

# Evaluation (Impact assessment) of Interreg IPA Cross-border cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020

## Final Evaluation Report

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## PROJECT SHEET

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## Acronyms

CBC: Cross-border Cooperation

HR Croatia

EC: European Commission

EP: Evaluation plan

EQ: Evaluation questions

ESIF: European Structural and Investment Funds

ERDF: European Regional Development Fund

ETC: European Territorial Cooperation

EU: European Union

EUSAIR: EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

EUSDR: EU Strategy for the Danube Region

IPA: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

JS: Joint Secretariat

JMC: Joint Monitoring Committee

MA: Managing Authority

RS: Serbia

SO: Specific Objective

PA: Priority axis

KOM: Kick-off meeting

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## Executive summary

The objective of this report is to illustrate the impact of the results and effects of Interreg IPA Programme considering the assessment of achieved results and impacts of the programme and their sustainability, communication towards planned objectives and assessment of the impact of programmes and projects financed under the programme area on cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

The evaluation findings should serve as a tool for improving the quality of future Programme implementation, and as one of the bases for planning future policies for the development of the Interreg IPA Programme in the coming financial period.

Due to a very low response rate of project Lead Partners to the web survey, the findings presented below are not without certain limitations.

### Programme's achievement of planned objectives

*EQ 2: Is the programme structure (e.g. priority axes and specific objectives, examples of activities, etc.) in line with the requirements and needs of potential beneficiaries?*



Based on the feedback provided within the survey it can be summarised that the programme structure, priorities and specific objectives, meet the needs of potential applicants in the targeted HR-RS area.

*EQ 3: Are the financial resources allocated for each priority axis in accordance with the requested funds of applicants for project proposals?*



The interest of the public / project applicants was higher than the programme was able to cover. Only 22% of all project proposals were chosen for financing. If we look at each individual priority axis, PA1 has the highest percentage of approved budget (22%), PA2 has the lowest percentage of projects chosen for financing (18%) and PA3 has the lowest percentage of approved budget (16%), but the highest percentage of projects chosen for financing (29%).

*EQ 4: How successful and efficient is the implementation of the project?*



Priority Axis 4 is most likely the first Axis to reach all Programme targets for 2023, having three fully achieved indicators and one indicator with a level of achievement higher than 50% (57%). Almost the same situation is with Priority Axis 1, where two indicators are fully achieved, and one has a level of achievement higher than 50% (54%). Priority axis 2 is the least likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023 due to low percentages of achievement in one indicator (40%). Regarding the financial progress, PA3 has the best results reaching almost 70% of the target value, while PA2 seems to be the slowest in financial progress, reaching close to only half of the final target. As for the progress in absorbing the

available financial resources on a Programme level, the performance of the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Serbia Programme is above the average (49%).

## Programme strategy/s consistency with emerging results

*EQ 1: Do the programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements?*

*EQ 5: What objectives of the programme have been undoubtedly achieved?*

*EQ 9: Are there any changes in the programme area resulting from programme interventions that were not defined and foreseen by the Programme?*

*EQ 10: Did the projects achieve the expected programme results?*



The results of the web survey show us that regarding all specific objectives (SO) all of the included projects have achieved expected programme results, except for one project under SO 3.1 (ViCTour), while some of them also produced results that had not been initially planned. Project ViCTour during its implementation experienced several deviations including delays from the work plan. Some of the activities did not follow the dynamic plan adopted at the very beginning of the implementation phase. The main reasons behind these dysfunctions were of administrative nature, specifically, issues related to public procurement.

It can be concluded that SOs 2.2 and 3.1 of the programme have been undoubtedly achieved as projects under these two SOs reached all planned results. One of the projects under SO 3.1 (S.O.S.) had a big impact on the programme area. Joint thematic cultural heritage product - Secession route connecting sister cities of Osijek and Subotica has been created. Joint secession heritage database, containing information on secession buildings, sites, cultural institutions and organisations in the project area has also been developed. Osijek Secession Park has been revitalized, preconditions have been created for the reconstruction of the City Hall in Subotica as an important building from the Secession period, a new local cross-border thematic tourist route/product has been created, the visibility of the market for common tourism products has increased as well as the capacity of cultural heritage.

## Linkages between financed interventions and results

*EQ 6: What changes have been made in the programme area in terms of the needs and challenges of the programme area?*



It can be concluded that expectations from Programme approach, structure and strategy, vary among beneficiaries. Adjustments, especially in use of new technologies, innovation and modernisation, are required.

*EQ 7: What programme interventions can be considered particularly successful in contributing to positive developments in the programme area?*



Analysed projects within all four priority axes point towards a positive trend in reaching Programme goals. Implemented projects clearly contribute to the development of programme area in improving skills of caregivers (health services), ecosystem services' implementation models, preservation of nature, fostering cross-border tourism development and introducing new products in business environment.

*EQ 8: What are the conclusions given the project results and their expected impact? What are the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact?*

Although projects have had a positive impact, sustainability of their activities is difficult to achieve due to lack of key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact such as other funding opportunities and uncertain circumstances as a result of Covid-19 pandemic (related to 2<sup>nd</sup> call for proposal projects) that has had a significant impact on continuation of project activities. In this sense, we recommend the future Programme to increase the attention paid to the capacity of future projects to ensure the sustainability of the actions over time (see EQ 12 for additional information).

Information from case studies highlight the risk that key Serbian stakeholders (e.g., Universities) can be discouraged from taking part to new opportunities financed by IPA CBC programmes. Two are the key factors mentioned by the interviewees: (a) limited capacity of public authorities (which must be involved due to their 'institutional' competences) in managing EU funds/projects; (b) complexity of public procurement procedures. Notwithstanding that these elements emerged only in the context of specific case studies, we recommend the Programme to carefully consider these inputs. Future programme shall pay particular attention to:



- supporting these key stakeholders in identifying projects partners with adequate skills and capacities;
- supporting these key stakeholders in their relations with the local/regional/national public authorities: universities and NGOs are often more experienced than public authorities in the management of EU projects but they more rarely lead project partnerships due to the greater institutional/political weight of the public actor. Particularly in case of projects facing difficulties in the implementation of the planned activities, the Programme authorities can intervene and support (if the case) the opinions and solutions proposed by the more experienced partners.
- enhancing the support provided to beneficiaries (in particular beneficiaries from Serbia) for what concerns public procurement procedures. Ad hoc trainings can be proposed focused on specific problems faced during the 2014-2020 period (and providing examples of the solutions adopted).

## Conclusions for future interventions



*Evaluation question 11: What are the links between activities and/or programme achievements and the overall EU framework for the post-2020 period?*



Looking to the key results achieved under 2014-2020 the most relevant SO for the future programming period are:

- PO 1 SO (i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
- PO 1 SO (iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
- PO 2 SO (iv) "Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience"
- PO 2 SO (i) "Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions"
- PO 4 SO (v) "Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care".
- PO 4 SO (vi) "Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation"

*Evaluation question 12: Is there a gap between the realized and remaining/new needs of the programme area? What are the conclusions and recommendations for the post-2020 period?*



The analysis shows that, during the 2014-2020 programming period, the funds provided by the Programme played a key role in responding to the needs of the territory. Data also indicate that the capacity of beneficiaries to mobilize other funds is limited (e.g., national funds, IPA funds, other EU funds such as LIFE, HORIZON 2020, etc.). All in all, the analysis suggests that the territory still has needs in terms of funding, for which the future programme is called to play a crucial role.

