited experience
- Enhanced regional capacity to avail of opportunities in Horizon 2020, which will position academic institutions across the territory to access funding for additional research and innovation

- Increased number of SMEs participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects

A cross-border project under one of these two investment priorities, therefore, would necessarily work towards bringing about some aspect of the desired change sought at programme level. As a result, the broad evaluation context is given by the programme's various investment priorities and their respective specific objectives, along with an outline of the desired change they are expected to achieve.

Other possible sources of funding for cross-border projects on the island of Ireland, however, are not as prescriptive in terms of setting specific objectives and the change they are to bring about. The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund, for example, has two thematic pillars set out in its *Reconciliation Fund Strategy 2014-2017*:

- **Repairing** of those issues which lead to division, conflict, and barriers to a deeply reconciled and peaceful society;
- **Building** a strong civil society that encompasses all communities, through the continued implementation of the Agreements and promoting a rights-based society, political stability and respect for all.¹⁰

Projects seeking funding from the Reconciliation Fund are considered based on the extent to which they have the potential to contribute to:

- Reconciliation through education, dialogue, culture, and commemoration;
- Promotion of tolerance and respect;
- Challenging stereotypes of one's own and of other communities/identities;
- Development and strengthening of meaningful and lasting cross-border links;
- Academic research where the primary purpose relates to promoting reconciliation.

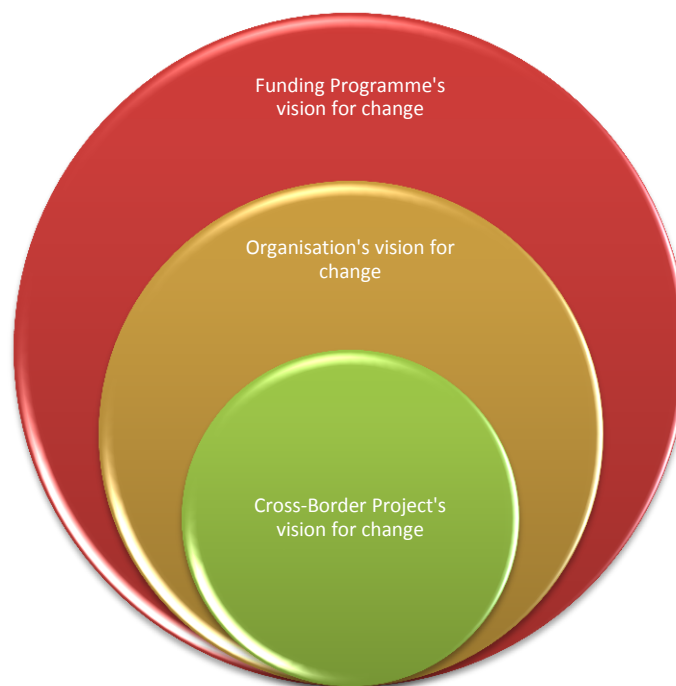
Significantly, however, the Strategy goes on to state: "These areas of work will remain deliberately broad to remain accessible to a wide range of organisations and projects" (p.4). Consequently, the potential evaluation context in terms of desired change will be equally broad, and its precise scope will be set by each cross-border project.

¹⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *The Reconciliation Fund Strategy 2014-2017*, <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/aboutus/funding/Reconciliation-Fund-Strategy-2014-2017.pdf>, (p.4).

1.3 The policy context at the cross-border project level

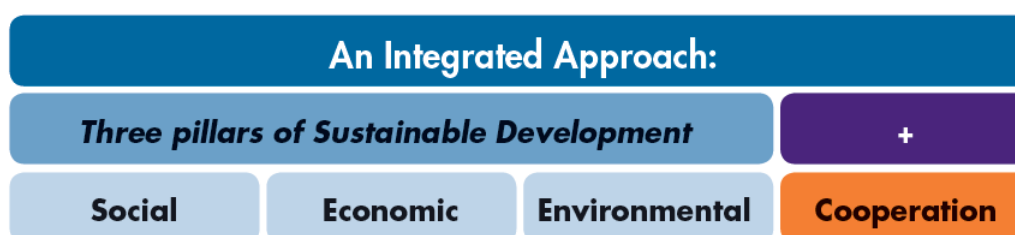
The broad policy context at the level of your cross-border project should be set by the overarching (long-term) vision or mission of your organisation, and more narrowly by its (medium to short term) strategic objectives. Unless your project is part of a major strategic shift for your organisation, it will normally reflect your organisation's concerns and ambitions and hope to contribute to the overall change it is trying to bring about by addressing a particular problem or unexploited potential affecting your cross-border territory.

There should then be an alignment between the policy contexts of the funding programme, your organisation and of your cross-border project, with the changes to be brought about by the latter feeding into the change your organisation is working towards effecting, and in turn contributing to the more general change the funding programme is looking to achieve. Evaluation of your cross-border project, therefore, represents not only a learning opportunity at the immediate project level, but also for your organisation in terms of the extent to which the project is forwarding organisational objectives.



Nevertheless, whilst there will be learning opportunities at the organisational level arising from the evaluation of your cross-border project, it is important to remember that what is being evaluated is the project itself: **you are evaluating the degree of success your cross-border project has had in bringing about change according to the criteria set out in the project plan.** As will be discussed later, the nature of the evaluation will be shaped by the principal policy area in which your project is looking to make a change. An intervention that is principally focused on an area related to economic policy will be more likely to lead to an evaluation that is more quantitative in nature, whilst a project engaging in a domain related to social policy would suggest a more qualitative evaluation, although evaluation of any project should offer a combination of both quantitative and qualitative.

This combination becomes all the more necessary when adopting an integrated approach to cross-border cooperation, as proposed in the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*.¹¹ This approach takes the three pillars of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) and adds a fourth pillar: cooperation.



A cross-border project that uses this approach will result in an intervention with impacts across all four pillars, and therefore with implications for a range of policy areas. This is why the *Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation* looks at the design of a cross-border project as a process that requires thinking how the intervention in the cross-border territory is going to impact across the pillars.



Evaluation of a cross-border project with an integrated approach will therefore have to take account of the degree of change brought about by the intervention across a range of policy areas, which implies evaluative approaches that include both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

1.4 Evaluation: Some central concepts and methods

Evaluation can appear exceedingly technical, with a wide range of associated terms, concepts and methods.¹² However, knowledge of the meaning of some of the more central terms, concepts and methods relevant to cross-border interventions will enable you to overcome any of this apparent complexity and to follow this Toolkit with ease.

Three terms relate to evaluation undertaken at different stages of an intervention:

- An **ex ante evaluation** occurs at pre-implementation stage, and assesses the relevance of a funding programme and its likelihood of achieving the proposed outcomes and change. An equivalent form of evaluation may also be required in the case of a major project (one that involves a significant amount of investment, such as a major infrastructure project). In the

¹¹ Ruth Taillon, Joachim Beck, Sebastian Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation* (2011).

¹² For a comprehensive list and explanation of many of these terms and concepts, see EVALSED's *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, which contains a useful glossary, as well as its *Sourcebook*.

EU context, for example, “*ex ante* evaluation is compulsory for each Territorial Cooperation programme”,¹³ and so both the INTERREG and PEACE Cooperation Programmes are required to undertake *ex ante* evaluations prior to their implementation.¹⁴ Although individual projects are not required to undergo an *ex ante* evaluation, this Toolkit will nevertheless consider it in relation to the design and pre-implementation stage of a cross-border project.

- **Interim or mid-term evaluation** takes place at the mid-implementation stage of programmes and some projects of a duration usually longer than three years, and is used to assess the progress the intervention is making towards its objectives. This allows programme or project managers to make any necessary adjustments to the intervention in order to ensure objectives are achieved. However, at the European level, there has been a shift to **ongoing evaluation**, with the European Commission encouraging Member States to move from “a compliance approach to a needs-based approach [and that they] should evaluate based on what they need to know and when”.¹⁵ The same principles should be applied to your cross-border project: **for a project of shorter duration there is no obligation to undertake an interim evaluation, but if necessary you could undertake some form of (informal) evaluation if and when you feel you need to know something**. However, this exercise should not be confused with monitoring: an interim evaluation looks for changes to the context of intervention, whereas monitoring looks at progress towards producing outcomes (i.e. how many training events have been delivered by a project to date).
- The ***ex post* or final evaluation** follows the closure of a programme or project, and assesses the degree to which it has achieved its objectives and brought about the intended change. For European programmes this is an obligation, and is carried out by independent evaluators. At project level any requirement for a final evaluation will be stipulated in your funder’s letter of offer.

There are a range of methodological approaches to evaluation, but for EU-funded territorial cooperation interventions the preferred approach is **impact evaluation**. According to the European Commission’s Directorate General Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), “In the 2014-2020 programming period, both result orientation and thematic concentration make it necessary to design programmes focussing their resources on a few objectives in order to maximise their impact. Their expected results shall be measured with result indicators and the programme effects assessed with impact evaluations”.¹⁶ Within the impact evaluation approach there are two broad categories: theory-based impact evaluation, and counterfactual impact evaluation.

- **Impact evaluation** is concerned with assessing the effects of an intervention in (for our purposes) the cross-border territory and the extent to which it has resulted in the intended change. However, where progress towards the intended change can be observed, impact evaluation also seeks to identify which contributory factors can be directly attributed to the intervention and which can be deemed as external.

¹³ INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.19.

¹⁴ As an example, see the *ex ante* evaluation for the PEACE III programme; Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland – Oxford Economics, *Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (PEACE III) 2007-2013: Ex Ante Evaluation* (April 2007).

¹⁵ INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.13.

¹⁶ European Commission DG REGIO, *The Programming Period 2014-2020: Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans* (April 2014), p.7.

- **Theory-based impact evaluation** is mainly – but not exclusively – a qualitative assessment of the impact of a programme or project, looking to see *how* and *why* an intervention has been successful in producing the intended change. It does so in relation to the project’s intervention logic, establishing whether the results have been produced in accordance with that logic. A project’s intervention logic is built on a “coherent logical chain linking the core problem [the project is addressing] to the objectives, the policy approach and instruments/actions”.¹⁷
- **Counterfactual impact evaluation** uses control or comparison groups to assess *how much of an observable change is due to the intervention* and *who has it affected*. This type of impact evaluation compares the changes that have taken place among the direct beneficiaries of an intervention with those that were not the targets of the programme or project. It requires “a credible control or comparison group”, “a large enough number of participants and entities and controls for statistical significance”, and “good data on supported and non-supported participants and entities to compare results”.¹⁸ Given these requirements, counterfactual impact evaluation may not be appropriate for many smaller-scale cross-border projects.¹⁹

There are other methodological approaches to evaluation that serve different purposes and address different stages of the project life-cycle. Some of them focus on project management issues, for example, whereas others may be concerned with the efficient use of resources. These include:

- The **resource allocation approach**, which could involve a cost-benefit analysis, for example, considers the use of resources, and is normally applied at the programme and/or project design and pre-implementation stage and at the end of project stage (*ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation).
- A **formative approach** could involve an interim evaluation aimed at the project management team to provide it with feedback on the progress of the project and allowing them to implement any necessary corrective measures.
- A **participatory approach** is concerned with supporting the development of networks, communities and territories. A “locally led evaluation intended to strengthen and build consensus among local actors, and to support their agendas and increase their capacities would be an example of a *bottom-up* or participatory approach”.²⁰

These approaches and methodologies should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Just as an evaluation may be qualitative as well as quantitative in nature, these approaches may be combined according to your specific needs.

For any evaluation to be successful the collection and availability of relevant and useful data is essential. This is also true for the purposes of **monitoring**, and is to a significant extent dependent on the setting of **outputs**, and **output** and **results** or **impact indicators**.

¹⁷ Ruth Taillon, Joachim Beck, Sebastian Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, p.45.

¹⁸ European Commission DG REGIO, *The Programming Period 2014-2020: Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans* (April 2014), pp.9-10.

¹⁹ For a detailed explanation and guidance on counterfactual impact evaluation, see European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Design and commissioning of counterfactual impact evaluations* (2013).

²⁰ EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.18.

- **Outputs** are the activities (e.g. workshops, conferences, site visits, etc.), products (e.g. brochures, new software, training manuals, etc.), or services (e.g., consumer advice, innovation consultancy, etc.) that your project will produce during its lifetime.
- **Output indicators** are quantifiable measures of what will be produced by your project, such as the miles of new road built, numbers of workshops organised, acres of brownfield sites redeveloped.
- **Results** or **impact indicators** demonstrate the degree of change your project will bring about.²¹ They are not intended to simply show, for example, that by the end of the project there will be a certain number of increased miles of road from the project start, but that those extra miles of road have increased the number of cross-border workers and thereby reduced unemployment rates in the cross-border territory.²²
- Although the two terms often appear in conjunction, **monitoring** is not the same as evaluation. **Monitoring** is principally an internal function of the project, although it also serves a vital purpose for evaluation in terms of the data it collects. It involves the setting of indicators and milestones, setting up systems to collect the data related to those indicators, collecting, recording and analysing that data, and using the resulting information for the day-to-day management of the project – *what is happening*. Evaluation, on the other hand, reflects on the progress and achievements of a project – *what has happened*.

The setting of indicators, collection of data and the quality and relevance of that data are crucial factors for the success of any project's evaluation. However, there are certain challenges facing a cross-border project that need to be addressed.

1.5 Challenges to the evaluation of a cross-border project

"It is crucial that through every stage of a cross-border project – and not simply in the original conception of the project – the cross-border approach is implemented throughout, avoiding any tendency to engage in actions implemented on a single jurisdiction basis, leading to a 'back-to-back' intervention. The extent to which your project truly demonstrates the application of a cross-border approach will be judged in its final evaluation."

PAT-TEIN, *Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management*, p.25

"The programmes are funded as part of the European Union's Territorial Cooperation objective; therefore project activity should have a significant cross-border dimension and have clear added value for completing the activity on a cross-border basis."

SEUPB, *European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020*, p.7

Whether the final (*ex post*) evaluation of your cross-border project is to be carried out internally or by an independent evaluator (a question we will return to later), the thinking about and planning for evaluation should reflect the cross-border approach. Just as you need cross-border stakeholder

²¹ The favoured term in EU Cohesion Policy and related guidance documents is results indicators. See, for example, DG REGIO's document "Standardized Key Terminology", http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/key_terminology.pdf.

²² Bearing in mind the focus on results in the 2014-2020 EU programming period, the following remarks on the terms "result" and "impact" should be noted: "We clarify here that impact is the change which can be credibly attributed to an intervention. In the past, there was some confusion in the evaluation debate in that 'impact' was also used (and still is in some cases) to mean longer term effects, including those which are indirect and unintended" (EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, pp.34-35).

recognition of the core problem your project is to address, for example, you will also need to have the same level of engagement in the evaluation process.

That process should coincide with the process of project design, as issues specific to one side of the border that could affect the task of evaluation may otherwise be overlooked when you are formulating your monitoring and evaluation framework. Such issues could include the availability or compatibility of data needed for monitoring and evaluation purposes, or the identification of important target groups for the dissemination of any final evaluation report.

“Different stakeholders, e.g., policymakers, professionals, managers and citizens, have different expectations of evaluation. If a major stakeholder interest is ignored, this is likely to weaken an evaluation, either because it will be poorly designed or because its results will lack credibility. Involving policy makers and those responsible for programmes will ensure they take results seriously and use them. Identify your stakeholders, find out what their interests are in an evaluation and involve them!”

EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.27

It is important to stress that the above comments from EVALSED are focused on the programme level rather than project level. As in all aspects of a cross-border project, **proportionality** must always be borne in mind. Whilst you will need cross-border engagement in the evaluation process, that engagement needs to be focused on the key partners and stakeholders, otherwise you risk devoting an inordinate amount of resources (whether in financial resources or staff time) that will result in an inefficient evaluation process. Although again aimed at the programme level, INTERACT notes that the efficiency of Territorial Cooperation can be evaluated by looking at the efficiency of cooperation:

“Has the programme been efficient in using for example auditors, translators, meetings, travel costs, transactions, reporting? Have cultural obstacles been dealt with efficiently? What procedures could be simplified to avoid cultural obstacles or inefficient cooperation?”

INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Cooperation Programmes*, p.17

As referred to earlier, a cross-border approach to the evaluation process, with involvement of key stakeholders from both sides of the border, may help in resolving some issues related to the capture of comparable data for monitoring purposes and for the setting of results indicators. This is an issue frequently faced by those looking at a cross-border territory where gaps often appear between the data collected by each jurisdiction.

“Our objective is to describe [...] the characteristics of the cross-border region, and to examine the ways in which this region may differ from other regions of the island economy. Here, we are very heavily constrained by the availability of published data”.

John Bradley and Michael Best, *Cross-Border Economic Renewal: Rethinking Regional Policy in Ireland*, p.95²³

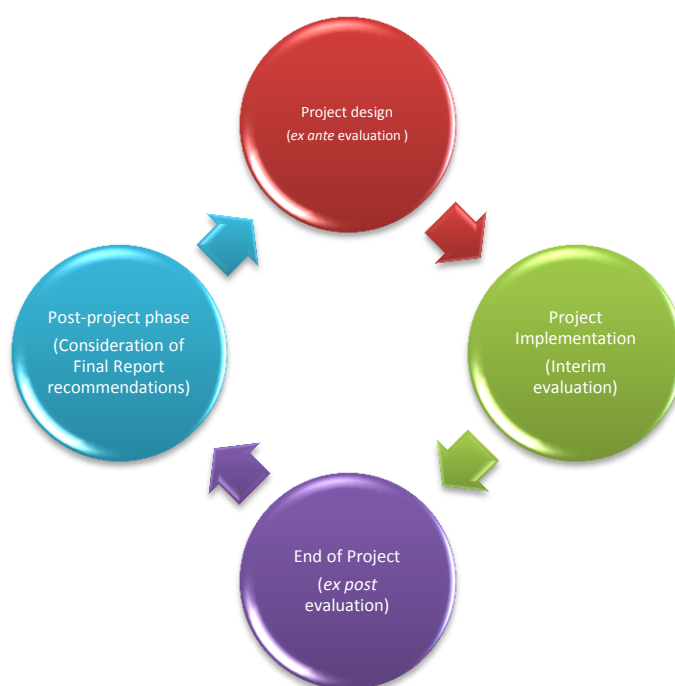
²³ On this matter, see also for example, Michael Burke, *A Commentary on Economic Data in Northern Ireland*, p.7. It should be noted that some joint efforts have been made to address this issue by the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) with the publication of *Census 2011: Ireland and Northern Ireland*.

It is in these circumstances that the knowledge of partners and/or stakeholders from both sides of the border becomes central to resolving challenges in setting results indicators for evaluation purposes for which relevant data is either readily available, or where data will have to be collected.

REMEMBER: Proportionality is key! Think about the scope of your project in terms of geographic coverage, the number and range of project beneficiaries, the project timescale, and the scale of your budget. The resources dedicated to the evaluation process should be commensurate with the scale of your cross-border project: a one-year project with a relatively small number of beneficiaries and covering a narrow area in the cross-border territory should not involve the same level of complexity in terms of the evaluation process as a five-year project with a significant budget, and with a large number of beneficiaries.

1.6 Planning for evaluation: some initial thoughts

When thinking about planning for the evaluation of your cross-border project, it is helpful to consider the main stages of the project cycle in relation to the principal stages of an evaluation cycle:



We can see here that the findings of the final evaluation of one project should inform the design of a subsequent project, underlining the learning objective of the evaluation process. It is important to understand from the outset, however, that at project level there is usually no obligation to undertake either an *ex ante* or interim evaluation.

“The duration of the project can be up to seven years depending on the nature of the activities being proposed. Where a project is over three years duration, the second phase of the project will be conditional on a rigorous mid-term evaluation to re-confirm the allocation of funding”.

SEUPB, *European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020*, p.26

Unless your project involves major capital funding or is of significant duration, therefore, there is usually no obligation for anything other than a final (*ex post*) evaluation.

Nevertheless, and bearing in mind the issue of proportionality, this Toolkit recommends that an **informal** and **internal** form of evaluation be undertaken at the end of the project design phase (immediately prior to the submission of the application for funding), and in an even more reduced form subsequent to the receipt of a Letter of Offer (prior to the implementation stage).²⁴ However, unless you identify a need for it, a short duration project (less than three years) would not necessitate an interim evaluation, especially if there is a robust monitoring framework in place.

As you think about these issues the question of your organisation's capacity in terms of evaluation knowledge and skills arises and needs to be addressed, especially since the initial stages of the evaluation process are normally internally driven. Additionally, and although the final decision could be taken at a later date (**but remember, if you don't include this in your project budget, you will have to find the resources elsewhere!**), you need to consider whether the final (*ex post*) evaluation will be undertaken internally or by an external evaluator.

"There may be different logics appropriate for different stages of the evaluation and programme cycle. It may be preferable to rely more on internal resources for formative evaluation inputs or for ex-ante exercises but depend more on external resources for the ex-post evaluation."

EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.39

Let's take this second point first. Various factors will have to be considered when thinking whether the final evaluation should be undertaken externally. These are some of the questions you need to ask yourself, and which should be answered on a cross-border basis:

- Is this a three-year project (or even longer)?
- Does it involve a significant number of sectors, beneficiaries and stakeholders?
- What is its geographical scope?
- What is its level of complexity?
- Who is its potential audience (stakeholders, policy-makers, future funders)?
- What level of capacity and experience does your organisation have of carrying out evaluations?

"In-house evaluators will have greater familiarity with institutional and management requirements and may well have easier access to information and key personnel. They may, however, not be seen as independent and may lack specialist expertise."

EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.38

"Evaluation enables us A) to *learn internally*: involved stakeholders are able to learn and improve their programme, and B) to *present externally*: the results of the programme can be presented to a broader public by an independent evaluator."

INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.11

"Using an outside evaluator gives greater credibility to findings, particularly positive findings."

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.9

²⁴ At programme level, where *ex ante* evaluations are the norm, this type of evaluation would only be undergone once. However, what we are recommending here is two intermediary (and **informal** and **internal**) stages of *ex ante* evaluation for your project.

Unless there is a specific requirement made by the project funder, ultimately the issue of whether the final evaluation should be carried out internally or by an external evaluator is a question of judgement, and one that should be arrived at on a cross-border basis. It may be useful to employ a grid to give you a visual aid in making this decision, with sliding scales corresponding to the main factors to be considered. Here is an example where the higher values on the scale represent projects of long duration, a significant number of beneficiaries, no internal evaluation capacity, a very important external audience for the final report, and a large area of the cross-border territory covered by the project:

	1	2	3	4	5
Duration					
Beneficiaries					
Capacity					
Complexity					
External audience					
Geographical scope					

So, in a hypothetical example of a three-year cross-border project with some degree of complexity involving approximately 70 direct beneficiaries located in two border counties, and where the organisation has only a very limited experience of carrying out an internal evaluation of a small project, but where the intended audience for the final evaluation report includes a significant external audience and is of major strategic importance, the grid may look like this:

	1	2	3	4	5
Duration					
Beneficiaries					
Capacity					
Complexity					
External audience					
Geographical scope					

A result like this would suggest the value of contracting an external evaluator to carry out the final evaluation and to compile the final report (we will deal with the issue of contracting external evaluators and designing the Terms of Reference in Section 4). However, it's important to remember that if you are going to use a grid like this, it will be up to the project team to decide which factors it wants to include, and what the values will be for each of them on the sliding scale.

Given the importance of evaluation, your organisation may also wish to consider whether to seek expert external advice at the cross-border project's pre-implementation stage in order to assist in designing an appropriate framework to capture its effects in bringing about the desired change. This may be more advisable where there is little internal evaluation capacity and where there is significant complexity in a project with strategic organisational importance.

“Improving the strength of your evidence will typically—but not always—require putting time and money towards planning, collecting data, and analysing the results. It is necessary to have some understanding in your organisation of what is more and less credible evidence, but hiring an external consultant can help you design an appropriate monitoring and evaluation programme to ensure your analysis is rigorous.”

NPC, *Building your Measurement Framework*, p.25

Even if you involve external evaluators at one or more stages of your cross-border project, **it is crucial that you are familiar with the process of evaluation**. You will not only be centrally involved in the initial stages of the design of a monitoring and evaluation framework, but you will also have to be aware of the major issues and methods relevant to the evaluation of your cross-border project when compiling the Terms of Reference (ToR) for an external evaluation. ***This Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects* will help you in this.**

2. Evaluation and the design and pre-implementation of a cross-border project



Evaluation should not be an afterthought; it should be considered from the earliest stages of the project cycle. This section will therefore look at evaluation in relation to the first phase of that cycle: the design of the cross-border project and assessment prior to the submission of application for funding, and the pre-implementation stage that follows the receipt of a Letter of Offer.

“Monitoring and evaluation should be part of your planning process. It is very difficult to go back and set up monitoring and evaluation systems once things have begun to happen. You need to begin gathering information about performance and in relation to targets from the word go. The first information gathering should, in fact, take place when you do your needs assessment.”

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.12

“Planning for evaluation must begin at the appraisal stage and should ensure that appraisal reports contain the information needed for evaluation. This should include an outline plan, setting out the general boundaries of the proposed evaluation.”

Department of Finance and Personnel, *The Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation*, p.12

Of course, sometimes the reality does not fulfil the ideal and you may be faced with the unfortunate situation of only considering the evaluation of your cross-border project when it is coming to the end (or even when it has already ended!). There are some suggestions for those who find themselves in this situation in Section 4.

2.1 Incorporating evaluation into the design of your cross-border project

The ability to demonstrate that you have included a valid monitoring and evaluation framework into the design of your cross-border project is an essential requirement when applying to any funder.

“How will the work be documented and evaluated? How will you share the lessons learnt from your work with others? What difference will the work make?”

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, “Brief guidance on how to apply for a grant”

“How will the project be monitored and evaluated?”

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Reconciliation Fund Application Form” (2014)

There is detailed guidance on the incorporation of a monitoring and evaluation framework into the design of your cross-border project in Step 6 of the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, but it would be useful here to highlight some essential points. As has been mentioned before, the 2014-2020 EU funding period will see greater thematic concentration and an increased

focus on results, and this has been translated into the Territorial Cooperation programmes for Ireland-Northern Ireland.

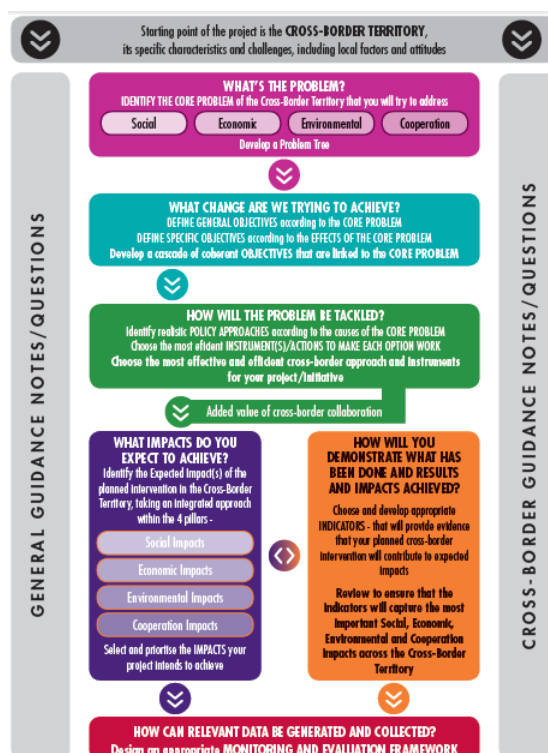
“The number of indicators within a letter of offer will be reduced to not more than three project-specific indicators in addition to programme indicators. These indicators will reflect the result and output focus of the programme.”

SEUPB, *European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020*, p.26

Bearing this mind, let us look at an example based on the draft 2014-2020 PEACE programme. The specific objective of “Shared Education” is described as the “creation of a more cohesive society by increasing the level of sustained contact between school children from all programmes across the Programme area”. There is one result indicator for this objective: “An increase in the number of children and young people in the area who have sustained a friendship or cordial relationship with a person or persons from the other community”. Therefore, if applying for funding under this specific objective, the change that a cross-border project proposes to bring about should contribute to greater social cohesion and have a small number of project-specific results indicators to complement the programme indicator.

NOTE: In terms of EU programmes, including European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the underlying rationale is to maximise change through concentration of effort.

It would be useful to remind ourselves here of the key analytical steps involved in the design of a cross-border project as set out in the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*:



It should be borne in mind that the core problem of the cross-border territory you have identified and which your project will address should be a specific aspect of the needs set out in the

programme from which you are seeking funding,²⁵ and the change you are seeking to achieve should also contribute to the programme's intended change in the eligible area. However, what is of central concern to us at this point in relation to evaluation is your identification of expected impacts or results, as once these have been set they will become guiding criteria when the final evaluation assesses how successful your cross-border project has been in achieving them, and to what extent they have brought about the intended change in the cross-border territory.

In this regard, two questions need to be answered:

- Are your expected results realistic?
- Do they clearly demonstrate the logic behind a cross-border intervention?

In answering the first question it's important to remind yourself that, whilst it should demonstrate a legitimate level of ambition,²⁶ your cross-border project is not expected to solve all the problems or exploit all the unused potentials of your cross-border territory. Again, in terms of European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the policy of concentration suggests avoiding that your cross-border project set itself a wide range of expected results and should instead be selective.

"It is also important to **be selective**: choose the [results] that are most significant and for which it will be possible – through identifying appropriate indicators and gathering supporting evidence – to demonstrate to what extent the [...] project has achieved its objectives."

Taillon, Beck and Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, p.45

This is not to say that your project does not anticipate a number of results, especially when following an integrated approach to cross-border cooperation, which will not only identify negative effects across all four pillars (economic, social, environmental, and cooperation) caused by the core problem, but will see the intervention as effecting change across those four pillars as well. Nevertheless, your project should select those seen as most in line with the funding programme's proposed results – **and this selection should be undertaken on a cross-border basis in order to secure the required level of engagement.**

REMEMBER: "The number of indicators within a letter of offer will be reduced to not more than three project-specific indicators" (SEUPB). **Prioritise what you see as the most strategically significant results for your project** – others can become additional results representing the added value of the integrated cross-border approach.

To answer the second question as to whether your expected results demonstrate the logic behind a cross-border intervention. This is where the fourth pillar of the integrated approach to cross-border cooperation needs to come to the fore.

"The ability to deliver cross-border benefits is a key criteria for all applicants to the INTERREG programme which will be foremost in the criteria applied at the time of project selection for support."

SEUPB, *INTERREG Programme 2014-2020*

²⁵ The European Territorial Cooperation programmes for Ireland-Northern Ireland, for example, set out a comprehensive catalogue of the problems and needs of the eligible area.

²⁶ See PAT-TEIN, *Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management*, pp.50-51.

“To what extent was cooperation necessary to achieve the effects? What has been the intensity of cooperation? What elements has cooperation added to the programme’s activities and achievements?”

INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.16

Some guiding questions follow that will assist you in this regard, but to properly answer these **it is important that you do so on a cross-border basis (i.e. with input from partners and core stakeholders from both sides of the border), and that you decide *how you are going to measure* these cross-border cooperation results.**²⁷

Will your project affect:

- the cross-border provision of services, referrals across borders and cooperation in the target area of the cross-border territory?
- public institutions and administrations, for example in regard to their responsibilities?
- the involvement of stakeholders in issues of cross-border governance?

Will your project require the creation of new or restructuring of existing public authorities (e.g. temporary or permanent working groups, advisory bodies, joint management bodies)?