The analysis of the cross-border added value and of the possible capitalization activities suggests that the future programme shall pay particular attention to supporting actions aimed at improving the policy instruments of the area, e.g. creation of new policy instruments (plans, agreements) integrated across borders; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems at cross-border level.

Moreover, the future programme should pay particular attention to the difficulties in ensuring the financial sustainability of the projects since the application phase. As a title of example, the future programme can envisage to foresee a specific section of the application form where to ask applicants to clarify how they intend to ensure the sustainability of the project over time by requiring to specify which specific funds they are targeting. This can help in guiding future project partners since the very initial steps of the application phase, in planning specific actions for ensuring synergies with other policy instruments and for consequently increasing the capacity of the projects to mobilise other funds.

*Evaluation question 13: Is there a more cost-effective and/or simple way to achieve the programme specific objectives?*



This evaluation question aims to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of projects according to their partnership size, i.e. to verify if the presence of a larger partnership represents an added value or a risk in terms of achievement of the intended objectives (at project and programme level).

The analysis of the financial absorption (i.e., total amount of expenditures certified by MA and CA out of the total budget of the project) and of the delays with respect to the project deadline initially established (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS) of the projects financed under the first call shows no evidence about possible correlations between the size of the partnership and delays in the implementation of projects.

## Horizontal issues

*Evaluation question 14: Did the planned measures/projects successfully contribute to the horizontal programme principles*



The analysis based on the review of project application forms points to the overwhelmingly positive contribution to horizontal programme principles. Simultaneously, survey results – conducted after the projects were finalized – confirm that the projects had a positive net impact, albeit a more modest one.

*Evaluation question 15: How much has the Programme contributed to the relevant macro-regional strategies?*



A considerable share of analysed projects was aligned with some of EUSAIR's and EUSDR's Pillars. On the basis of self-assessment, their perceived contribution to the two strategies can be deemed as varying between average to high.

*Evaluation question 16: Have the established communication goals been achieved and how have the target groups accepted the Programme?*



Programme communication goals have been achieved, such as the goal to ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups within project and/or Programme area, and/or to the general public. Target groups gained new knowledge and improved their capacities which were the initially expected impacts of the projects.

## SO 1.1: Improving the quality of the facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care

*Evaluation question 17: Have new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors been introduced thanks to the interventions of the Programme?*

*Evaluation question 18: To what extent has the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the program?*



Data from the survey indicate that new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors have been introduced mostly thanks to the interventions of the Programme, such as by developing, testing or adopting cross-border initiatives, tools, services and/or related pilot projects aiming to enhance quality, improve accessibility (increased number of service users) and effectiveness of public health care, social services and institutions and by improving competences/skills of key stakeholders. This suggests that the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the Programme.

## SO 2.1: Enforce integrated cross-border monitoring / management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection

*Evaluation question 19: How much has risk management been strengthened and improved through activities financed from the programme?*

*Evaluation question 20: How did the interventions of the programme affect the environment and biodiversity in the programme area?*

*Evaluation question 21: Have the activities related to the importance of nature conservation been implemented, enhanced understanding of the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems among the local population and visitors of the area?*



Within projects in the scope of Specific Objective 2.1. activities were conducted that exerted a positive impact and strengthened risk management systems.

Concerning the goal of improving or strengthening risk management systems, survey respondents tackled the aforementioned issue most noticeably by conducting studies and research in the field of nature protection and risk prevention. Simultaneously, their impact was the weakest on the development of policy instruments for improving cross-border governance in the field.

Likewise, the respondents stated that results in the area were achieved through financing small scale infrastructural interventions, improving the competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders as well as through the development and implementation of new solutions. All of the respondents stated they had a positive impact on increasing knowledge/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and creating conditions for better protection of biodiversity.

## SO 2.2: Promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency

*Evaluation question 22: Did the projects develop new energy solutions?*

*Evaluation question 23: Can changes in public awareness be recognised as a result of the promotion of sustainable energy sources?*

*Evaluation question 24: How much did the implemented project activities contribute to the reduction of electricity consumption in public buildings in the programme area?*



Under the specific objective 2.2. three interventions have been implemented within the 1<sup>st</sup> Call for Proposals (finalisation of projects: one project ended at the beginning of 2019, while two projects ended at the beginning of 2020). The outputs and results of these projects suggest that the cross-border area has experienced an increase in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources. The contribution to the PA2 indicator *Additional capacity of renewable energy production* consists of 1,44 MW renewable energy produced by the 3 implemented projects. Furthermore, implemented project activities led to better governance in energy planning (tools, regulatory frameworks, standards), increased awareness of the benefits coming from the use of energy efficiency measures, increased capacity of policy makers in the sustainable energy planning and reduction of energy consumption.

### SO 3.1: Strengthen, diversify and integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets

*Evaluation question 25: Did the interventions of the programme contribute to the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer in the programme area?*

*Evaluation question 26: How much has programme interventions enabled better management of cultural and natural heritage?*

*Evaluation question 27: How much did the projects contribute to increasing the number of visitors and/or the number of overnight stays in the programme area?*



Interventions of the programme had notable impact on the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer, which is evidenced by the results of several projects that managed to create new touristic content and make it more accessible and attractive for visitors in the programme area. Results of project activities indicate that the management of cultural and natural heritage was significantly improved, mostly through training sessions and seminars with relevant stakeholders. Even though some of the projects recorded increased numbers of visitors and/or overnight stays in those project areas, the overall figures for the whole programme area are below the target value, whose fulfilment was further hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### SO 4.1: Improve competitiveness of the Programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters, education and research organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products / services / patents / trademarks in the Programme area

*Evaluation question 28: How much has institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved?*

*Evaluation question 29: Did the interventions of the programme strengthen competitiveness and the business environment in the programme area?*

*Evaluation question 30: Did programme interventions affect the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programming area?*



Institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved in the following sectors: green economy, sustainable agriculture and automotive industry. All projects contributed to encouraging the exchange of best practices in the application of ICT, new technologies, processes, products or services to be directly used by the enterprises. Programme interventions affected the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programming area, which was seen in project Eco Build where the activities of the project included innovating and developing new standardised products, services and patents with agricultural biomass as their main feature. The Programme area experienced significant problems due to the low level of ICT solutions and lack of new technologies. Thus, the interventions under PA 4 and SO 4.1. addressed the main challenges and needs as regards enhancing competitiveness and the development of a business environment in the Programme area.

## Introduction

This Report is the final deliverable of the evaluation of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020 managed by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of the Republic of Croatia as the Managing Authority (MA).

The objective of this report is to illustrate the impact of the results and effects of Interreg IPA Programme considering the assessment of achieved results and impacts of the programme and their sustainability, communication towards planned objectives and assessment of the impact of programmes and projects financed under the programme area on cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

The evaluation findings should serve as a tool for improving the quality of future Programme implementation, and as one of the bases for planning future policies for the development of the Interreg IPA Programme in the coming financial period.

## Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of this service is to evaluate cross-border cooperation programme whose overall aim is to strengthen the social, economic and territorial development of the cross-border area through the implementation of joint projects and activities.

The evaluation is aimed at assessing the impact of results and impacts of Interreg IPA programme regarding the assessment of achieved results and effects of the Programme and their sustainability, assessing the effects of communication towards planned objectives and assessing the impact of programme and projects financed under the Programme on the programme area, cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess how and to what extent, thanks to the EU (ERDF/IPA II), the programme funds have contributed to the objectives of the Programme, i.e. to the overall objective of the Programme and to the specific objectives of each priority axis of the Programme. The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess what the Programme has achieved through its implementation and identify which key challenges and which improvements are necessary for the programming period 2021-2027.

The following specific objectives are also defined: impact assessment of individual priority axes, review of achievement of target values of impact and result indicators, review of target groups, indicative activities and structure of beneficiaries, evaluation of compliance with horizontal principles, socioeconomic review of programme area with SWOT analysis, risk evaluation between achieved results of programme implementation and planned values, assessment of contribution to European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - Europe 2020 and evaluation of communication strategy in relation to planned objectives. The evaluation will be carried out by a team of evaluation experts who will work in accordance with the basic principles of evaluation including:

- transparency in the evaluation process — a clear and unambiguous involvement of all relevant stakeholders;
- a clear methodology — in accordance with the work methodology presented in this report;
- impartiality and independence vis-à-vis the service provider, the institutions and users involved;
- visibility of the results — in accordance with the activities set out in the invitation to tender and in agreement with the contracting entity.

## Scope of evaluation

Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia - Serbia 2014-2020 is a cross-border cooperation Programme whose overall objective is to strengthen the social, economic and territorial development of the cross-border area through the implementation of joint projects and activities. The overall Programme budget is EUR 40.345.091,00, of which EUR 34.293.188,00 is a grant from the EU (ERDF / IPA II).

Within the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia - Serbia 2014-2020, 2 calls for proposals have been published and all appropriations have been allocated on the basis of the decisions of the Joint Monitoring Committee. The last of 22 projects from the 1<sup>st</sup> call for proposals have completed their implementation in 2020, while out of 20 projects from the 2<sup>nd</sup> call for proposals, 19 projects have started their implementation in 2019, while the last contracted project from this call started implementation in March 2021.

## Evaluation context

Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programmes are specific instruments whose purpose is to support the cross-border cooperation between the EU Member States and candidate countries or potential candidate countries. Like all Interreg, Interreg IPA CBC Programmes are subject to the Regulations (EU) <sup>1</sup>No 1303/2013 and <sup>2</sup>No 1299/2013. Furthermore, the presence of IPA funding requires compliance with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) <sup>3</sup>No 447/2014. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the state of play of the implementation of the Programme. Paragraphs are based on the information provided by the MA during the kick-off meeting in Zagreb.

<sup>1</sup> Common Provisions Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013 (CPR), particularly Articles 54 describing general provisions on assessment, Article 56 on assessment during implementation of the Programme, Article 110 defining functions of the Joint Monitoring Committee, and Article 114 related to conditions regarding submission of the implementation report.

<sup>2</sup> ETC Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013, particularly recital 26 on Managing Authority's responsibility to undertake the evaluation based on the evaluation plan, and Article 14 describing applications for Implementation report.

<sup>3</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA II), particularly Article 41 on evaluation.

## Interreg IPA CBC Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020

Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds perform the function of the Managing Authority for Interreg IPA cross-border cooperation Programme Croatia - Serbia 2014-2020, while the Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Serbia and Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of the Republic of Croatia perform the function of National Authorities. The overall Programme objective is to increase socio-economic growth through interventions in the sectors of:

- health and social care;
- environment and nature protection/risk prevention and sustainable energy and energy efficiency promotion;
- development of sustainable tourism and culture;
- strengthening competitiveness and business environment.

The Programme area includes four counties in the eastern part of Croatia and five districts in the north-western part of Serbia. The programme area covers 25.505 km<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 1. Map of the area covered by the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020



Source: <https://www.interreg-croatia-serbia2014-2020.eu/about-programme/programme-facts/>



## Evaluation research methodology




The methodology followed in drafting the report was presented in the inception report, the first deliverable of the evaluation of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation programme.

The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess how and to what extent, thanks to the EU (ERDF/IPA II), the programme funds have contributed to the objectives of the Programme, i.e. to the overall objective of the Programme and to the specific objectives of each priority axis of the Programme. The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess what the Programme has achieved through its implementation and identify which key challenges and which improvements are necessary for the programming period 2021-2027.

Elements evaluated according to the terms of reference:

- assessment of the results achieved and the impact of the Programme and their sustainability,
- assessment of the impact of communication according to planned objectives,
- assessment of the impact of Programme and projects financed under the Programme on the programme area, cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

Consistently with the approach proposed in the inception report, the evaluation was carried out by referring to three main data sources:

-  • A desk review of all the Programme documents, including Annual Implementation reports and data on financial progress sent by the MA.
-  • A web-survey disseminated among beneficiaries and applicants in order to capture their perception on the quality of the Programme's management.
  - The extremely low participation of project Lead Partners to the web-survey has led to difficulties in formulating key findings and recommendations. Given the short timeframe to carry out the evaluation, the web-survey represented the key evaluation activity needed to thoroughly answer evaluation questions, with special regard to those related to SOs (i.e. EQ 17 to 30). The insufficient level of detail of certain key findings and the scarcity of recommendations can therefore be ascribed to this particular issue.
-  • A case study analysis carried out at the level of cross-border projects.
  - Case studies consist of interviews with project partners and the analysis of project documents.

## Programme's achievement of planned objectives

**Evaluation question 2:** Is the programme structure (e.g. priority axes and specific objectives, examples of activities, etc.) in line with the requirements and needs of potential beneficiaries?

**Answer:** Based on the feedback provided within the survey it can be summarised that the programme structure, priorities and specific objectives, meet the needs of potential applicants in the targeted HR-RS area.



Programme supports the implementation of joint projects and activities within four priority axes (PA) and five specific objectives (SO):

- PA1 – Improving the quality of public social and health services in the programme area
  - *SO 1.1: Improving the quality of the facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care*
- PA2 – Protecting the environment and biodiversity, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency
  - *SO 2.1: Enforce integrated cross-border monitoring / management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection*
  - *SO 2.2: Promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency*
- PA3 – Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage
  - *SO 3.1: Strengthen, diversify and integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets*
- PA4 – Enhancing competitiveness and developing business environment in the programme area
  - *SO 4.1: Improve competitiveness of the programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters, education and research organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products / services / patents / trademarks in the programme area*

Potential beneficiaries positively perceive programme structure which they found was in line with their requirements and needs. A web-survey disseminated among beneficiaries and applicants in order to capture their perception on the quality of the programme structure (priority axes, specific objectives and indicative activities) has shown that all respondents who completed the survey confirm the adequacy of programme structure. It is important to note that none of the respondents expressed a negative perception toward the programme structure. Participants in the survey did not propose any new objectives and/or activities that programme should support.

**Evaluation question 3:** Are the financial resources allocated for each priority axis in accordance with the requested funds of applicants for project proposals?

**Answer:** The interest of the public / project applicants was higher than the programme was able to cover. Only 22% of all project proposals were chosen for financing. If we look at each individual priority axis, PA1 has the highest percentage of approved budget (22%), PA2 has the lowest

percentage of projects chosen for financing (18%) and PA3 has the lowest percentage of approved budget (16%), but the highest percentage of projects chosen for financing (29%).



This section compares the distribution of financial resources as submitted by applicants in their project proposals to the distribution of the total financial resources approved per PA. The overall programme budget is EUR 40.345.091, of which EUR 34.293.188 is EU funded (ERDF/IPA II). The table below shows available funding per PA.