Will your project lead to:

- the creation or harmonisation of regulations, legislation and/or shared enforcement within the cross-border territory?
- new protocols or voluntary agreements for the management of delivery of public services?
- new management processes and procedures (e.g. meetings, structuring and coordinating networks of actors)?
- the creation of new organisations for public tasks (institution-building)?
- new or developed relationships between actors on both sides (e.g. the range and intensity of participation of actors from different sectors and/or different levels)?
- systematic cross-border use of project results?
- formulation of joint recommendations?
- establishment of high-level strategic consultation between political representatives and regional participants?
- coordination or joint enforcement of laws or regulations?
- cohesion of regional policy?
- cross-border mobility of people for economic, social or cultural reasons?
- cross-border circulation of products?

Your cross-border project may anticipate achieving a significant number of such cross-border cooperation results, but again you need to be strategic in terms of selecting what are seen as the most important – and again, **this decision should be taken on a cross-border basis.**

The importance of bringing a cross-border approach to the design of your project should be clear, as such an approach will maximise the project’s potential and enable you and your partners and stakeholders to identify any gaps in its intervention logic.

²⁷ For more on this, see Taillon, Beck and Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, pp.48-51.

“Cross-border projects will only exploit their full magnitude within an interdisciplinary setting, bringing together experts and knowledge from different disciplines and different sides of the border.”

PAT-TEIN, *Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management*, p.10

This cross-border approach should also be taken not only to the creation of a monitoring and evaluation framework for your project,²⁸ but to the creation of an Evaluation Steering Group too. However, bearing in mind the principle of proportionality as well as the issue of efficiency (the balance between the resources you input into the project and its results), at project level **this should not become organisationally complex**. You may decide that the equivalent of the project’s steering or advisory group will take on this role as well. **What is crucial is that you have a cross-border group that includes some level of expertise with responsibility for considering and advising on all aspects of the evaluation process.**

2.2 Submission of funding application and the cross-border project pre-implementation stage: an *ex ante* evaluation?

You and your partners will no doubt have spent considerable amounts of time and energy in putting together the best possible application for financial support for your cross-border project. However, you are advised to invest some more effort in undertaking an **internal** and **informal** *ex ante* evaluation of your proposed project. Informal, because at project level there is usually no requirement from funders to undertake an *ex ante* evaluation, and internal as your Project Steering Group or Evaluation Steering Group (if you have decided to constitute one) should be able to take on this role, even if you may also decide to bring in some expert external advice.

“[The] risk of the scope widening is particularly great for *ex ante* evaluations. These can turn into exercises in forecasting or speculation that are far from the object of the evaluation. In *ex ante* evaluation it is best to limit the scope of the evaluation strictly to the programme proposals.”

EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.31

Having finished the design of the project, this *ex ante* evaluation should principally focus on assessing its capacity to bring about the intended change by examining *how* it intends to do this (the intervention logic), as well as its efficiency and sustainability.

Efficiency is assessed in terms of what the anticipated results of the project are (outputs) against the resources used to achieve them (inputs, which can include finance, staff, time and equipment). The central question here is: **are the inputs proportionate to the anticipated outputs?** Check that the project demonstrates a legitimate balance between what you need to put in and what you anticipate to get out. If your *ex ante* evaluation suggests that either a disproportionate amount of resources is being employed to bring about the intended change, or that the project is claiming the achievement of a significant number of results with insufficient resources (which would suggest unrealistic expectations), then you need to revisit your plan.

Sustainability is judged in relation to your project’s potential to result in continued, sustained cooperation, with permanent benefits to the cross-border territory, and contributing on a long-term

²⁸ Detailed guidance on this is contained in Step 6 of Taillon, Beck and Rihm’s *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*.

basis to the development of cross-border cooperation. Some possible means of achieving this is through capacity-building of project beneficiaries, institutional changes, and the creation of cross-border networks that are likely to last beyond the period of funding.²⁹

Assessing your cross-border project's **intervention logic** means retracing the steps from the anticipated change (result), to the policy actions it proposes to employ in order to address the causes of the core problem you have identified, the project's general and specific objectives in relation to the problem's effects, and back to the core problem itself. What you are ensuring here is that there are valid causal links in your intervention logic, and that there is demonstrable evidence that it supports a cross-border intervention. In other words, it should be clear that your cross-border project will achieve results that would not otherwise be attainable on a single-jurisdiction basis (**remember the cross-border cooperation pillar!**).

"Your starting point when considering what policy approaches and instruments/actions to choose to address a problem in the Cross-Border Territory must be to consider whether or not a cross-border approach is required to achieve the objectives of the proposed action; and if so, why?"

Taillon, Beck and Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, p.37

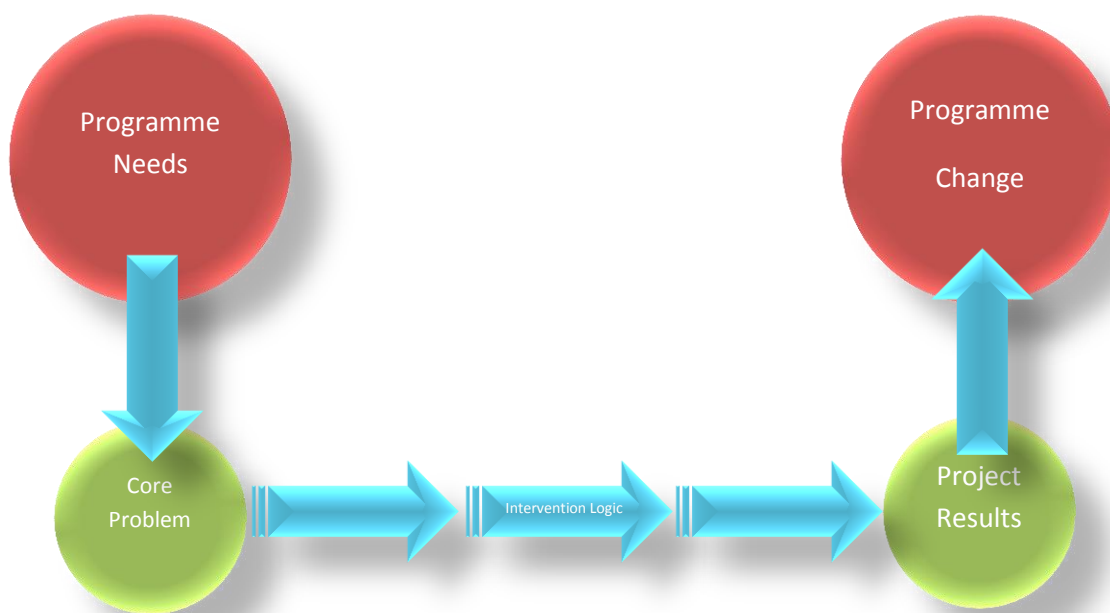
As you do so, it is also important that your *ex ante* evaluation confirms that the cross-border project *clearly* demonstrates that both the core problem it has identified and the change it proposes to bring about are **relevant** to the funding programme. **Does the core problem map onto the needs of the cross-border territory identified by the programme, and does the anticipated change correspond to the overall change proposed at the programme level?**

"The primary purpose of the assessment process is to assess the potential of the proposed project to deliver the specified results outputs of the programme in a cost effective manner."

SEUPB, *European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020*, p.25

The framework for verifying the relevance and intervention logic of your cross-border project can be visualised as follows, with your core problem being informed by the programme needs, and your anticipated change contributing to the change to be brought about at programme level:

²⁹ The issue of sustainability is addressed again in Section 4 in relation to the final evaluation.



In terms of project relevance, it is unlikely that your informal *ex ante* evaluation will identify critical errors. Instead, what you need to ensure is that the relevance is clear: **will an external evaluator be able to see clearly in your application the relevance of your proposed cross-border project?**

A second iteration of this *ex ante* evaluation process should take place following the receipt of a Letter of Offer (which may be issued some time after the original conception of the project), although focusing on any factors relating to the anticipated results of your cross-border project. Importantly, in the Ireland-Northern Ireland eligible area, there is the possibility that some cross-border projects may be involved in a two-stage application process:

“Where appropriate a two stage process will be used. Stage one will be a short application form, with applicants receiving a decision within three months of applying. Applications emerging from stage one of the process will then be invited to provide additional detailed information for stage two of the application process.”

SEUPB, *European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020*, p.25

The value of undergoing a second iteration of an internal *ex ante* evaluation may become clearer for those projects required to undergo this two-stage application process.

“Having received a letter of offer or contract from your funder, it is important that a project manager and the partners and/or stakeholders remind themselves of the original analysis and understanding of their cross-border context, and the needs that had been identified which the project is to address. This is particularly important as the Letter of Offer may contain within it stipulations or conditions that may affect the original scope of your project, and that you may wish to negotiate with your Managing Authority or funder.”

PAT-TEIN, *Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management*, p.12

Whereas the PAT-TEIN *Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management* deals with a number of operational issues that may arise subsequent to the receipt of the Letter of Offer, here

we are focusing on possible consequences for the evaluation process. These may include issues such as the evaluation framework itself, the number or nature of anticipated project results, or the project timescale. Consideration of these issues may lead you to seek advice from and to negotiate with your Managing Authority or funder. Again, **this process should be taken on a cross-border basis.**

Some questions, therefore, that you may have to answer are:

- **Are there any stipulations or recommendations related to the cross-border project's evaluation framework itself?** This may include the need to involve certain stakeholders and/or beneficiaries in the evaluation process that may not have been originally included, or stipulations regarding the timing and format of an interim (where applicable) or final evaluation.
- **Have any changes been recommended in terms of the number and/or nature of the project results?** Given the need for concentration, it may be possible that your project is asked to limit the number of anticipated results, or to prioritise some of them. This will require consideration on the overall capacity of the project to deliver on the anticipated change, and to revise its results indicators.
- **Are there any timing issues?** It is important that you consider the start and end-dates of the project according to the Letter of Offer. If the length of time of your cross-border project has been reduced, you must seriously consider whether it will still be able to achieve all of the anticipated results contained within the original application. Do you need to re-prioritise some results?

Given the nature of a cross-border project, it is essential that these questions are not answered on a single-jurisdiction basis. In order to safeguard the required degree of cross-border cooperation these questions must be considered on a cross-border basis, and this will be facilitated due to the fact that your Project Steering Committee (or Evaluation Steering Committee, if you have decided to create one) should have representation from both sides of the border.

REMEMBER: Your Managing Authority or funder is open to discussion of these questions. The priority is to ensure projects can contribute to programme results!

This *ex ante* evaluation process has focused on assessing your proposed cross-border project's efficiency, relevance and the validity of its intervention logic. However, there are other central factors to an evaluation that will come into play at later stages of the evaluation and project cycle.

3. Evaluation and the implementation of the cross-border project



As we now move to the implementation stage of your cross-border project, it's important to stress again that evaluation looks at what *has been done*, and not what *is being done*. This is true even for the pre-implementation stage, as an *ex ante* evaluation assesses what has been done in terms of the design of the cross-border project and the completion of the funding application. Although the two are intimately connected, monitoring deals with what *is being done* and is not the same as evaluation. The quality of that connection, however, is one of the elements that may become one of the objects of assessment for an evaluation undertaken during the implementation of a project: an interim evaluation. Evaluation at this stage of the project cycle is an example of **formative** evaluation since it will inform you on the progress your project has made towards its intended change, allowing you to adopt any corrective measures to ensure the attainment of the project results.

"The basic questions of interim evaluations [...] concern the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions implemented."

EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.35

In this section, therefore, we will consider the aims of an interim evaluation, which will now assess factors (such as effectiveness) that would not have been the focus of an *ex ante* evaluation. It will also highlight issues that are crucial to a cross-border project, such as the distribution of observable results. But before doing so we will begin by looking at whether there is any value for your cross-border project in undertaking an interim evaluation.

3.1 Assessing the benefits of an interim evaluation for your cross-border project

As has been noted before, for longer-term European Territorial Cooperation projects in the Ireland-Northern Ireland eligible area, there is an obligation to undertake an interim evaluation: "Where a project is over three years duration, the second phase of the project will be conditional on a rigorous mid-term evaluation to re-confirm the allocation of funding" (SEUPB). The continuation of funding for such a project, therefore, is dependent on the completion of such an evaluation and is not optional.

For cross-border projects of shorter duration, however, the question of whether to undertake an interim evaluation or not is a real one, and the issue of proportionality is central in answering it. Essentially (and bearing in mind that for European Territorial Cooperation projects there is no obligation for undertaking one), you have to consider whether what you may expect to get out of such an evaluation is worth the resources you will have to put into it. There may, of course, be

factors inherent to the project itself that require an interim evaluation, such as a cross-border project based on a participatory approach. In this case there may, for example, be a need for project beneficiaries and stakeholders to lead an interim evaluation assessing the progress the project has made towards some goal and their own contribution to it.

NOTE: What you are looking for here is the progress made towards change, *not* how many deliverables have been achieved – that is more a concern of monitoring of operational aspects rather than evaluation.

For other projects, though, these are some of the questions that have to be answered and which are related to the overarching question of proportionality:

- Has your project reached a sufficient number of beneficiaries and stakeholders **on both sides of the border** to allow you to carry out a meaningful survey?
- Is there sufficient *relevant* data from other sources?
- Have there been any significant changes to relevant policy areas?
- Are there any specific issues that you wish to evaluate?
- Are significant findings justifiably anticipated that could be important to the project and/or policy-makers?

If the answer to all these questions is no, then it is not really an issue of proportionality, but rather of usefulness. If there is an insignificant amount of relevant data, a small number of beneficiaries and stakeholders on both sides of the border, no significant change to the policy context, and no identified need by the project to assess specific issues, then an interim evaluation would be highly unlikely to provide the project with any useful insights – **there is no real opportunity for learning**.

However, if the answer to all or most of these questions is yes, then there may be some value in undertaking an interim evaluation – **but the issue of proportionality still has to be considered**. Can you justify the resources required to undertake this evaluation, whether in terms of staff, equipment, time or finances (was an interim evaluation budgeted for)?

Ultimately, this question has to be answered strategically – **and has to be answered on a cross-border basis!**

3.2 The central criteria in an interim evaluation

The main questions that an interim evaluation considers are related to **efficiency** and **effectiveness**. The issue of relevance, which was a factor considered in the *ex ante* evaluation, is no longer a focus for evaluation of a funded cross-border project. However, the *ex ante* evaluation also assessed the coherence of the project's intervention logic, and this could still become relevant to the interim evaluation. On the other hand, the consideration of effectiveness at the *ex ante* stage of evaluation would be to stray into the realms of forecasting, which is not the role of evaluation.

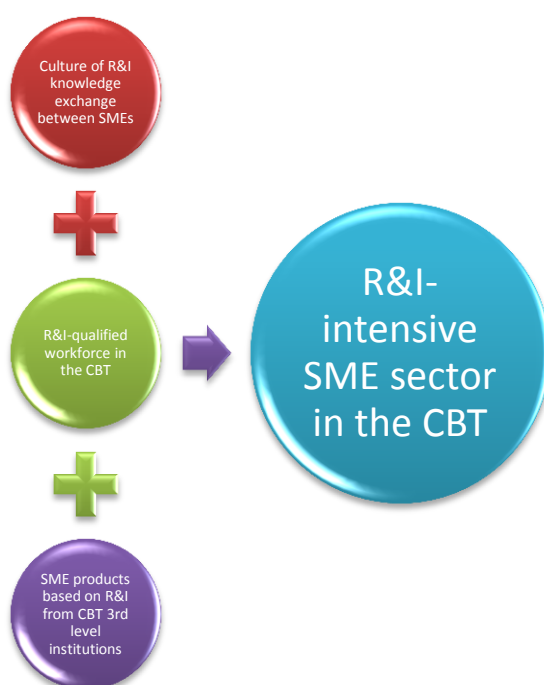
Fundamental to the evaluation of a cross-border project is how it assesses these issues on a cross-border basis, looking at how the project is affecting the target cross-border territory, and in particular whether there are any issues in terms of geographical distribution. In other words, can we

see more progress towards change on one side of the border rather than the other, and why might this be the case?