*Table 1. Detailed indicative total programme budget breakdown per Priority Axes*

PA	EU funding (ERDF/IPA II)	National funding	Total funding
1	€ 5.609.512	€ 989.915	€ 6.599.427
2	€ 11.644.543	€ 2.055.080	€ 13.699.623
3	€ 7.544.500	€ 1.331.383	€ 8.875.883
4	€ 6.065.315	€ 1.070.351	€ 7.135.666
5	€ 3.429.318	€ 605.174	€ 4.034.492
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 34.293.188</b>	<b>€ 6.051.903</b>	<b>€ 40.345.091</b>

Source: <https://www.interreg-croatia-serbia2014-2020.eu/about-programme/programme-documents-legislation/>

The next table below shows that priority axis with most demands was PA2 - Protecting the environment and biodiversity, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency with the requested budget of € 84.474.470 and 71 submitted project proposals. However, only 18% of all project proposals were approved, which is the lowest result compared to other PAs.

Even though PA1 - Improving the quality of the services in public health and social care sector doesn't have the best percentage of project proposals submitted for financing, 22% of the requested budget has been approved, which is the highest percentage in that respect.

Regarding PA3 – Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage is the PA with the best percentage of project proposals chosen for financing (29%), but the worst percentage when it comes to the requested budget – only 16% of the requested budget was approved.

However, the table shows that the overall interest of the public is higher than the programme was able to cover. If we look at the total numbers, only 22% of project proposals were chosen for financing, which means that the interest was almost 5 times greater than the programme was created for.

*Table 2. Financial resources demanded and approved per PA for both published CfPs*

PA	Number of project proposals	Total budget requested	Number of approved projects	Total budget approved	Approved projects / projects proposals	Approved / requested budget
1	10	€ 5.609.512	10	€ 6.599.427	100%	114%
2	71	€ 84.474.470	13	€ 13.699.623	18%	16%
3	10	€ 7.544.500	3	€ 8.875.883	30%	118%
4	10	€ 6.065.315	10	€ 7.135.666	100%	118%
5	10	€ 3.429.318	10	€ 4.034.492	100%	118%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>€ 106.142.115</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>€ 127.345.091</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>120%</b>

1	37	€ 30.433.965	8	€ 6.566.160,38	22%	22%
2	71	€ 84.474.470	13	€ 14.540.755,28	18%	17%
3	35	€ 57.228.862	10	€ 9.248.047,20	29%	16%
4	54	€ 35.833.557	12	€ 7.258.326,54	22%	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>€ 207.970.854</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>€ 37.613.289</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>18%</b>

Source: HR-RS\_1stCfP – Ranking list per PA.xls, HR- RS\_2ndCfP – Ranking list per PA.xls, HR- RS\_contracted\_projects.xlsx

#### **Evaluation question 4:** How successful and efficient is the implementation of the project?

**Answer:** PA 4 is the first Priority Axis most likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023, already having three fully achieved indicator targets and one indicator target at a level of achievement higher in 2020. Almost the same situation is with Priority Axis 1, where two indicator targets have been fully achieved in 2020, and one has a level of achievement higher than 50% (54%). PA 2 is the least likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023 due to low percentages of achievement for one indicator (40%). Regarding financial progress, PA3 has the best results reaching almost 70% of target value in 2020, while PA2 seems to be the slowest in financial progress, reaching close to only half of the final target in 2020. As for the progress in absorbing the available financial resources at Programme level, the performance of the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Serbia Programme is above average (49%).



The success and efficiency of the programme implementation have been assessed by analysing the level of achievement compared to what was planned in the programming phase in terms of output and financial indicators. The analysis conducted in 2019 highlighted how, in general, the programme was performing well towards the final targets. Data reported in the AIR 2020 confirms the excellent progress of the Programme, which can be described in more detail as follows:

- Two indicators' targets, both under PA3 – *Number of persons educated in quality assurance, standardization on cultural and natural heritage and destination management* and *Increase in expected number of visitors to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage* – extremely surpassed the 2023 final targets (221% and 531%, respectively);
- Six indicators, two under PA1 – *Number of persons related to improving health care services and/or social care services trained* and *Number of jointly developed tools and services that enable better quality of social and health care*, one under PA2 - *Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status*, and three under PA4 – *Number of innovative technologies, processes, products and services introduced by the enterprises in the Programme area*, *Number of innovative technologies, processes, products and services introduced by the enterprises in the Programme area* and *Number*

*of laboratories and/or competence centres jointly used by entrepreneurs developed or improved* – surpassed the 2023 final target

- Five indicators present a level of achievement higher than 50%
- One indicator, under PA2 – Additional capacity of renewable energy production, is still below half of its target value (40%)

It should be noted that some target values of the Programme output indicators were adjusted in 2020 by Cooperation Programme modification and those new values were included in AIR 2019 and 2020. The biggest changes were made regarding two indicators under PA2 – *Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status* (increased from 800 to 69,792) and *Additional capacity of renewable energy production* (decreased from 32 to 3.6). In December 2020, another programme amendment was carried out, resulting in the reallocation of the saved amounts from PA2 and PA4 to PA1.

Table 3. Progress towards the 2023 targets

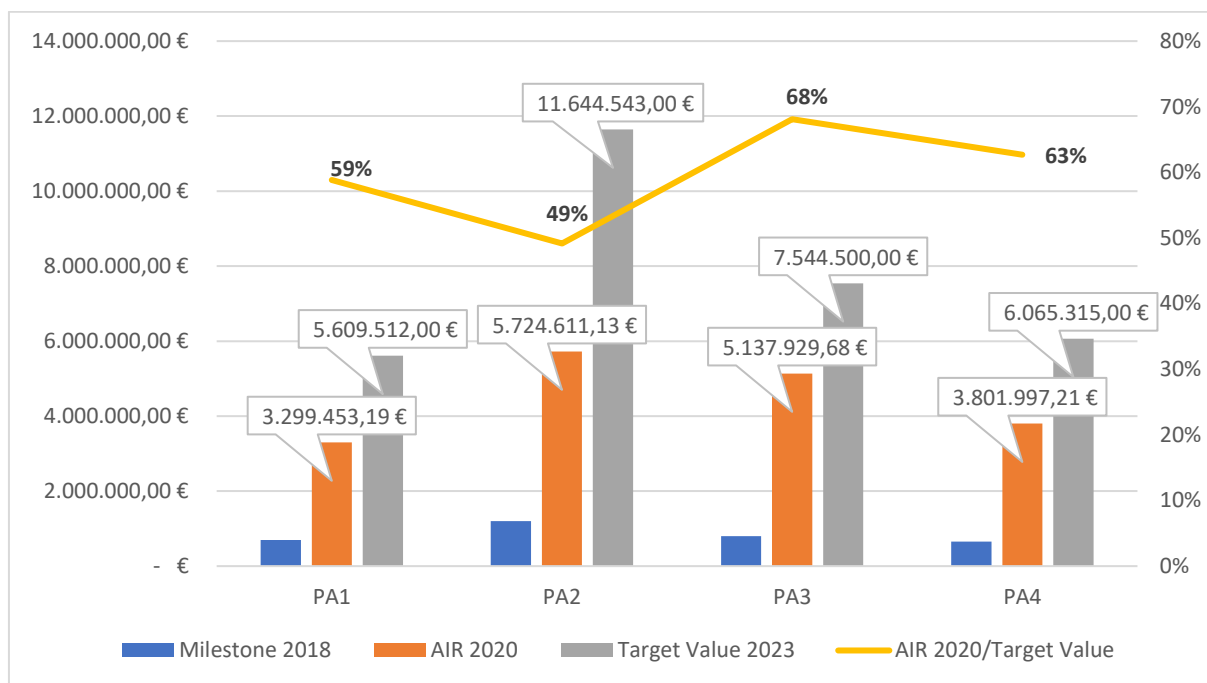
PA	Indicator	Values achieved 2020	Programme target - 2023	% of achievement of Programme target
PA1	Number of persons related to improving health care services and/or social care services trained	524	437	120%
PA1	Number of jointly developed tools and services that enable better quality of social and health care	12	9	133%
PA1	Population covered with improved health services and/or social services or facilities	54.314	100.000	54%
PA2	Number of jointly developed and/or operated monitoring systems	4	5	80%
PA2	Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status (Ha)	74.883,89	69.792,00	107%
PA2	Additional capacity of renewable energy production (MW)	1,44	3,60	40%
PA3	Number of joint tourism products developed and promoted	8	13	62%
PA3	Number of tourism supporting facilities and/or tourism infrastructure developed or improved	9	11	82%
PA3	Number of persons educated in quality assurance, standardization on cultural and natural heritage and destination management	818	370	221%

PA	Indicator	Values achieved 2020	Programme target - 2023	% of achievement of Programme target
PA3	Increase in expected number of visitors to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage (visit per year)	5.318	1000	532%
PA4	Number of cross-border clusters or networks or other collaborative schemes including entrepreneurs established or improved	4	7	57%
PA4	Number of innovative technologies, processes, products and services introduced by the enterprises in the Programme area	13	7	186%
PA4	Number of laboratories and/or competence centres jointly used by entrepreneurs developed or improved	20	12	167%
PA4	Number of enterprises cooperating with research institution	16	9	178%

Source: AIR 2020

Regarding financial progress, the chart below shows the level of financial absorption by the end of 2020. Compared to the financial plan (Annexes 1 – 4) 58% of expenditures was certified within the scope of the Programme. PA3 has the best results, reaching almost 70% of the target value, followed by PA4. PA2 seems to be the slowest in financial progress, reaching almost half of the final target in 2020.

Figure 2. Financial absorption per PA compared to 2023 final target

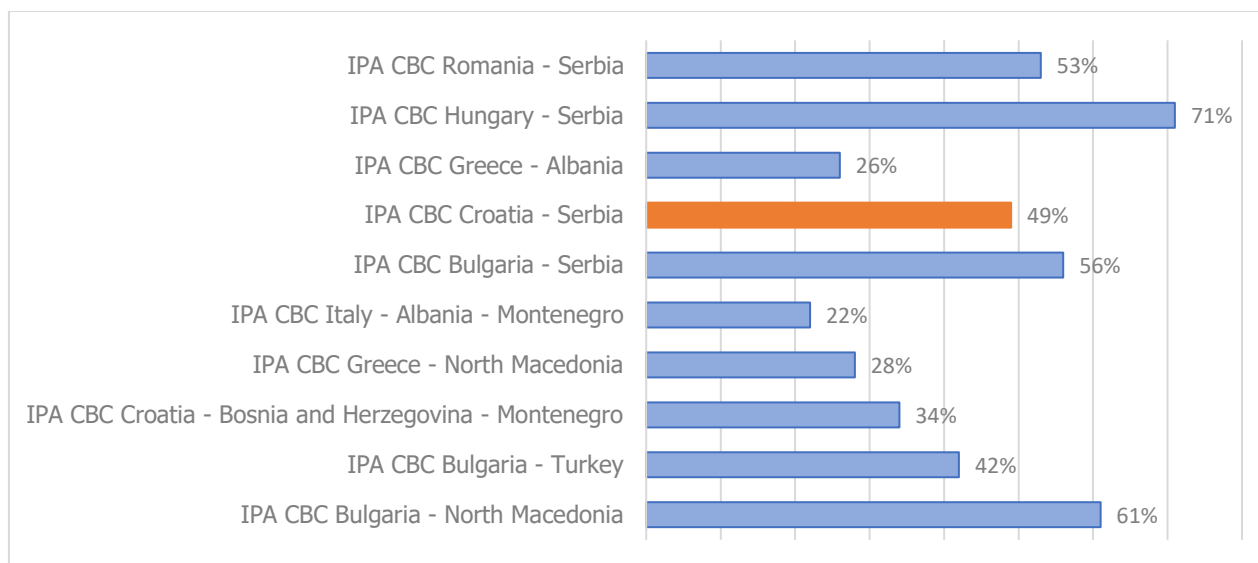


Source: AIR 2020

As for the progress in absorbing the available financial resources, data provided by the EC<sup>1</sup> facilitate a comparison of the progress made by the Programme with the other Interreg and IPA-CBC programmes. The figure below is based on EC data and compares the performance of all IPA-CBC programmes. The percentages represent the amount of eligible costs declared by the beneficiaries in 2020, out of the total Programme budget. The performance of the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Serbia Programme is above average (49%).

<sup>1</sup> Source: cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu, accessed on (15.08.2021.)

Figure 3. Eligible expenditure declared by beneficiaries out of the total Programme budget – comparison among IPA programmes



Source: cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu



Insights from the case studies confirm the state of the play of projects implementation. Regarding projects MOS-Cross and ReGerNet, all planned activities and results have been achieved. Although the overall results from Programme PA 1 show that achieved targets were not entirely met, these projects have achieved everything as planned and more (e.g., providing improved health and social services to more persons than they have initially envisaged). Concerning PA 2, projects IMPACT-ENVI and EcoWET achieved all foreseen activities and results (for example, two monitoring systems were developed as planned). Project EXPLORE CRO-SRB is a part of PA 3 and it has also achieved all activities and results, like developing and promoting three joint tourism products. This suggests that those results are above the results of the overall level of PA 3. All activities and results were also achieved by projects Eco build and CROSS TREE, under PA 4. These projects are also above the mean overall results of the Programme.

## Programme strategy's consistency with emerging results

**Evaluation question 1:** Do the programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements?

**Evaluation question 5:** What objectives of the programme have been undoubtedly achieved?

**Evaluation question 9:** Are there any changes in the programme area resulting from programme interventions that were not defined and foreseen by the Programme?

**Evaluation question 10:** Did the projects achieve the expected programme results?



## Answer:

The results of the web survey show us that regarding all specific objectives (SO) all of the included projects have achieved expected programme results, except for one project under SO 3.1 (ViCTour), while some of them also produced results that had not been initially planned. Project ViCTour during its implementation experienced several deviations including delays from the work plan. Some of the activities did not follow the dynamic plan adopted at the very beginning of the implementation phase. The main reasons behind these dysfunctions were of administrative nature, specifically, issues related to public procurement.

It can be concluded that SOs 2.2 and 3.1 of the programme have been undoubtedly achieved as projects under these two SOs reached all planned results. One of the projects under SO 3.1 (S.O.S.) had a big impact on the programme area.

Joint thematic cultural heritage product – Secession route connecting sister cities of Osijek and Subotica has been created. Joint secession heritage database, containing information on secession buildings, sites, cultural institutions and organisations in the project area has also been developed. Osijek Secession Park has been revitalized, preconditions have been created for the reconstruction of the City Hall in Subotica as an important building from the Secession period, a new local cross-border thematic tourist route/product has been created, the visibility of the market for common tourism products has increased as well as the capacity of cultural heritage.