However, before we begin looking at the question of an interim evaluation of the effectiveness of a cross-border project, it is important to remember that its underlying parameters are set by the project itself. They are based on the overall change the project intends to bring about, and the specific results that will achieve this. So, an interim evaluation will assess how the cross-border project has progressed towards these results, with it being more likely that results will be more observable at the specific level rather than the overall change.

3.2.1 Effectiveness

Let us take a hypothetical example of a project seeking to bring about a Research & Innovation-intensive SME sector in its target cross-border territory (CBT) producing higher value-added products for export:



Here we have three specific objectives (in the smaller circles) that are contributing to the general objective (in the larger circle), where the latter should be seen as having an impact across the four pillars of integrated cross-border cooperation.³⁰ Whilst an interim evaluation may not be able to reliably conclude at this stage of the project cycle that the overall change has been achieved (although there may be early indications of this), it should be able to ascertain with more certainty whether, for example, there has been a change in the culture of R&I knowledge exchange amongst SMEs in the cross-border territory.

What is being assessed here, then, is the cross-border project's effectiveness in terms of the overall parameters it has set itself in its specific and general objectives. Importantly, as an interim evaluation is formative, it will help your cross-border project identify what has been working well

³⁰ For more on this, see Taillon, Beck and Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, pp.56-59, and Section 4.1. of this Toolkit.

and what is working less well. That is because it's not simply about saying "yes, here we can see progress toward the intended change", but also "this has happened because ..."

"Effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which a development programme or project achieves the specific objectives it set."

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.3

"The effectiveness aspect checks whether the programme is actually having an effect, if the foreseen objectives are being achieved, and if the actions taken are appropriate in order to obtain an effect."

INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.16

Crucially for cross-border projects effectiveness should also be measured in relation to the fourth pillar of the integrated approach to cross-border cooperation: the cooperation pillar.³¹ **An interim evaluation of a cross-border project should assess the extent to which cross-border cooperation has contributed to the progress towards its objectives.**

"Effectiveness of Territorial Cooperation programmes is to be evaluated through [...] the **effect on territorial cohesion**: in what way has the programme contributed to the territorial cohesion of programme's territory and policy?"

INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.16

Cross-border projects, therefore, need to be able to demonstrate how they are contributing towards the Territorial Cooperation programme's territorial cohesion goal, and an interim evaluation should test its effectiveness in this respect.

In order to do so the importance of including stakeholders from both sides of the border in the evaluation process comes to the fore. The ability of an interim evaluation to accurately assess the cross-border project's progress will otherwise be undermined.

"The emergence of local and territorial development, where different policy sectors and sources of financing are integrated in an attempt to enhance the socio-economic development of an area, makes the identification of stakeholders and their involvement in the programme formulation process (the bottom up approach to planning) an essential step of the whole exercise for certain evaluations."

EVALSED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.31

To better illustrate the question of territorial cohesion, let's return to the earlier hypothetical example of a project seeking to bring about a Research & Innovation-intensive SME sector in its target cross-border territory, and in particular how it intends to create a culture of R&I knowledge exchange among SMEs.

The project's interim evaluation saw evidence of the emergence of such a culture that could be clearly attributed to the intervention. Monitoring detailed revealed, for example, that:

- SMEs were adapting manufacturing technologies and processes transferred from other SMEs;
- Temporary secondment of R&I personnel was taking place between SMEs;

³¹ This approach is outlined in Sections 1.3 and 2.1 of this Toolkit, and in more detail in the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*.

- Dissemination of R&I best practice was occurring at SME networking events.

However, whilst the anticipated change appeared to be taking place due to the project's activities, further analysis of the monitoring data, a beneficiary survey, and interviews with stakeholders pointed to a lack of the project's effectiveness in relation to cross-border cooperation. Although progress had been made in creating a culture of R&I knowledge exchange, that exchange was taking place predominantly on one side of the border, involving SMEs mainly from one jurisdiction. This finding indicated the need for corrective measures to be put in place in order to enable the project to contribute towards the goal of territorial cohesion in the cross-border territory.

Additionally, the interim evaluation found that this lack of cross-border cohesion was leading to an unintended adverse effect. Key stakeholders in the other jurisdiction expressed resentment at the predominance of R&I knowledge exchange taking place on the other side of the border, and that this was leading to an increased reluctance of SMEs in their jurisdiction in continuing to take part in a project that they saw as mainly benefiting "competitors" across the border. Therefore, without corrective measures being introduced, instead of promoting the value of cross-border cooperation as a crucial element in creating an R&I-intensive SME sector in the cross-border territory, the project could result in disengagement of SMEs on one side of the border from that process.

As we can see the hypothetical example above, an interim evaluation should be able to capture unintended results that can be both adverse and positive. Where they are adverse, the interim evaluation offers you a timely opportunity to introduce measures that can address them, and where they are positive it will allow you to record them and track them through your monitoring framework to the end of the project cycle.

Additionally, where an interim evaluation observes progress towards the intended change in the cross-border territory, it has to distinguish between those factors that are directly attributable to the project (which relies to a significant extent on the quality of your results indicators and the monitoring framework) and those that are external. For example, the interim evaluation of a project seeking to bring about higher levels of employment in the cross-border territory needs to ascertain the extent to which increases in employment are a result of the arrival of a major company in the area. Here we can see the potential value of some element of counterfactual evaluation, with the interim evaluation gathering data from a comparable group who are not beneficiaries of the cross-border project: can the same change be seen in this group?

REMEMBER: An evaluation should not consist of a single approach or methodology, and rather combine a range of approaches suited to the particular project.

On the other hand, where the interim evaluation notes little or no progress made towards achieving one or more specific result, it should be able to suggest whether this is related to operational issues, or whether there is a need for you to revisit your cross-border project's intervention logic in the light of the updated information provided by the evaluation. Are there unanticipated factors that put into question your original causal chain?

Informed by the project's overall framework, the type of questions an evaluation testing effectiveness may seek to answer could be:

- What has the project's *actual* effect been?
- What observable progress has the project made toward achievement of its objectives?

- Are its activities/outputs appropriate for the change the project seeks to bring about?
- Could the project achieve better effects using different actions?
- Are the outputs and results properly defined to achieve the project's objectives?
- Have significant effects been produced through particular successful or unsuccessful actions?

3.2.2 Efficiency

The other central criterion for an interim evaluation is **efficiency**. Has the progress made by the cross-border project toward the intended change been achieved at a reasonable cost in terms of resources?

"The term efficiency is assessed by comparing the actual outputs and the inputs – the resources mobilised."

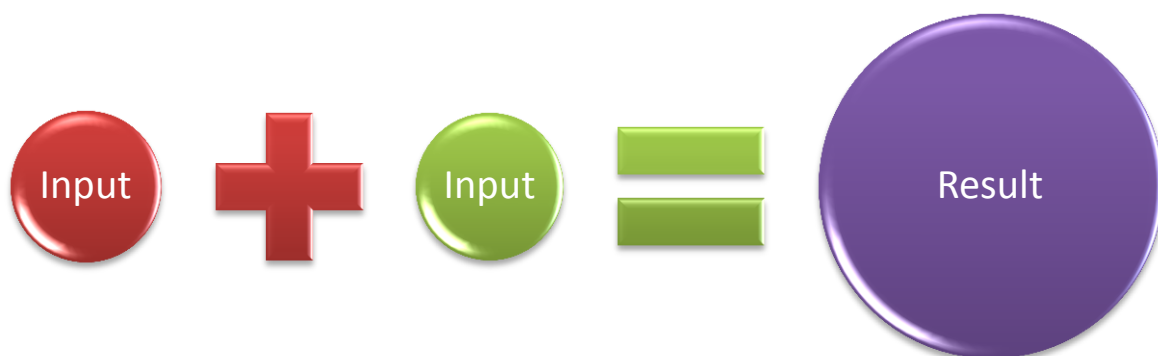
EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, p.35

"The efficiency aspect checks if the programme is well managed, if it delivers value for money and if the time is used efficiently."

INTERACT, Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation, p.17

What your interim evaluation should assess in terms of efficiency is whether the project is employing resources in the most cost-effective manner and – especially given the cross-border nature of the project – that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort: is there any tendency toward back-to-back activities, i.e. that an activity that should be undertaken on a cross-border basis is being instead repeated in each jurisdiction?

The interim evaluation will allow you to see whether you have achieved this balance between inputs and results:



There is a deliberate visual representation of a disproportion in scale here, and obviously an interim evaluation that finds that this scale is reversed (with the result smaller in scale than the inputs)

would point to a need for the project to reconsider its operational methods in order to find more economic ways of achieving the same result, perhaps by combining similar activities or even discontinuing some of them. Other possible reasons for less than satisfactory efficiency could include planned activities exceeding the agreed timeframe, workshops exceeding the maximum cost per participant, excessive staff time spent on organising conferences. For an interim evaluation to be able to properly identify these factors as the causes of inefficiency, though, rather than simply concluding that the project is inefficient, your project would need to have set efficiency indicators at the pre-implementation stage (i.e. timeframes for specific activities, maximum cost per workshop participant, maximum hours in staff time spent on conference organisation).

Crucially for a *cross-border* project, however, an interim evaluation should find evidence that the result is greater than the sum of the inputs, i.e. $1 + 1 > 2$, rather than $1 + 1 = 2$. Where a cross-border project employs the integrated approach to cross-border cooperation, this scale of result will come about due to the *additional* benefits of cross-border cooperation itself.

“The [...] activities should have a greater effect at the level of the Cross-border Territory than would be the case if the jurisdictions acted separately. *These effects might be directly related to the specific objectives of the programme/project, or could be additional benefits (expected or unexpected) arising specifically from the process of cooperation.* Cooperation and partnership based on mutual exchange of experiences should produce real interaction which promotes the achievement of shared objectives and lead to a final result that differs qualitatively from the sum of the several activities undertaken at the level of the two jurisdictions.”

Taillon, Beck and Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, p.12

But for this to happen it is important that your cross-border project is managed as efficiently as possible and that there is no unnecessary duplication of back-to-back activities where these could be undertaken on a cross-border basis. Your interim evaluation should be able to identify any obstacles to the employment of the integrated approach to cross-border cooperation that would adversely affect your project’s efficiency.³²

Where an interim evaluation is testing a cross-border project’s efficiency, the questions it will ask may include:

- How well are the project’s resources managed?
- Could better results be achieved at the same cost?
- Is the project well managed and implemented in an efficient and transparent manner?
- What procedures could be simplified in order to avoid inefficient cross-border cooperation?

3.3 Interim evaluation and your monitoring framework

The interim evaluation of your cross-border project will be the first major test of your monitoring framework in terms of its ability to support the evaluative process rather than informing the project’s day-to-day management. As discussed in Section One, the range and quality of the data you have collected will have a significant impact on the nature of the questions your interim (and

³² Note that detailed guidance on this aspect is available in the PAT-TEIN *Toolkit for Inter-Cultural/Cross-Border Project Management*.

final) evaluation will be able to ask.³³ An evaluator's task will become much more difficult (and more costly!) if the data to answer a particular evaluation question is not readily available. That is why a framework for monitoring and evaluation should be put in place into the design of your cross-border project, and it should be consistent with your project's objectives. It also needs to be planned with cross-border involvement of partners and key stakeholders, as they will not only be able to bring critical knowledge of the context in the other jurisdiction (such as the availability and compatibility of certain data), but will also prove vital in the collection of data.

These are some of the questions you need to answer when designing your monitoring and evaluation framework:

- To what extent do monitoring/evaluation structures already exist? Does new capacity need to be put in place?
- Is the baseline situation sufficiently well-known or will further data collection be necessary [...]?
- What information needs to be collected to provide evidence in support of the selected indicators?
- What kind of data – qualitative or quantitative?
- How and when will information be collected?
- Who will take responsibility for gathering information / evidence?
- If the data you need is to be paid for, have you ensured that these costs have been included in your budget?
- Is the existing data available in a format that allows for capturing the cross-border impacts of the project? If not, what proportionate alternative means will be used to collect data?
- How will the data be analysed?
- How and when will the data be reported?
- For what purpose will the monitoring data and evaluation findings be used?
- Who are the key actors who will provide and use such information?³⁴

Although these questions should have been answered at the project design stage, some of them should be considered again as your project enters the interim evaluation stage. This could be the case especially if during the project's implementation issues have arisen that you would like the interim evaluation to consider.

But REMEMBER: The focus of the evaluation has to be the project's progress toward its intended results!

"If a question is only of interest in terms of new knowledge, without an immediate input into decision-making or public debate, it is more a matter of scientific research and should not be included in an evaluation."

EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, p.33

The same principal or relevance applies to the collection of data for monitoring purposes. Burdening partners and stakeholders with the collection of data that will not serve a useful purpose for the evaluation process could result in administrative fatigue that will adversely affect sustained engagement in your project's implementation, and could also question its efficiency.

³³ Remember, see also Step Six of the *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*.

³⁴ Taillon, Beck and Rihm, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*, p.63.

At the end of the interim evaluation recommendations may be made to modify your monitoring framework as gaps or inconsistencies could have been identified. It is important that your Project Steering Committee (or Evaluation Steering Committee) seriously consider such recommendations and implement them. This is part of the learning process, and taking forward the findings of an interim evaluation in terms of the project's monitoring systems will facilitate the final evaluation.

"Plans are essential but they are not set in concrete (totally fixed). If they are not working, or if the circumstances change, then plans need to change too."

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.5

"All [projects], especially long-term ones, should incorporate a degree of adaptive management or reflexivity into them allowing them to respond to feedback along the way. Final success therefore is not just whether the original plan was correct, but the extent to which a [project] has effective monitoring and is capable of adapting to feedback along the way. [...] Therefore a key factor for success (and thus for evaluation) is the ability of the [project] to be responsive to change."

Frank Vanclay, "Guidance for the design of qualitative case study evaluation: A short report to DG REGIO", p.2

REMEMBER: All recommendations made in the interim evaluation need to be properly considered. Where progress toward the project's objectives has not been as expected, or where areas for improvement have been identified in terms of efficiency, you have an opportunity to make any necessary modifications in order to achieve the change in the cross-border territory that you set out to make.

"Monitoring and evaluation have little value if the organisation or project does not act on the information that comes out of the analysis of data collected."

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.35

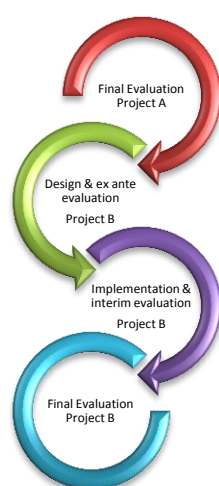
4. The final evaluation



The looming prospect of the final (*ex post*) evaluation usually gives rise to certain anxieties amongst those managing and most closely associated with a cross-border project. These can be particularly acute when the evaluation is going to be undertaken externally. In this case it is the anxiety of an outsider without the intimate familiarity that comes from working on the project casting judgement on something that has barely finished, and whose full effects will only become known subsequently. There is also the anxiety provoked by doubts over whether the project has achieved all its anticipated results, and whether what has been achieved has led to greater cohesion of the cross-border territory: have the project's effects been felt to the same extent on both sides of the border? All of this can be further exacerbated if the project had no interim evaluation and if a monitoring and evaluation framework was not properly integrated from the very beginning. As EVALSED points out, however, "Several programmes do not have an official evaluation", but "the requirements for the final report are so elaborated that the projects basically have to undertake an evaluation."³⁵

However, before we examine the issue of evaluating a cross-border project whose full effects may only be realised after the final evaluation has taken place and looking at the Terms of Reference (ToR) for an external evaluation and its final report, it's important to try and allay some of those anxieties.

First, we need to remind ourselves that the end of the cross-border project and its evaluation do not have absolute finality. The evaluation is not a final judgement beyond which there may be no return. Remember that a final evaluation is part of an ongoing evaluation and project cycle.



As an essential learning tool, the final evaluation of *this* cross-border project will prove invaluable to the design and implementation of your *next* cross-border project, as well as moving your

³⁵ INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, p.85.

organisation's strategic goals forward. Without this learning process underpinned by evaluation the ability of your organisation to improve in the delivery of its objectives will be seriously undermined.