The web survey of lead partners has shown that under SO 1.1 all the obtained answers (2 out of 2 responses) point to the fact that relevant projects achieved the intended results, with no unexpected additional results. Under this SO the most notable results were **increased knowledges/skills/capacities of key stakeholders and new services in the field of public health and social care sectors.**

Regarding SO 2.1, all answers within the survey emphasize that projects achieved all planned results and that there were no additional unplanned results achieved (2 out of 2 responses). The web survey has shown that the most important project results were **increased knowledges/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and more protection of biodiversity.**

Respondents' replies pertaining to SO 2.2 point out that all relevant projects achieved the intended results (3 out of 3 responses), while one of them (ES–GEES) brought about results that had not been originally planned. The most important results when it comes to this SO are **increased capacity of policy makers in sustainable energy planning and increased awareness of the benefits coming from the use of energy efficiency measures.**

Web survey's results further show that within SO 3.1 there was one answer (ViCTour) pointing out that that particular project had not achieved initially planned results (1 out of 5 responses), but most of the projects did achieve them. As stated above, ViCTour project during its implementation experienced several deviations including delays from the work plan. Some of the

activities did not follow the dynamic plan adopted at the very beginning of the implementation phase. The main reasons behind these dysfunctionalities were of administrative nature, specifically, issues related to public procurement. According to the survey, within the scope of this SO the most important results were **increased skills and competence of tourism actors in promoting sustainable and smart models and sustainable valorization of less known touristic destinations.**

The answers under SO 4.1 show that all projects achieved the intended results (3 out of 3 responses), while none of them yielded results that had not been planned at the beginning. The most important results achieved concerning this SO are **increased cooperation among entrepreneurial supporting institutions, clusters, educational and research organizations and entrepreneurs and contribution to the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions.**

The web survey further revealed that all programme developments and results cover relevant project outcomes and achievements. In particular, projects under SOs 2.2 and 3.1 have achieved all of the results as planned, while one project under each SO generated results that had not been planned to begin with (ES–GEES, S.O.S.) . It can be concluded that these two SOs have been undoubtedly achieved. One of the projects contributing to SO 3.1 included results that had not been initially planned (S.O.S.) and at the same time had a big impact on the programme area. Namely, it resulted in the reconstruction of the Sakuntala park, which has thus become more attractive for smaller gatherings and musical events, especially since the reconstruction included installation of a small pavillon, nowadays occasionally used for musical events. Representing Osijek's 19<sup>th</sup> century secession heritage, the newly renovated Sakuntala park is the starting point of S.O.S.'s cross-border secession thematic route. Joint thematic cultural heritage product – Secession route connecting sister cities of Osijek and Subotica has been created and developed as well as joint secession heritage database, containing information on secession buildings, sites, cultural institutions and organisations in the project area. Osijek Secession Park has been revitalized, preconditions have been created for the reconstruction of the City Hall in Subotica as an important building from the Secession period, a new local cross-border thematic tourist route/product has been created, the visibility of the market for common tourism products has increased as well as the capacity of cultural heritage.



### **EXtraordinary PLeasure of Our REgion - Common gastro, eco and recreation routes of Croatia and Serbia – EXPLORE CRO-SRB (Lead partner - Development Agency of Slavonski Brod Ltd. (HR))**

Although this project did not yield any results that had not been initially foreseen, it has managed to achieve all of the expected results. The results achieved in this project were as follows: 1. PR and external communication plan created; 2. Six pieces of research were conducted and results presented in the form of three studies; 3. Three round tables held in order to define 3 common tourism routes; 4. Gastro-, eco- and recreation specifics (points) of the cross-border region linked together in 3 common routes; 5. Short promotional film recorded; 6. 50 stakeholders, also the main promoters of created routes, trained; 7. A ten-month intensive social media marketing campaign conducted; 8. An e-cluster platform established; 9. 20 cooperations established between 20 tourism entities (common tourist services).

Case studies went on to prove that these projects did not have any difficulties nor were there any obstacles that they had to face. Only project EXPLORE CRO-SRB had an issue regarding the crash of the e-platform for web shop/online booking, in relation to which the representative of the lead partner pointed out that they will use their own funds to ensure sustainability of project results through the platform.

## Linkages between financed interventions and results

**Evaluation question 6:** What changes have been made in the programme area in terms of the needs and challenges of the programme area?

**Answer:** It can be concluded that expectations from Programme approach, structure and strategy, vary among beneficiaries. Adjustments, especially in use of new technologies, innovation and modernisation, are required.



Available Territorial analysis of the 2021-2027 IPA CBC HR-RS shows that priority goals from 2014-2020 period remain relevant but *importance* must be additionally given to:

- modernization and innovation of industry and the economy as a whole; investment in knowledge and activities based on research and development activities (R&D); focus on agriculture and ICT development in all sectors; supporting a strong ICT environment and better integration of ICT in other sectors of the economy; SME (Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise) competitiveness (Smarter Europe);

- increase in use of renewable energy sources and reduction of reliance on fossil fuels together with the increase in energy efficiency of public buildings; climate change adaptation; circular economy; enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure (Greener Europe);
- unemployment and poverty issues, brain drain and demographic trends, marginalised communities, health care and tourism and culture development; better development of existing services and introduction of new ones, non-institutional social welfare services since there is a low percentage of non - institutional social service especially for the elderly; connection between tourism and health infrastructure should be more emphasized and developed; clear opportunity for the development of projects that would be aimed at educational programmes for lifelong learning, especially VET programmes for the unemployed (Social Europe).

Interreg specific objective “A safer and more secure Europe” covering the themes of border crossing management and mobility and migration management is high on the list of priorities in the area. However, there is also a lack of jurisdiction of local and regional governments so the cross-border Programme should not focus on this issue.

The development needs *detected in the programme area* may be summarised in following:

Table 4. *Detected development needs*

<b>1. SMARTER EUROPE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and innovation</li> <li>• SME competitiveness</li> <li>• Digitisation of society</li> </ul>
<b>2. GREENER EUROPE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewable energy sources</li> <li>• Energy efficiency</li> <li>• Climate change adaptation</li> <li>• Circular economy</li> <li>• Nature protection and biodiversity</li> <li>• Multimodal mobility</li> </ul>
<b>3. SOCIAL EUROPE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and training</li> <li>• Access to health care</li> <li>• Tourism and culture</li> </ul>

Source: Territorial analysis of the 2021-2027 IPA CBC HR-RS



The survey answers show that the programme strategy is relevant for 46% of respondents, while 54% of respondents provide suggestions to better adapt programme strategy to “new technologies” which are particularly relevant in the cooperation area. More in detail, respondents highlighted the importance of:

- balancing expectations with reality (new cutting edge technology) – the issue being the fact that expectations were built from manufactured data which proved to be different in real life conditions;
- researching and developing new solutions in waste-to-energy concepts;

- introducing new technologies in tourism – challenges related to finding suitable suppliers of these technologies.



Several projects provide comments on programme structure and strategy. From the case studies, it is visible that projects did not report any significant unexpected challenges or needs that had a negative influence on overall project outcome. No changes in the intervention context occurs and all challenges detected in implementation phase had been solved within cross-border partnership. For example, project ES – GEES (PA2) emphasize that they believe that programme structure and strategy mostly covers all the needs in the programme area. On the other hand, project CROSS TREE (PA4) believes that it is “quite limited in scope, it does not consider the specific needs of agricultural industry, especially those parts of the industry, such as fruit and vines, where it is not so easy to have short-term results”.

**Evaluation question 7:** What programme interventions can be considered particularly successful in contributing to positive developments in the programme area?