The fact that your cross-border project is being assessed by an external evaluator (either as a requirement of the Managing Authority or your funder, or as a strategic option taken by your organisation) does not mean that you have no meaningful input into the final evaluation. External evaluators require dialogue with the cross-border project management team and its stakeholders, and are not there to *obliviously* enforce their own preconceptions into the assessment of your project. This is not to say that external evaluators don't have their own ideas.

"Do not expect any evaluator to be completely objective. S/he will have opinions and ideas – you are not looking for someone who is a blank page! However, his/her opinions must be clearly stated as such, and must not be disguised as 'facts'."

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.10

"Evaluators are rarely fully independent from the object of evaluation and evaluation is never value free. Evaluators will be subject to a range of influences. Indeed the commitment of the evaluator to the aims of the intervention under consideration may well increase the quality of the evaluation findings."

EVASED, *The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, p.44

Whilst professional evaluators will ensure their independence and that this is translated into their findings, this doesn't mean that the dialogue that should be established with the cross-border project team prevents you from identifying factual errors leading to erroneous conclusions. This will become particularly important during the drafting of the final evaluation report (which we will discuss in more detail later).

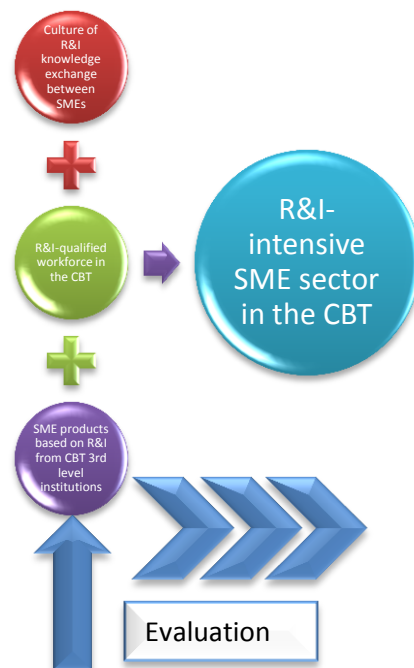
NOTE: Timing is crucial here! Bearing in mind any deadline for submission of the final evaluation report to the Managing Authority of funder, you need to start the final evaluation early enough to allow sufficient time for an initial draft of the report to be submitted to you by the evaluators for your consideration.

Fears over whether your cross-border project has not achieved all its anticipated results also need to be placed in their proper context. Any project can be adversely affected by external factors beyond its control even when corrective measures were put in place at the interim stage. Also, your project is not expected to solve all the problems in the cross-border territory, but to make a contribution to the programme's progress towards doing so.

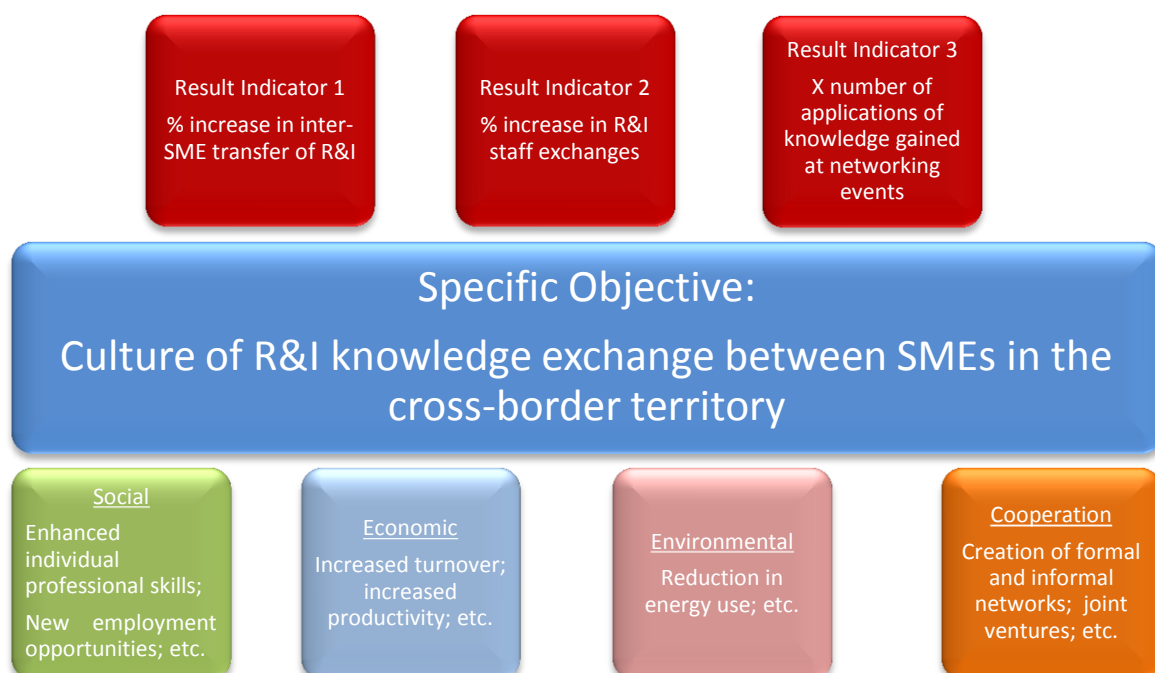
4.1 The final evaluation and long and short-term effects

Concerns that a final evaluation of your cross-border project will inevitably undervalue its full potential because the change it set out to make in the cross-border territory will only be fully realised in the longer term need to take note of two central points: the evaluation will focus on the project results, and it will look for indications of progress beyond the project's lifetime: its **sustainability**.

In order to illustrate these points, let's return to the hypothetical example used in Section 3.2.1 of a cross-border project seeking to bring about a Research & Innovation-intensive SME sector in its target cross-border territory.



Here the final evaluation will assess whether the project's specific objectives have been achieved (short-term results) and what degree of progress has been made toward the general objective (longer term result). Central to this assessment will be the results indicators **set by the project itself**. Looking at this hypothetical cross-border project's first specific objective, its anticipated results were mapped out employing the integrated approach to cross-border cooperation as follows:



The final evaluation of this project considered that this specific objective had been largely achieved. This represents the attainment of a shorter term result that contributes to the cross-border project's general objective (longer term result) of bringing about a Research & Innovation-intensive SME sector in its target cross-border territory producing higher value-added products for export.

Objective: "Explicit statement on the results to be achieved by a public intervention."

EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, p.107

Looking at the project's first result indicator as an example, the final evaluation reached the following conclusions:

NOTE: In what follows certain parts are highlighted in red. Where that occurs consider the implications for project design, the monitoring and evaluation framework, the relation between quantitative and qualitative data, and methods employed in evaluation including the use of comparators.

Result Indicator 1: There had been a significant % increase in the exchange of R&I knowledge between the SMEs that were the project's direct beneficiaries and, in the light of information gathered through a beneficiary survey and interviews, that this was directly attributable to the intervention. This increase came in the context of a very low baseline in relation to the project beneficiaries and to the cross-border territory in general. Analysis of the available relevant local and regional statistics, combined with a survey and interviews with SMEs in the cross-border territory that had not been project beneficiaries, revealed that there had also been a small increase in R&I knowledge transfer across the cross-border territory. Although much of this small increase is attributable to a number of those SMEs' involvement in a NI Investing scheme, and a negligible number acting independently, there was also some evidence of unanticipated R&I knowledge exchange between direct beneficiaries of the project and non-beneficiaries.

Having noted the findings related to the cross-border cooperation dimension in the Interim Evaluation report, there is evidence of appreciable progress in this regard. Not only have there been significant numbers of examples of transfers of R&I knowledge between SMEs from both jurisdictions (with a good equilibrium in North-South flows), there were also seven cases of cross-border joint ventures (developing new products) and two cases of the creation of cross-border networks specific to particular R&I activities, indicative of sustained progress beyond the period of funding.

According to information gathered from project recipients, the project has been successful in increasing turnover and productivity, with most SMEs reporting positive results due to the introduction of new production processes and the manufacture of goods with higher added value. Having analysed project monitoring data, it was noticeable that the small number of SMEs that reported negligible or no increase in turnover and productivity were irregular attenders at the project's networking events.

However, considering the general economy of the cross-border territory, it was generally stagnant during the period of the intervention. This performance was largely due to a downturn in the economy principally of the agricultural sector which suffered from weakening demand in key markets and pressures on production costs. However, it can also be concluded that the economic

performance of the cross-border territory would have fared worse if it were not it being partly offset by an upturn in the SMEs benefiting from the project.³⁶

Other elements would of course have been considered by the final evaluation of this hypothetical cross-border project. For example, in examining the creation of new job opportunities, evaluators would look at what kinds of jobs may have been created (were the beneficiary SMEs creating higher-paid jobs directly related to R&I, or were they lower paid posts), what was the employment status of those taking up new job opportunities (were they economically inactive, or were they previously employed elsewhere, in which case there may not be any significant movement in overall employment rates in the cross-border territory), and are these new job opportunities encouraging cross-border mobility of workers.

However, our focus here is on the evaluation of short-term and longer term results. From our hypothetical example we can see how a final evaluation can assess the project's **effectiveness** in achieving its short-term results, based on the project's results indicators and its monitoring data, but also supplemented by other data and placed within the overall context of the cross-border territory. Importantly, it should also be able to observe impacts across the pillars of cross-border cooperation, which will feed into the change brought about by the project's general objective. In this regard the cooperation pillar is particularly important, as impacts here will provide evidence for the **sustainability** of the project's results.

Formal and informal cross-border networks, novel institutional and/or sectoral cross-border arrangements, and the joint development of cross-border strategies are examples of how a cross-border project's progress towards the intended overall change will continue beyond the lifetime of the project due to its cooperation impacts. A final evaluation, therefore, does not only assess the degree of progress your cross-border project has made towards its general objective, but will also be alert to evidence of **sustainability** across the four pillars, and that those effects are felt across the cross-border territory.

REMEMBER: In terms of effectiveness a final evaluation will look at what worked (and what didn't) and *why*. It will consider the project's strategies in determining the project's success, as well as how **efficient** it was: does the project represent value for money in achieving its results?

4.2 Procuring an external evaluation of your cross-border project: Terms of Reference

External evaluation of the results of your cross-border project may in some cases be a requirement of the Managing Authority or your funder, but more often the decision to employ independent assessors is an organisational one. That decision should be informed by the principle of proportionality (is it in the organisation's interests to have an external evaluation of a discrete, one-

³⁶ In this regard note the following: "programs can still be regarded as 'successful' if an indicator at a future time is worse than it was at commencement, providing that there is a reasonable analysis that there were other changes taking place such that the program made the community better off than it would have been without the program"; Frank Vanclay, "Guidance for the design of qualitative case study evaluation", p.3.

year project?), as well as by the other factors discussed in Section 1.6. One of those concerned the relative importance of the potential external audience for the final evaluation's findings and its report.

If, along with the other factors already discussed in Section 1, it is decided by your Project Steering Committee and/or Evaluation Steering Committee (which should be cross-border in nature) that the final evaluation should be carried out by external evaluators due to the project's strategic importance, then Terms of Reference (ToR) need to be drawn up. In order to do so, you need to answer the following questions:

- What do you want evaluated?
- For what purposes do you want it done?

The answers to these questions will help you compose a short introductory paragraph that will provide some initial context for potential evaluators in the ToR.

"The Terms of Reference is a key document in the evaluation process, as it defines all aspects of how an evaluation will be conducted. It presents the objectives of the evaluation, the role and responsibilities of the evaluator and evaluation client and the resources available to conduct the evaluation."

DG REGIO, "The Programming Period 2014-2020: Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation", p.11

Although its precise nature will depend on the specific requirements of your cross-border project, the ToR should include the following broad categories, some of which will be examined in more detail:

Terms of Reference

- **Funding Programme:** A brief outline of the Programme funding the project and of the policy context.
- **Background:** This is the project's broad context, including a brief description of the core problem it is addressing and its general objective, as well as of your organisation. Include why you want to undertake an evaluation.
- **Scope of the evaluation:** Outline the geographical scope of the cross-border territory as well as its broad sectoral and institutional scope, including main stakeholders.
- **Main users and stakeholders for the results:** Identify the potential audience for the evaluation results and how they may be used.
- **Key evaluation questions:** The central questions the evaluation must address.
- **Methodologies:** You may wish to give broad parameters of the types of approach you would prefer.
- **Schedule:** Specify the start date and the overall length of the evaluation, as well as key milestones. These must include the submission of the draft final report and the submission of the completed report. **REMEMBER TO LEAVE SUFFICIENT TIME BETWEEN THE SUBMISSION OF THE DRAFT AND FINAL REPORTS TO ALLOW FOR YOU TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGES AND AMMENDMENTS!**
- **Indicative budget:** It is good practice to offer an indication of the available budget and to allow those tendering for the work to detail what they would be able to do within that budget.
- **Required competences:** This should include prior experience of similar evaluation work, knowledge of the cross-border context, evidence of evaluation expertise and of the ability to

manage and deliver an evaluation in a timely fashion.

- **Structure of the proposal:** Specify how interested evaluators have to structure their proposal, including the maximum length and any additional supporting documentation you may want to require.
- **Submission rules and assessment criteria:** Specify the deadline for submission, any preferred format (PDF, Word, etc.), mode of transmission (post, email, etc.), and an explanation of the main criteria to be applied in the assessment of proposals.³⁷

Three of the above elements merit some further clarification: evaluation questions, methodologies, and required competences. The first two of these can be taken together, and what is essential here is to leave enough scope for potential evaluators to propose their own ideas. In terms of the evaluation questions, it is important that in the ToR you set out in broad terms the essential questions you want the evaluation to address, but on the understanding that the selected evaluators have the necessary independence to pose their own questions during the evaluation process. The same is true in terms of methodologies, and perhaps the main stipulation made should be in terms of requiring both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Finally, in setting out the required competences you should avoid narrowing the potential field unnecessarily by requiring detailed, specialist knowledge of specific sectors. What is more important in this respect is proven evaluation experience and knowledge of the cross-border aspect.

But what happens when you receive the proposals from external evaluators? Obviously you need to apply the criteria included in the ToR fairly and consistently, but it would be advisable that the proposals are considered by your Project Steering Committee or Evaluation Steering Committee (if you have one) which should have cross-border representation and experience of the evaluation process. Once the selection has been made it is important that clear channels of communication are established between the project management and the evaluator(s). It is also useful to alert stakeholders to the evaluation, and to invite them to a presentation of its results (which will be discussed again later); this will contribute towards their engagement in the process.

“Once the evaluation has started there is the temptation for the commissioning authority to keep contact with the evaluation team at arm's length. This view is based on the belief that a hands-off approach will help to secure the independence of the evaluation team.”

EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, p.44

An experienced evaluation team will not forsake its independence due to contact with those who have commissioned the evaluation, and indeed dialogue is essential in order to ensure the quality of the evaluation process. This should begin with confirmation of the evaluation schedule and its milestones, with the first one being the submission of a detailed workplan that includes an elaboration of the main evaluation questions and methods to be employed. The confirmed evaluation schedule as well as defined roles and responsibilities should be set out in a contract. Depending on the length of the evaluation, you should consider establishing formal feedback times and, perhaps, an interim evaluation report for larger projects (but remembering the principle of proportionality – do not make the process overly complex).

³⁷ Further detailed guidance on compiling ToR can be found in *EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, and *INTERACT, Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation Programmes*.

NOTE: The key here is to ensure a smooth evaluation process, allowing evaluators to identify any obstacles and for you to address them. Dialogue between the project management and the evaluator(s) is essential!

4.3 The final evaluation report

As the evaluation reaches its conclusion and thoughts turn toward the final report, tensions usually rise for both the project management team and the evaluators themselves.

“Producing the draft final report is often a difficult stage both for evaluators and stakeholders. What has previously been anticipated now becomes real and sometimes threatening or disappointing. Stakeholders, especially those with programme management responsibilities, may be tempted to discredit findings they do not like. Evaluators for their part may construct arguments on limited evidence or be insensitive to the political import of what they present. Producing a final report that is acceptable to the evaluation team and the commissioning authority and respected by stakeholders who have been engaged in the process is a major challenge and requires a good deal of time.”

EVALSED, The Resource for the Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, p.48

The importance of building into the evaluation process sufficient time for the drafting, submission *and consideration* of a *draft* final report is crucial. This should not be seen as a means of attempting to unduly influence the evaluators’ conclusions or recommendations, but rather to enable the project management team and key stakeholders to ensure that those conclusions and recommendations are informed by the evidence and that there are no factual errors.

Consideration of the draft report should be the responsibility of the Project Steering Committee and/or the Evaluation Steering Committee, and the draft should also be circulated to key stakeholders. In considering the draft final report the following are some of the points that should be assessed:

- The links made between the evaluation questions and the report’s conclusions.
- The links between the conclusions and the evidence presented (including factual evidence).
- The clarity and applicability of the report’s recommendations.

Once the Project Steering Committee and/or the Evaluation Steering Committee has considered the draft report, it must communicate clearly to the evaluators any required modifications. Again, it must be emphasised that any such requirements should not be attempts to exert undue influence on the evaluators, but simply to ensure clarity and factual accuracy. It is also important to stress once more that sufficient time must be made available for consideration of the draft report, and for the evaluators to seek clarification and integrate the necessary changes into the final version.

According to the guidelines issued by Northern Ireland’s Department of Finance and Personnel, an evaluation report should contain the following elements:

- Whether, and if so, why the results differed from what was foreseen.
- How effective the intervention was in achieving its objectives, and why.

- The cost-effectiveness of the intervention.
- What the results imply for future management or policy decisions.³⁸

As the final version of the evaluation report is being completed, you and the Project Steering Committee should begin thinking about how you are going to disseminate it, and who you want to have knowledge of it for strategic purposes. These issues will be dealt with in more detail in Section 5.

Once the final evaluation is complete, it would be useful to invite the evaluators to present their principal conclusions and recommendations to the Project Steering Committee and the cross-border project's major stakeholders. This is not an opportunity to challenge the evaluators on their findings, but rather to enable discussion among the cross-border partnership and to consider any implications of the report. Discussion by the Committee and principal stakeholders should also focus on how the report will be disseminated and to whom. Is there going to be an event marking the end of the project, and should it include a public presentation of the final report? The involvement of stakeholders in such a discussion will also demonstrate their importance to the whole evaluation process.

³⁸ Department of Finance and Personnel, *The Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation*, p.12.

5. After the project, what now for evaluation?



This short Section is more of an afterword than anything else. Your cross-border project has closed, the final evaluation report has been submitted and considered by the Project Steering Committee and principal stakeholders, all the funder's requirements have been fulfilled. Surely there is nothing left to do, and the evaluation process has come to an end. However, as has been emphasised from the outset of this Toolkit, evaluation is a key learning tool, but learning without acting on the lessons learnt is of little value.

"Learning is, or should be, the main reason why a project or organisation monitors its work or does an evaluation. By learning what works and what does not, what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong, you, as project or organisation management, are empowered to act in an informed and constructive way."

CIVICUS, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p.38

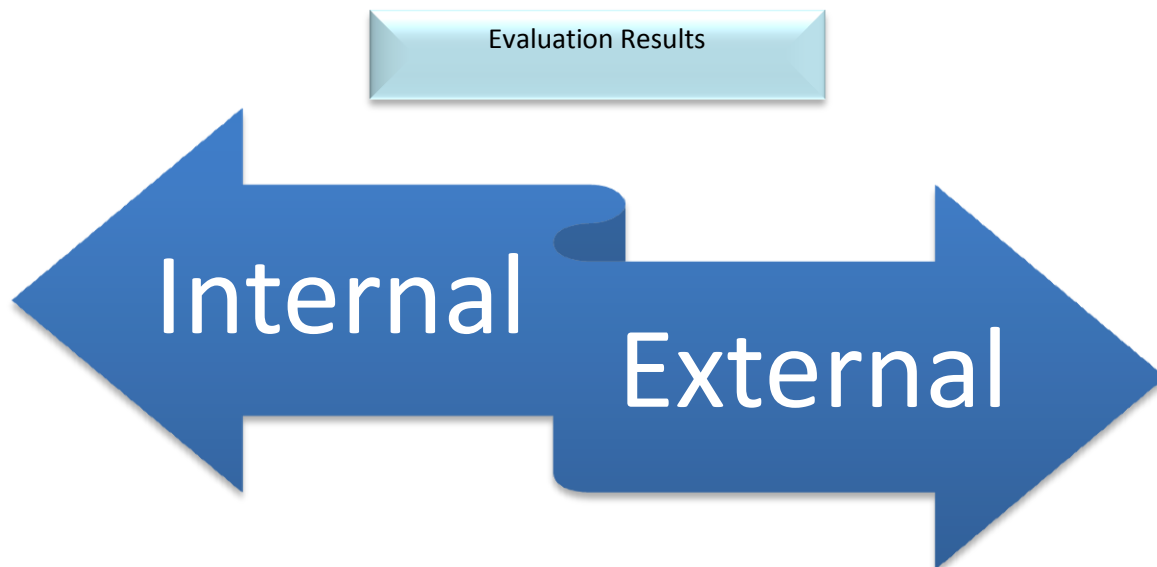
In the first instance, consideration of the recommendations included in the final evaluation report should lead to an action plan, with clear lines of responsibility as to who needs to do what. Follow-up action can be internal to the organisation and related to project management issues (such as improvements to results and budgetary monitoring systems or increasing in-house evaluation capacity), or it can be external and require the involvement of stakeholders in the cross-border territory.

Additionally, the final evaluation report can be an invaluable evidential resource, providing a solid basis for the identification of further needs or opportunities in the cross-border territory and supporting the benefits of cross-border cooperation. But such a resource cannot be a passive one – it needs to be *actively* promoted, and its lessons shared externally. Strategically, the results of your evaluation should be disseminated beyond immediate stakeholders, or to the Managing Authority, Programme managers and funders, but also to relevant policy-makers at local, regional, national and European levels. However, such dissemination cannot be restricted to the hope that these actors pick up your final evaluation report and read it attentively.

"Evaluation results should be communicated in such a way that they meet the needs of decision-makers. The information needs to be politically relevant, concise and easily comprehensible. Evaluation functions should therefore promote the use of evaluation in decision-making by ensuring that policy implications and lessons learnt from [...] evaluations are synthesised and appropriately disseminated."

INTERACT, *Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation of Territorial Cooperation*, pp.81-82

This means thinking about appropriate and profitable means of extracting the relevant information from the results of your evaluation and communicating it through a variety of platforms according to the particular audience and situation. This can include your organisation's annual report, bulletins and website, presentations at workshops or conferences, responses to public consultations, as well as various social media platforms. The important thing is to think about internal and external audiences and to actively communicate your evaluation results to them.



Central to the results of the evaluation of your cross-border project, however, is how they will inform the planning of your next project. Part of this will also involve applying the lessons learnt about the evaluation process itself to the design of your next evaluation framework as you begin the evaluation and project cycle once again. When you do, turn to page one of the *Toolkit for Evaluation of Cross-Border Projects...*

Case Studies

The two Case Studies that follow are intended to act as sites for the testing and exploration of the issues and methods outlined in the body of this Toolkit, allowing you to clarify your learning in relation to practical examples of cross-border projects, as well as prompting you to answer central questions concerning the evaluation process. Thus, the first case study offers a relatively detailed description of the evaluation process undertaken by the Border Lives cross-border project, whilst the second – the Aspire project – rather than describing the evaluation process, presents the project itself and asks you to think about how you would go about designing an appropriate evaluation framework. As in every cross-border project, these examples are very different in terms of their contexts and objectives, and therefore require evaluative approaches that are specific to their needs. However, despite those differences you should be able to identify common concerns and challenges faced by most of those involved in cross-border projects.

Case Study 1: Border Lives



Border Lives was a cross-border project supported by the PEACE III programme, managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by the Community Relations Council/Pobal Consortium.³⁹ It was implemented by the Tyrone Donegal Partnership from February 2012 to November 2014, and was designed with the aim of “ensuring that the stories and experiences of those living in the border region during the Northern Ireland conflict are captured, replicated and shared in innovative ways that are accessible to both new and wider audiences locally, regionally and internationally”.

It did so by combining traditional storytelling with innovative media methods and platforms, producing six high quality films that allow people living along the Ireland-Northern Ireland border to retell their experiences of how the conflict shaped their lives and the lives of their communities. Those films are available to be viewed on the Border Lives website (www.borderlives.eu) alongside four e-learning modules (“Restart”, “Remembering”, “Renewal” and “Reconstruction”, under the collective umbrella of Border Lives Rethink), and the project also created a smartphone app and a social media presence.⁴⁰ Over 90 people from both sides of the border and from all sections of the

³⁹ What follows is informed by the project’s final evaluation report produced by Consensus Research, which was kindly provided by the project for the purposes of this Toolkit. CCBS is particularly grateful to Conor McGale, the project manager.

⁴⁰ The smartphone app “comprises of both short trailers and full length streaming video for all the films produced, along with ancillary information, greatly expanding on the content – timelines, descriptions and geographic information along with background to the project. Users of the App can see the locations where the films were made, and even guide themselves via GPS to the same locations. The App contains a Gallery of selected images relevant to the project” (www.borderlives.eu).

community took part in the films, which were then screened and discussed at various locations along the border.

The Tyrone Donegal Partnership (TDP) that implemented the Border Lives project was established in 1996 and is a “successful cross-border, not-for-profit organisation which aims to contribute to the improvement of the social and economic conditions, primarily in the counties of Tyrone and Donegal and the adjacent counties including Fermanagh, Sligo and Leitrim”.⁴¹ Since its establishment TDP has received substantial financial support from the International Fund for Ireland, particularly through its Wider Horizons Programme, as well as INTERREG II and III, and PEACE. It therefore has accumulated significant experience of designing and implementing a range of cross-border projects.

1.1 Evaluation and the design and pre-implementation stages of the Border Lives cross-border project



The Border Lives cross-border project was designed to address a number of central identified needs in the border area related to reconciliation and the past, including:

- Providing a voice to victims and survivors, including “invisible” victims.
- Addressing the sense of isolation and lack of recognition of victims and survivors in the southern border counties.
- Addressing the divisive perception in some communities of storytelling “belonging” to one community or the other.

The overall change which the project intended to contribute towards was in positively advancing the healing and remembering process so that communities and individuals in the cross-border territory relate to each other with mutual understanding. In light of these factors, it was decided that an application for funding should be made to the PEACE III programme under Priority 1.2, “Acknowledging and dealing with the past”.

QUESTION: If you were to undertake an informal *ex ante* evaluation of the proposed project, what aspect of the project would you assess in terms of applying for a particular funding programme?

The PEACE III Operational Programme described its overall aim as:

“To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation.”⁴²

To achieve progress towards its overall aim, the Programme set out two strategic objectives:

- **“Reconciling communities:** key activities will facilitate relationships on a cross-community and/or cross-border basis to assist in addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance, and accepting commonalities and differences. In addition, key activities will seek to

⁴¹ <http://www.tyroneanddonegalpartnership.co.uk/about/background/>.

⁴² SEUPB, *PEACE III EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007-2013*, p.37.

acknowledge and deal with the hurt, losses, trauma and suffering caused by the conflict” (p.37).

- **“Contributing to a shared society:** key activities will address the physical segregation or polarisation of places and communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Region with a view to encouraging increased social and economic cross community and cross-border engagement” (p.38).

In terms of the Programme’s Priority 1.2 (“Acknowledging and dealing with the past”), the rationale included the following elements:⁴³

- “The question of how to deal with the past is one of the most vexing problems facing any society emerging out of conflict; Northern Ireland and the Border Region is no different in that regard. [...] To build reconciliation, individuals and institutions need to acknowledge their role in the conflicts of the past, and accept and learn from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition.”
- “While recognising that the victims and survivors of violence and those who are related to, or care for them, are a diverse group with diverse needs, many are experiencing long term difficulties such as chronic pain and trauma and continue to face complex psychological problems. Victims and survivors often suffer from a lack of recognition, are characterised by marginalisation and exclusion and do not feel they have a voice to express their views and share their experiences.”

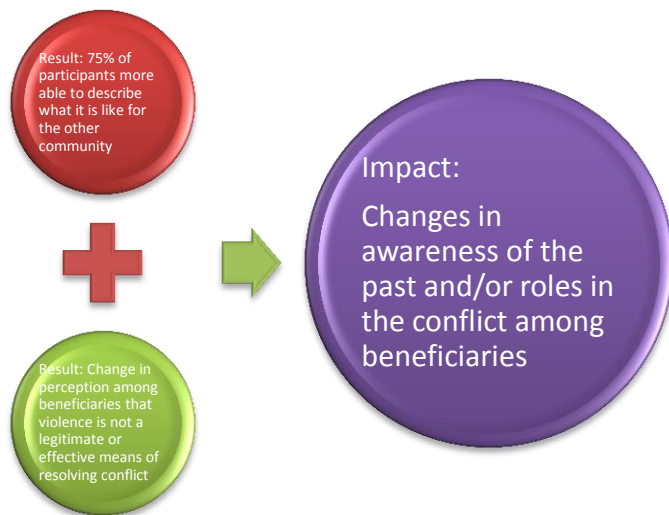
Additionally, the aim related to this Priority was described as:

“The Priority aims to exchange different views of history, culture and identity and different conflict and post-conflict experiences among relevant groups and individuals at the local level. This will focus on changing the awareness of the past and understanding different roles and experiences of the conflict, promoting cultural diversity and developing long term strategies that promote peace and reconciliation. This may include provision for a forum for testimonials which explores legacy and memory of the conflict through truth recovery, documentation, story telling and the recording of complex history and experience. In this light, the Priority will target those not already pre-disposed to reconciliation and facilitate and explore the wide range of experiences of the conflict that have been faced by different stakeholders in Northern Ireland and the Border Region. The Priority understands that focusing on the past and understanding different roles and experiences of the conflict is a difficult issue and any activities will be conducted in a sensitive manner” (p.54).

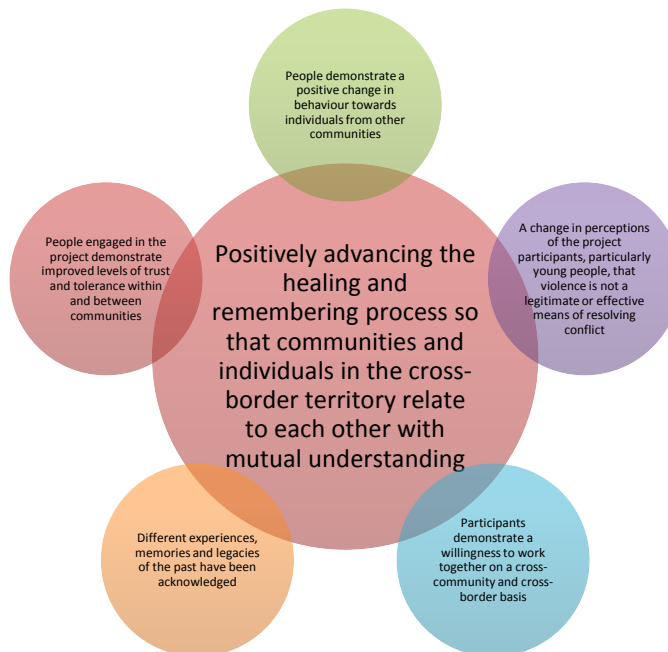
Finally, the Operational Programme sets out the anticipated results and overall impact for interventions under this Priority,⁴⁴ which can be seen as follows:

⁴³ SEUPB, *PEACE III EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007-2013*, p.53.

⁴⁴ Note that an additional result was included in the Operational Programme, which was: “75% of recipients of trauma counselling feel they are better able to cope” (p.56).