**Answer:** Analysed projects within all four priority axes point towards a positive trend in reaching Programme goals. Implemented projects clearly contribute to the development of programme area in improving skills of caregivers (health services), ecosystem services’ implementation models, preservation of nature, fostering cross-border tourism development and introducing new products in business environment.



Analyzed case studies point out success of programme interventions within all four PAs. Projects implemented within PA1, MOS-Cross and ReGerNet, implemented all planned activities and achieved results that have had a significant impact in the area such as: establishment of a cross-border integrated system (ICT tool) of mosquito and MBDs surveillance in cross-border area; establishment of Regional Academy for caregivers’ training (RACT), within the organizational structure of the GCSU.

Within PA2, projects IMPACT-ENVI, EcoWET and ES-GEES achieved all activities and results, as planned. Some of them have been particularly successful and created numerous positive developments in programme area: added value was cross-border introduction of a new monitoring/evaluation system which enabled screening of soil and water quality, followed by screening of livestock and vegetable production status as well as screening of invasive species, diseases and pests; energy reconstruction of primary schools; an Action plan for improving ecosystem services in six pilot areas; construction of ecosystem processors (constructed wetlands).

Under project EXPLORE CRO-SRB within PA3, all activities were implemented and results achieved, while the most notable impact on the target group was enabling easier market access for small producers and increase of their visibility, which was achieved with project activities.

All activities were also successfully carried out and results reached by projects Eco build and CROSS TREE within PA 4. Those projects also greatly contribute to Programme results: new products and valuable knowledge in the area of agricultural biomass waste management (this

project brought a new approach to tackling agricultural waste in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way); acquirement of new skills and knowledge in nursery production and local products development, then upgraded the quality of fruit tree nursery products in both cross border regions through the process of guided product standardization and introduction of new products and technologies, and creation of cross-border linkages between business, academic and public sector aimed at increased competitiveness and efficiency. Above expectation, project CROSS TREE “resulted in increased interest of younger generation in fruit production industry, which in turn fostered creation of a new study programme at the University of Novi Sad”.

**Evaluation question 8:** What are the conclusions given the project results and their expected impact? What are the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact?

**Answer:** Although projects have had a positive impact, sustainability of their activities is difficult to achieve due to lack of key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact such as other funding opportunities and uncertain circumstances as a result of Covid-19 pandemic that has had a significant impact on continuation of project activities.

All of the projects that were included in case studies had successfully achieved or even exceeded all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. The expected impact of all projects was achieved, although in case of some projects it is difficult to quantify. On the overall, it can be safely concluded that project activities have definitely had a positive impact on the programme area in general.



### **Wetlands Ecosystem Services Assessment in Croatia-Serbia cross border region – EcoWET (Lead partner - Nature Conservation Movement of Sremska Mitrovica (RS))**

The EcoWET project encompassed activities that included an Action plan for improving ecosystem services in six pilot areas; construction of ecosystem processors (constructed wetlands); Guidance on mapping, assessment and monitoring of ecosystem services; well-organised media campaigns and a documentary film on ecosystem services in pilot areas. These results contributed to sustainable management of protected areas, increased cooperation of all stakeholders (nature protection sector, local government, public utilities companies, sectoral agencies, civil society organisations), especially between the two public agencies for forest management (Hrvatske šume, Vojvodinašume).



The web survey with lead project partners has shown that the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact and sustainability are continued funding after completion of project implementation, which was especially highlighted by 9 out of 14 respondents

(64,28%), followed by improvement of overall circumstances regarding Covid-19 crisis, emphasized within 4 out of 14 answers (28,57%).

Although up to a different extent, most of the replies to the survey notably focus on the lack of funding opportunities following project completion as the biggest challenge for project sustainability as well as variable Covid-19 situation that has had a large impact on the cross-border movements and which thus hampers the cooperation and connections between the two countries.



The web survey with lead project partners has shown that the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact and sustainability are continued funding after the project that highlighted 9 out of 14 respondents (64,28%) and better situation regarding Covid-19 crisis that emphasized 4 out of 14 answers (28,57%). Most of the survey answers focus on the lack of funding opportunities after the project completion as the biggest challenge for the project sustainability, as well as variable Covid-19 situation that has a large impact on the cross-border movements which complicate the cooperation and connection between countries.

## Conclusions for future interventions

**Evaluation question 11:** What are the links between activities and/or programme achievements and the overall EU framework for the post-2020 period?

**Answer:** looking to the key results achieved under 2014-2020 the most relevant SO for the future programming period are:

- PO 1 SO (i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
- PO 1 SO (iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
- PO 2 SO (iv) "Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience"
- PO 2 SO (i) "Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions"
- PO 4 SO (v) "Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care".
- PO 4 SO (vi) "Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation"



This section aims at finding the link between the specific objectives set for the 2021-2027 programming period (CPR, ERDF and Interreg regulations and annexes) and the results emerging from interventions financed by the Programme in the current programming period.

The analysis was developed by:

1. aggregating the information collected from the survey and the case studies about the categories of results achieved by the projects financed by the 2014-2020;
2. comparing the results achieved to the 2021-2027 strategical framework (i.e. list of policy objectives and specific objectives).

The match between the results achieved and the 2021-2027 policy framework is presented in Table 5 below.

Key results of the analysis:

- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 1.1 *Improving the quality of the facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care* (i.e., increasing knowledges/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the field of public health and social care sectors, by improving the access to health and social care services and by introducing new services in the field of health and social care) are consistent with results targeted in 2021-2027 under PO 4, SO (v) "Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 2.1 *Enforce integrated cross-border monitoring / management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection* shows are consistent with the results targeted under PO 2, SO (iv) "Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 2.2 *Promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency* are consistent with what is expected for the future programming period under PO 2 SO (i) "Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 3.1 are consistent with what expected for the future programming period under PO 4 SO (vi) "Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 4.1 are consistent with what expected for the future programming period under PO 1 SO (i) "Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies" and SO (iv) "Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship".



Table 5. Overview of the links between the results achieved by the 2014-2020 programme and the 2021-2027 policy framework

		SO 1.1	SO 1.1	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.1
		Increased knowledges/skills/capacities	New services in the field of health and social care	Better access to health and social care services	Increased knowledges/skills/capacities	More protection of biodiversity	Better governance in the field of nature protection and	Increased awareness of the benefits coming from the use	Increased skills and competence of tourism	More diversified tourism offer	Sustainable valorisation of less known touristic	Increased attractiveness of the cooperation area (more	Encouraging the exchange of best practices in the	Increase of skills and competences of SMEs
PO 1	(i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies												x	
	(iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship													x
PO 5	(i) Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions							x						
	(iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience				x	x	x							
PO 4	(v) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care	x	x	x										
	(vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation								x	x	x	x		

**Evaluation question 12:** Is there a gap between the realized and remaining/new needs of the programme area? What are the conclusions and recommendations for the post-2020 period?

**Answer:** the analysis shows that, during the 2014-2020 programming period, the funds provided by the Programme played a key role in responding to the needs of the territory. Data also indicate that the capacity of beneficiaries to mobilise other funds is limited. All in all, the analysis suggests that the territory still has needs in terms of funding, for which the future programme is called to play a crucial role.

The analysis of the cross-border added value and of the possible capitalisation activities suggests that the future programme shall pay particular attention to supporting actions aimed at improving the policy instruments of the area; creation of new policy instruments (plans, agreements) integrated across borders; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems at cross-border level.

Moreover, the future programme shall pay particular attention to the difficulties in ensuring the financial sustainability of the projects since the application phase, to guide future project partners in planning specific actions for ensuring synergies with other policy instruments and for consequently increasing the capacity of the projects to mobilise other funds. The analysis of the presence of possible gaps between what was achieved by the Programme and the needs of the cooperation area is based on two different sources.