The anticipated results of the Border Lives cross-border project contributing to the overall change it hoped to bring about can be represented as follows:



QUESTION: How would you evaluate this proposed cross-border project in terms of its *relevance* to the PEACE III programme?

The principal activities and their associated milestones undertaken by the Border Lives project in order to attain these results were:

- Identify and document six key events that occurred in the border region and the effect it had on the wider community/area and ultimately within the context of the conflict.
- Create a website resource including an interactive online portal and maintain it until June 2014 and beyond as a pathway to hear the stories of individuals and groups affected by the conflict.

- Hold eight launch events, one in each border county, showcasing the website and the stories that it holds by June 2014.
- Create and build positive relationships with individuals and groups throughout the project period that result in recording and sharing of a minimum of 80 stories of the cost and legacy of the conflict by June 2014.
- Create by the end of June 2012 and sustain until June 2014 an effective partnership that will represent diverse communities of interest and key stakeholder groups.

However, it is important to note that, originally, the project design included a greater number of activities and milestones and was unsuccessful in its application to the PEACE III programme.

QUESTION: Which evaluative factors may have determined that the original project design was not successful in its application for support? Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency (including value for money)?

A second call for applications to Priority 1.2 provided an opportunity for the project to seek external advice and for the plan to be refined in terms of its results and milestones. Advisory support from Pobal was also crucial in assisting the Tyrone Donegal Partnership in understanding and properly applying the Aid for Peace methodology required by the PEACE III programme. The revised application for funding was successful.

“Measuring and quantifying the impact of Peace-Building and reconciliation interventions is a challenging task. Peace-Building, reconciliation and conflict resolution are complex terms which have no common definition and are often centred on developing more intangible outcomes such as changes in relationships and attitudes that do not lend themselves readily to quantification.”

“As a result, developing indicators and measuring outcomes can be considered a common problem across Peace-Building and reconciliation interventions. This has also proved to be the experience in Northern Ireland/Ireland under the PEACE I (1995-1999) and PEACE II Programmes (2000-2006).”

The Aid for Peace approach focuses on assessing the needs for Peace-Building in a given country or area and then tailoring the intervention’s objectives and activities to these needs by identifying their Peace-Building relevance and developing appropriate indicators. The approach can be employed during the planning, implementation and evaluation stages, preferably all three”.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building, p.vi and p.x

Following confirmation of the project’s success in securing funding, as part of the pre-implementation phase the Tyrone Donegal Partnership concluded that external evaluation expertise would be employed in order to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework that would meet the specific needs of the Border Lives project and those of the Aid for Peace methodology.

1.2 Monitoring and evaluating peace-building in the Border Lives project



Although during the implementation of the Border Lives cross-border project there was no formal interim evaluation, given the nature of the project external evaluation activities were nevertheless undertaken. Additionally the project's Steering Committee, which had cross-border representation, provided a valuable evaluative mechanism by regularly assessing the project's progress towards the intended results in the light of monitoring information. This enabled the project, with the agreement of the Managing Authority and the Programme promoters, to adopt corrective measures during its implementation. An example of this was the decision to focus on six geographical areas along the border instead of producing films related to six "events" as had originally been planned, thereby helping to ensure broader participation in terms of those agreeing to tell their stories.

Note how evaluation is an underlying concern during the project implementation phase, and not restricted to formal evaluation periods such as an interim evaluation. This also points to the interrelated nature of monitoring and evaluation.

However, an overriding factor leading to the engagement of an external evaluation team during the project's implementation phase was the need to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation framework was consistent with the PEACE III programme's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building. Although the Tyrone Donegal Partnership had received support from the programme promoters to design appropriate results indicators at pre-implementation stage, it was nevertheless felt that the Border Lives cross-border project would benefit from additional expert support as the project was rolled out. Other factors, alongside the need for compliance with the PEACE III programme's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, also contributed to the decision to seek expert advice:

	1	2	3	4	5
Duration					
Beneficiaries					
Capacity					
Complexity					
External audience					
Geographical scope					

It's important to stress that the assessment of internal capacity was made in relation to the need for implementing a specific Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building in a cross-border project of considerable complexity in terms of technological approaches, involvement of participants on a cross-border *and* cross-community benefit, and dealing with highly sensitive issues. As referred to earlier, the Tyrone Donegal Partnership has accumulated significant experience in developing and managing a wide range of cross-border projects, and has therefore developed a great deal of

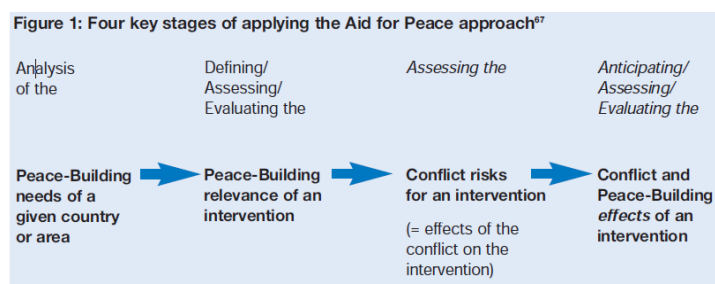
relevant capacity. Nevertheless, faced with the need to adopt a specific Framework, it was decided that there would be real value in engaging external advice.

NOTE: Considerations over the evaluation of a project require an organisation's willingness to be self-critical and realistic.

The contracting of external evaluation support by the Border Lives cross-border project was also seen as timely in terms of its particular life-cycle and some of its key stages:



The appointment of the external Monitoring and Evaluation team came as the project entered its most intense period of activity, and when the Project Steering Committee felt that support was necessary to refine the results indicators to ensure complementarity with the PEACE III Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building. This meant adopting the Aid for Peace methodological approach which comprises four key stages:⁴⁵



The first three stages – Peace-Building needs analysis, Peace-Building relevance of the project, and assessment of conflict risks – had already been completed as part of the project design and application process, with support from Pobal.

It was at the fourth key stage of the Aid for Peace approach that the Border Lives cross-border project appointed its team of external evaluators, which was in line with the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building.

“Before each operation would be launched, operation leaders would be required to submit a work plan which would include indicators that will be used for monitoring and assessment. It is proposed that key indicators will be selected from the menu of programme/priority indicators to ensure direct alignment with the overall PEACE III Programme objectives. These indicators would emerge from the Peace-Building needs analysis (as per Stage 1) and contribute towards the goals of the operation (as per Stage 2) but would also be identified and agreed in a participatory manner by operation leaders and key stakeholders, including a selection of target beneficiaries.

To supplement the performance indicators, operation leaders would be responsible for undertaking self-evaluation and producing a common report template to assist in the coordination and aggregation of the findings. Over the course of an operation, a minimum of three evaluation reports

⁴⁵ PricewaterhouseCoopers, *A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building*, p.81.

would be conducted at the ex-ante (at the outset of an operation to provide base lining information) mid-term and ex-post stages.”

PricewaterhouseCoopers, *A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Peace-Building*, p.83

Significantly, in fulfilling the requirement for self-evaluation the PEACE III Monitoring and Evaluation Framework set out three options for project managers which could be combined. The first was for the project to undertake its own evaluations, the second was for evaluations to be undertaken by an external evaluator, and the third was for two projects to be “twinned” and evaluate each other. The Border Lives cross-border project opted for its evaluations to be undertaken by an external team.

The PEACE III Monitoring and Evaluation Framework also suggested that self-evaluations at project level should adopt a methodological approach consisting principally of the use of monitoring and evaluation forms completed by beneficiaries at the pre and post-implementation stages, and focus groups or workshops.

During the project’s implementation monitoring and evaluation forms were completed by participants in the six films, as well as by those attending the completed films’ public screenings. Additionally, the external evaluators held facilitated focus groups at four of those screenings. Some of the questions in the monitoring and evaluation forms for those attending the public screenings included:

- Level of involvement in good relations/peace-building work (“I am very involved in good relations/peace-building work”, “I get involved occasionally”, “I have not been involved previously”)
- Why did you attend this event (“I am directly involved in the project/I am one of the participants in the film”, “I am a family member/friend of one of the people in the film”, “I am involved in good relations/peace-building in the area”, “I am interested in projects that deal with the past”, “I wanted to hear the stories and experiences of local people”)
- Your response to the film. What words would you use to describe your first response (list 2 or 3 main ones)
- To what extent did the film capture the reality of life in this area during the conflict (rated between 1 and 5)
- Did the film deal sensitively with the difficult issues related to the past in this area (“yes”, “no”, “don’t know/not sure”)
- Dealing with the past. Do you think projects like this can help us to deal with the past and promote better community relations (“yes”, “no”, “don’t know/not sure”)
- Would you like to see more projects like this in this area (“yes”, “no”, “don’t know/not sure”)
- Has this film encouraged or motivated you to engage in projects which are dealing with the past in Northern Ireland and the border counties (“yes”, “no”, “don’t know/not sure”)

Some of the focus-group questions aimed at participants in the project included:

- What has been unique or different about this particular project?
- What encouraged /motivated you to take part?

- Did you/your family have concerns about this: what helped you to overcome these concerns? How do you feel now the film has been screened?
- Do you think this film and screening has any potential to change things in the community? Explore/explain the reasons for your response....
- At a personal level, how have you found it helpful to engage in this project? Would you encourage others in your community to take part in any similar activities? Why?
- Have you any concerns about it being shown to a wider audience and in other communities? What might help you to overcome these concerns?
- Has participation in this project changed your attitude/perceptions on developing cross community relations /working with other communities?
- Have you gained a better/deeper understanding about the past: 1) in your own community? 2) in the other community? Has your attitude around dealing with past changed in any way? How?
- Has this project had any effect on these issues (cross community work, dealing with the past, etc.) in the wider community (outside the direct participants)? How has this happened?

QUESTION: Taking as an example the question “Has participation in this project changed your attitude/perceptions on developing cross-community relations/working with other communities”, how would you ensure that this would provide the project with a measure of change over the lifetime of the project?

The information gathered through monitoring and evaluation forms and post-screening focus groups would provide a central basis for the project’s final evaluation.

1.3 The final evaluation of the Border Lives project



Consensus Research as the external evaluators appointed by the Tyrone Donegal Partnership to undertake evaluation activities for the Border Lives cross-border project from June 2013 had significant familiarity with the project as they commenced its final evaluation. Indeed, as they had been involved in refining the project’s monitoring and evaluation framework in line with the overall PEACE III Monitoring and Evaluation framework, the process of collecting and analysing information for the final evaluation was eased considerably.

NOTE: Although it will not always be possible or desirable to appoint external evaluators during the project implementation phase, in order to facilitate the final evaluation you should draw up Terms of Reference at project start: this will help you to design the optimum monitoring and evaluation framework and to ensure that you collect the relevant data.

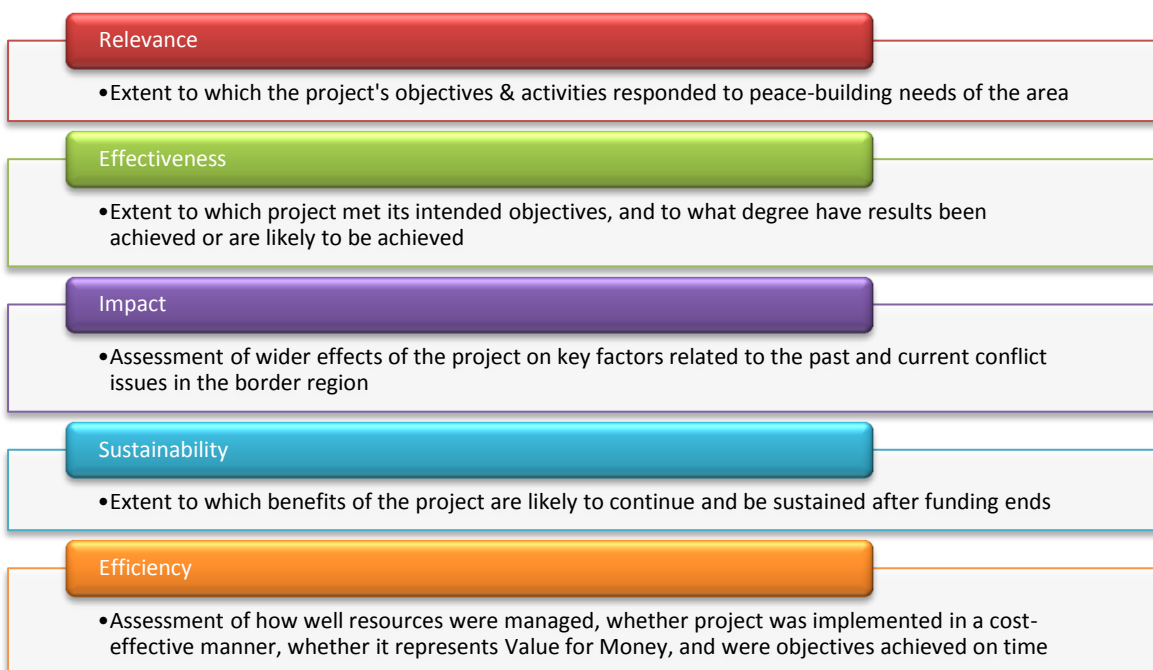
The external evaluation team employed three principal approaches to collecting data for the project’s final evaluation:

- **Desk research:** review of relevant project documentation, project steering group minutes, monitoring reports, films produced by the project, and the E-Learning tools

- **Public film screenings:** facilitated discussions with members of the public attending four of the public film screenings, analysis of questionnaires collected at the screenings
- **Consultations with stakeholders:** interviews with members of the Border Lives project team, the Project Steering Group, project partners, Pobal and other agencies involved in dealing with the past and reconciliation

QUESTION: What kind of data will these approaches mainly provide?

The final evaluation report's main findings were based on a review of the Border Lives cross-border project against the principal evaluation criteria for peace-building developed by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC),⁴⁶ which were related directly to the Aid for Peace methodology favoured by the PEACE III Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Those criteria were:



The final evaluation report was structured in the following manner:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Context and rationale for the project
- Review of project performance
- Response to the project
- Review of the project
- Main findings
- Conclusions and recommendations
- Appendix 1: Milestones in project development
- Appendix 2: Screening questionnaire
- Appendix 3: Questions for interviews and focus groups

⁴⁶ See, for example, OECD, *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* (2012).

- Appendix 4: Listing of information road shows
- Appendix 5: Border Lives Project Code of Good Practice
- Appendix 6: Summary overview of the six films produced
- Appendix 7: Community screening events
- Appendix 8: Social media reach
- Appendix 9: Itinerary for project manager visit to Washington DC

NOTE: Consider how the final evaluation report's structure and the information it includes can be seen to presume an external audience.

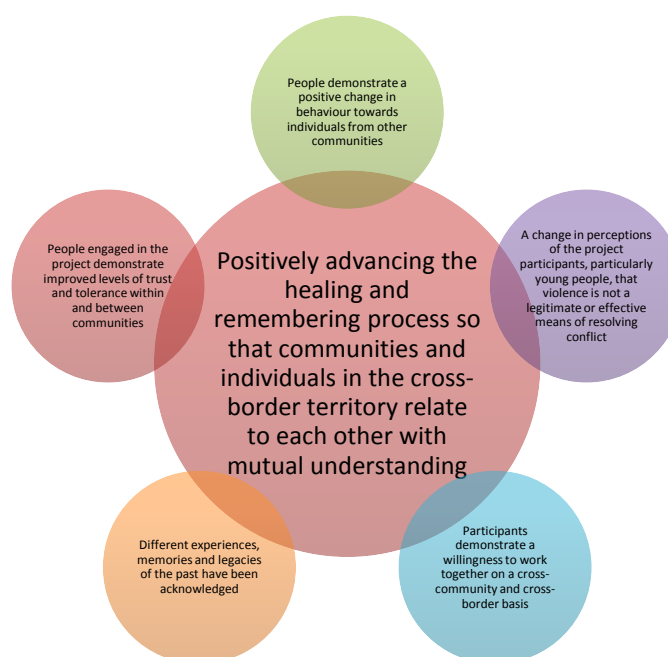
In relation to the peace-building evaluation criteria employed the final report's main findings included the following:



NOTE: Although some evidence for the final evaluation's main findings was based on quantitative data (e.g. numbers of participants, budgetary progress), given the nature of the project much of it was derived from qualitative data. Importantly, the final report featured a number of quotes from interviews and monitoring and evaluation forms.

Significantly, the final evaluation report on the Border Lives cross-border project states that it “is still relatively early in the life cycle of this project and therefore difficult to assess impact as the films and the educational resource have the potential to have an ongoing impact”. These comments illustrate the evaluative tension between short and longer-term results examined in Section 4.1 of this Toolkit.

As noted earlier in this Case Study, the Border Lives project anticipated a number of results contributing to an overall change in the cross-border territory, illustrated as:



Whilst the final evaluation report for the Border Lives project refers to the difficulty of assessing impact, it nevertheless offers a positive assessment based on achievement of shorter-term results and their capacity to contribute in the longer-term to the desired overall change in the cross-border territory. That capacity, however, is intimately related to the issue of sustainability and what is possible beyond the period of funding.

Sustainability is a concern within the final evaluation report’s six recommendations:

- Tyrone Donegal Partnership (TDP) should ensure that systems and processes are put in place to ensure that the work of the Border Lives project is sustained and the legacy aspect of this project is realised.
- Tyrone Donegal Partnership should ensure the visibility of the project is sustained and efforts made to maintain the website and social media components.
- Building on the success of Border Lives, any future project should build on the strengths and linkages created to ensure the cross-community element is central to the process.
- Relevant bodies involved in good relations and peace building work should use the 6 films and the educational resource to facilitate increased cross-community dialogue on these issues.
- There is a clear match between project potential moving forward and the themes and priorities for the proposed new Peace IV funding programme: SEUPB should ensure support for TDP to enable them to fully utilise the existing resources created and to open up the potential to engage new people in a similar process.

- There are an increasing number of Storytelling Initiatives supported from a range of funding sources as a contribution to dealing or contending with the past: it is important for Government and others who fund this work to ensure that projects fit within any wider strategic or emerging agreed policy framework.

These recommendations and how the Tyrone Donegal Partnership and relevant project partners deal with them are central features of the post-project phase.

1.4 The post-project phase: The after-life of the Border Lives project



The Border Lives cross-border project team, the Project Steering Committee and the Tyrone Donegal Partnership considered in depth the recommendations contained in the final evaluation report as well as reflecting on learning opportunities provided by the project. In terms of the latter, it was acknowledged that those involved in the project's design and implementation had encountered difficulties in setting peace-building results indicators to measure attitudinal changes. However, it was also recognised that the support provided by Pobal and the appointment of an external monitoring and evaluation team had been invaluable in designing and refining a monitoring and evaluation framework consistent with the PEACE III framework. This highlighted how despite Tyrone Donegal Partnership's considerable experience in the design and delivery of cross-border projects, there may nevertheless exist additional evaluation capacity requirements as a result of the needs of a specific project, and that these may have to be provided by external sources.

In relation to the recommendations directly addressed to the Tyrone Donegal Partnership in the Border Lives' final evaluation report, the following areas were considered and actions implemented:



The post-project phase of Border Lives as had both an internal and external dimension. It has led to reflections on the internal capacity for the evaluation and monitoring of a peace-building project of this nature, and required to adhere to a specific programme framework of some complexity, as well as to how the organisation will ensure the sustainability of the project's longer-term peace-building impacts.

Externally, TDP has acted upon the final evaluation report's recommendations with implicit requirements to engage with other organisations and bodies beyond the project's life-time, notably in terms of continuing work undertaken with educational establishments and in dissemination activities nationally and internationally. Additionally, the final evaluation also contained two recommendations explicitly aimed at external bodies with important policy functions.

Crucially, however, the evaluation process has also contributed to TDP's considerations for future cross-border projects, with the learning provided by the Border Lives project feeding into what will be the design and pre-implementation phase of the next project – or projects.

Case Study 2. ASPIRE



Brief Overview

ASPIRE is an integrated cross-border economic development programme targeting micro-businesses in the cross-border territory covered by the East Border Region,⁴⁷ and is funded by the INTERREG IVA programme under Priority 2 (“Cooperation for a sustainable programme region”), Theme 1 (“Collaboration”), sub-theme D (“Enterprise Collaboration”).⁴⁸ ASPIRE’s overarching aim is to assist sixty micro-businesses (employing fewer than ten people) in their development by employing sixty graduates for a period of twelve months to deliver a specific initiative or project for the business, resulting in businesses that are more innovative, profitable and sustainable, and ready to become involved in the export market.

The ASPIRE programme’s lead partner is the East Border Region (EBR),⁴⁹ with the EBR’s ten local authorities being the other principal partners, although Banbridge District Council is the lead local authority partner and is where the programme coordinator is based. ASPIRE also works closely with the further education sector. The programme’s funding began in March 2012 and ends in June 2015.

Relevance

Whilst the overarching aim is to develop more innovative, profitable and sustainable businesses, the specific aims of the ASPIRE cross-border programme are to:

⁴⁷ For more information, visit the ASPIRE website at <http://www.aspireprogramme.com/>, or for an overview provided by the East Border Region see

http://www.eastborderregion.com/pages/index.asp?title=Aspire_Enterprise_-_East_Border_Region.

⁴⁸ The Centre for Cross Border Studies is grateful to Pamela Arthurs, Chief Executive of the East Border Region, and especially to Sharon Daly, the ASPIRE Project Officer, for providing access to information used in this Case Study.

⁴⁹ East Border Region Ltd is a cross-border local authority organisation, currently comprising ten local authorities: Monaghan County Council, Ards Borough Council, Down District Council, Louth County Council, Newry & Mourne District Council, Craigavon Borough Council, Banbridge District Council, Armagh City & District Council, North Down Borough Council, and Meath County Council. That membership will change as a result of the reform of local government in Northern Ireland. For more on the East Border Region, visit <http://www.eastborderregion.com/>.

- Deliver a distinctive programme that identifies the specific development needs of micro-businesses in the East Border Region's cross-border territory, and to address those needs by providing new skills through the employment of graduates.
- Improve business processes and enhance the capacity of micro-businesses within the East Border Region, helping them to grow and to move up the enterprise pipeline so that they become eligible for support from the mainstream development agencies.
- Employ graduates and assist businesses to harness the available graduate talent, applying their skills to create sustainable regional development and forge stronger cross-border linkages.

The rationale for the ASPIRE programme is based on the identification of gaps in current economic development provision in the East Border Region which, through programmes such as InterTradeIreland's Acumen and Fusion programmes, is more geared towards larger and more sophisticated businesses rather than the micro-businesses that form a significant proportion of the cross-border territory's economy.

The overarching aim of the INTERREG IVA programme was to "support strategic Programme co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable region", and "developing a dynamic economy, supporting infrastructure and promoting innovative ways of addressing specific Programme problems".⁵⁰

The aim of Priority 2, "Cooperation for a sustainable Programme region", was to "improve access to services so as to improve the quality of life for those living in the eligible area", whilst the aim of the related theme of Collaboration was to:

- "Promote programme co-operation and the exchange of expertise, information and best practice between public bodies and other relevant stakeholders. In particular, the Priority will fund strategic collaborative approaches that will promote innovative ways of addressing specific programme problems, delivering services within border areas and promoting sustainable communities".

Finally, the sub-theme of "Enterprise Collaboration" aimed to address the "infrastructural gap across the eligible region", developing "strategies and new ways of working" for enterprise.⁵¹

The rationale for the "Collaboration" theme is set out in the Operational Programme as follows:

"The existence of land and maritime borders has emphasised the peripherality of the eligible region and has in the past contributed and may still contribute towards exacerbating the economic, social and environmental problems. Some of these problems are also more difficult to resolve due to the existence of the borders. Indeed, as separate and differing policy approaches have been adopted in areas such as health, education and the economy, this has had a detrimental effect on the economic and social condition of the border area, impacted on the development of programme partnership and activity, including civic networks, and made it more difficult to address common problems on a programme basis. In addition, the largely rural nature of the eligible region adds further complexity

⁵⁰ SEUPB, *INTERREG IVA Operational Programme* (2007), p.4.

⁵¹ It is important to note that this sub-theme was not included in the original Operational Programme, and was added subsequently in 2011 to address perceived gaps. This addition can be seen as the result of ongoing evaluation and monitoring at Programme level. See RSM McClure Watters, *Mid-Term Evaluation of the INTERREG IVA Programme* (October 2013), p.15.

to the economic and social challenges that need to be addressed.”

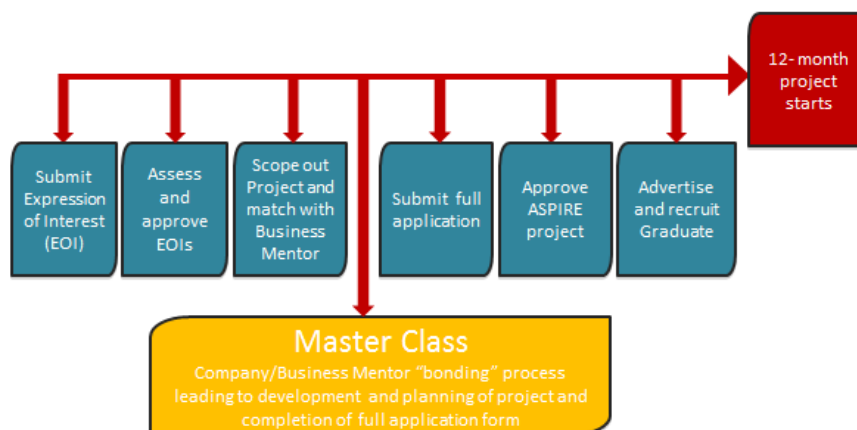
QUESTION: How would you evaluate the relevance of the ASPIRE programme either at the *ex ante* or *ex post* stage?

Effectiveness

QUESTIONS:

- Given the nature of the ASPIRE programme and its intended outcomes, how would you set about designing an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework to measure its effectiveness, what would be your results indicators, and what types of data would you look to capture for evaluation purposes?
- If you were to draw up the Terms of Reference for the evaluation of the ASPIRE programme, what would they include?

To achieve its intended outcomes and overall desired change in the East Border Region cross-border territory, the ASPIRE programme put in place an application process intended to match eligible micro-businesses with graduates best equipped to meet their innovation needs.⁵²



Companies wishing to apply to the ASPIRE programme would be deemed eligible if they met the following criteria:

- Ability to demonstrate a specific and realistic business improvement need
- Prepared to employ and mentor a graduate for at least twelve months
- Demonstrable willingness to develop cross-border trade links
- Have less than ten employees
- Be located within one of the nine partner council areas
- Capacity to contribute £3,600/€4,200 per year towards a graduate's salary of £17,500/€20,750 per annum

QUESTIONS:

- In order to assess its relative effectiveness, would the ASPIRE programme be suitable for a counterfactual evaluation approach?
- If counterfactual evaluation were to be included in the overall evaluation process, could

⁵² See <http://www.aspireprogramme.com/index.php/news>.

companies failing to meet the programme's criteria be included in a control group? If not, why not?

Having submitted an expression of interest, those companies deemed eligible receive a half day's individual session with a consultant in order to scope out the proposed project and to identify a suitable business adviser. This stage is followed by a one-day by attendance by business owner/managers and their business advisers at a full-day Group Master Class where expert guidance is offered on the ASPIRE application process, and on the elaboration of needs and objective-led business development plans.

Companies are then supported by their business adviser during a full-day session to develop their business plan and to complete their application to the ASPIRE programme. Those that are approved proceed to the graduate recruitment stage.

QUESTION: Can the approval stage provide information relevant to the assessment of the ASPIRE programme's cross-border effectiveness?

The business adviser supports the company to draw up job descriptions for the graduate position which is advertised by the ASPIRE programme. Applications are shortlisted by the business adviser, and suitable candidates are reviewed by the company for interview and selection. The twelve-month period of the project begins when the successful graduate takes up the post, and during that time there are regular monitoring meetings involving the company owner/manager, the business adviser and the graduate.

QUESTIONS:

- What evaluative purposes might such monitoring meetings have, and can they measure effectiveness?
- If you were undertaking an ex ante evaluation of the ASPIRE programme (i.e. before it applied for INTERREG funding), how would you assess its potential effectiveness in achieving its intended outcomes?

At the end of each ASPIRE project the supported company submits a final report to the programme, which is supplemented by an independent report from the relevant consultant. Some of the items in the report include:

- Number of employees at time of application, and number at project completion
- Company turnover at time of application, and turnover at project completion
- Project objectives **as stated in original application**
- Overall account of the project describing the main outcomes, achievements, events, problems and solutions for the company, as well as the main benefits for the ASPIRE graduate
- Does the company have plans for further cooperation with the business adviser
- Any new business partnerships/linkages formed as a result of the project
- Company plans for further investment to exploit results of the ASPIRE project
- Assessment of significance of results of the ASPIRE project to the company and to the graduate (judged on a scale "nil", "low", "medium", "high")
- Knowledge and capabilities gained by the company and its staff as a result of the ASPIRE project
- Has the company developed new cross-border customers as a result of ASPIRE

- Would the company consider other graduate placement programmes as a result of the ASPIRE project
- Description of how the ASPIRE project improved the company's market position in the relevant business area
- Description of the problems or opportunities that the ASPIRE project addressed and how it made an impact on the company's future performance
- Description of any new products, processes or services introduced as a result of the ASPIRE project
- Would this project have taken place without support from the ASPIRE programme
- Quantify improvements as a result of the ASPIRE project (increased sales, increased net profit before tax from increased sales, cost savings through increased efficiency, other cost reductions, total increases in profit)
- Expected change as a result of the ASPIRE project for the three years following the end of the project (expected increase in sales, expected increase in net profit before tax from increased sales, expected costs savings through increased efficiency, other expected cost reductions, total expected increases in profit)
- Quantify the change in annual value of cross-border/export trade during the ASPIRE project
- Quantify expected change in annual value of cross-border/export trade in the next three years as a result of the ASPIRE project
- Was the ASPIRE graduate offered permanent employment by the company after the ASPIRE project
- Description of the main job functions of the graduate after the ASPIRE project

QUESTIONS:

- Would the information gathered from final reports be sufficient to evaluate the ASPIRE programme's effectiveness in attaining its intended results? If not, what other sources could there be?
- What quantitative data is made available in these final reports, and how can it measure the programme's effectiveness?
- Is there relevant information available to measure the cross-border effectiveness of the programme?
- Can you map the programme's intended outcomes onto the questions contained in the final report?

Efficiency and sustainability

The total cost of the ASPIRE programme was £2,073,344, with £1,393,008 coming directly from the INTERREG programme. The programme has a programme coordinator, and it appointed Helix Innovation Partnerships Ltd as the programme's delivery agent.⁵³ Helix provided the necessary consultancy and business advice support to the ASPIRE programme and its beneficiary companies.

The overall change the ASPIRE programme intended to bring about was to create a more innovative, profitable and sustainable economy of the cross-border territory of the East Border Region, thereby contributing to the INTERREG IVA's global aim of creating a more prosperous and sustainable region.

QUESTIONS:

- How would you go about evaluating the ASPIRE programme in terms of Value for Money?

⁵³ For more on Helix, visit the company website at <http://www.helixireland.com/>.

Will the beneficiary companies' final reports provide information relevant to such a measurement?

- Which factors would you take into consideration when judging the balance between inputs into and expected outputs from the ASPIRE project?
- What relevance may there be in the main job functions of graduates employed by companies after the end of the project in terms of efficiency and/or value for money?
- What information do final reports provided by companies supported by the ASPIRE programme contain that would allow you to assess its sustainability beyond the funding period?
- Which shorter-term results can be deduced from the final reports, and how can they allow you to evaluate longer-term effects?
- What other sources could provide you with information as to the relative efficiency and sustainability of the ASPIRE programme?

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