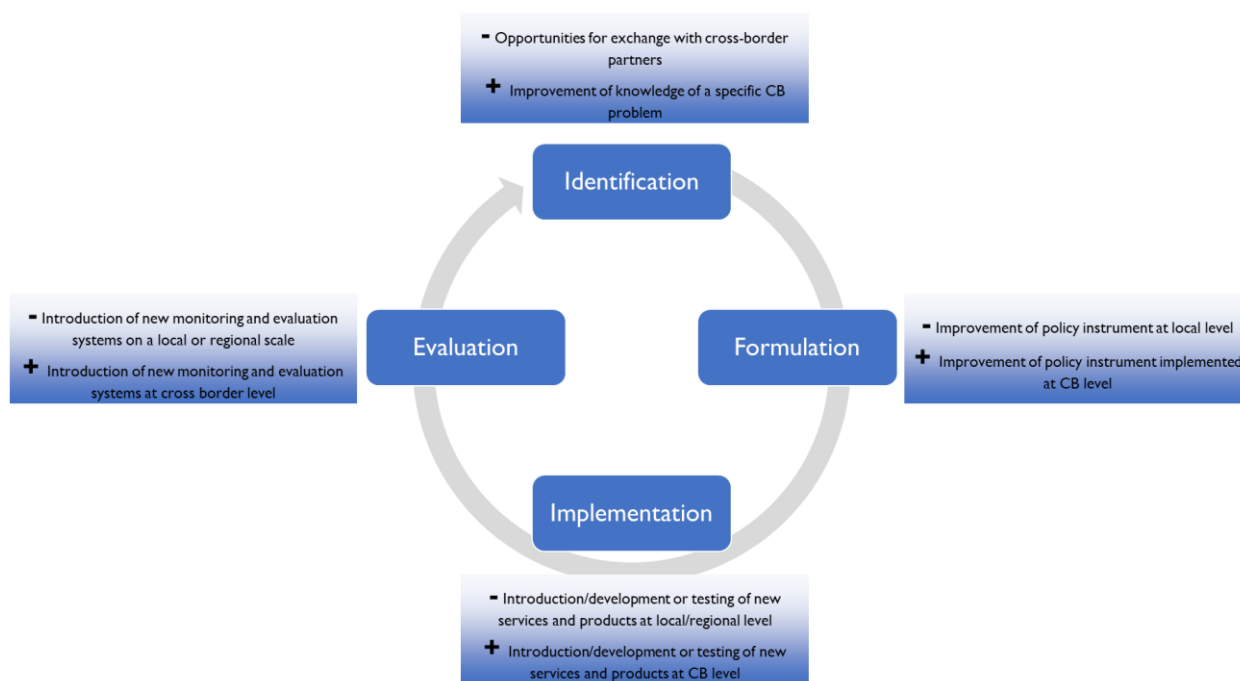
1. First, based on the data collected through the websurvey, we investigated the perceptions of beneficiaries regarding the cross border added value of their project and indirectly we identified possible gaps in terms of types of activities not yet implemented at cross border scale.
2. Second, based on the answers to the web-survey, we verified to what extent the beneficiaries trust in future interreg funds to follow up on the project activities.



### ***Possible remaining/new needs in terms of types of activities to be implemented***

A specific section of the web-survey was dedicated to investigating the cross border added value of the operations financed. The options provided to the beneficiaries in the questionnaire correspond to different phases of the policy cycle and, for each phase, to different levels of "intensity" of cross-border added value. The figure below summarises the logic underpinning this specific part of the questionnaire.

Figure 4. Logic underpinning the questions on the CB added value



The table below illustrates the results of the web-survey. Beneficiaries consider that the cross border added value of their project mainly lie on the improvement of knowledge of a specific cross border problem (i.e. identification phase) and on the introduction/ development or testing of new services and products at local/regional level (i.e. implementation phase). We can deduce that possible gaps in terms of activities not yet carried out at cross-border level are at the level of formulation and evaluation of the policies. This is also confirmed by the responses provided to the specific question on the possible future capitalisation activities: 54% of respondents declare that future capitalisation activities shall focus on activities related to the implementation of policies/solutions, 31% on evaluation and monitoring of previously implemented solutions, while only 8% shall focus on identification of territorial/sectoral needs

Future programme can consequently consider to pay particular attention to interventions aimed at improving the policy and the monitoring instruments at local and cross border level.

Table 6. What is the key cross-border added value of the project?

Phase	Type of added-value	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
Identification	Creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners and for promotion of international networks	50%	100%	67%	60%	0%	53%
	Improvement or transfer of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories	100%	100%	67%	80%	100%	87%
Formulation	Improvement of policy instruments (plans, agreements) at local or regional level	50%	0%	0%	20%	0%	13%

Phase	Type of added-value	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
	Creation of new policy instruments (plans, agreements) integrated across borders	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	7%
Implementation	Introduction/development or testing of new services and products at local/regional level	100%	100%	0%	100%	67%	73%
	Introduction/development or testing of new services and products at cross border level	100%	50%	0%	80%	33%	53%
Evaluation	Introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale	100%	100%	0%	20%	0%	33%
	Introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems at cross border level	100%	50%	0%	40%	0%	33%

Source: Data survey



### **Possible remaining/new needs in terms of need for funds**

A specific section of the web-survey was dedicated to investigating at which extent beneficiaries have relied and will in future rely on the programme funds to carry out their projects.

Key findings emerging from the survey:

- 83% consider that the funding opportunities provided by the Programme have been essential to carry out the planned activities (see Table 7 below).
- Less than half of respondents are mobilising and/or will mobilise other funds (than the co-financing) for supporting project activities.
- Synergies with other EU instruments are limited and mainly refer to the smart specialisation strategies of the partners regions (see Table 8).
- 100% of respondents plan to continue project activities beyond the duration of the project and for 70% of them the potential lack of funding represents the key challenge for the sustainability over time of the projects.
- 93% of respondents declare that they will apply for a new cross-border project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme to capitalise on the results of your project.

Table 7. Funding opportunities provided by the Programme

	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
<b>Essential</b>	100%	100%	67%	80%	100%	83%
<b>Important</b>	0%	0%	33%	20%	0%	17%
<b>Complementary to other funding sources</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Data survey

Table 8. Synergies with other policy instruments

	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
<b>S3 of the partners regions</b>	50%	50%	33%	40%	100%	53%
<b>Horizon 2020</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>COSME</b>	0%	0%	33%	40%	0%	20%
<b>Enterprise Europe Network</b>	0%	0%	0%	40%	0%	13%
<b>LIFE</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Other</b>	50%	50%	33%	0%	0%	20%

Source: Data survey

**Evaluation question 13:** Is there a more cost-effective and/or simple way to achieve the programme specific objectives? (to be answered separately for each specific objective)

**Answer:** The analysis removes doubts about possible inefficiencies of projects characterised by large partnerships. From the statistical perspective, there is no evidence about possible correlations between the size of the partnership and delays in the implementation of the projects.

This evaluation question aims to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of projects according to their partnership size, i.e. to see if the presence of a larger partnership represents an added value or a risk in terms of achievement of the intended objectives (at project and programme level). This analysis is carried out through data analysis by verifying whether we can observe a correlation between the partnership size and the efficiency of the projects in terms of respect of deadlines and progress in absorption of funds.

More precisely:

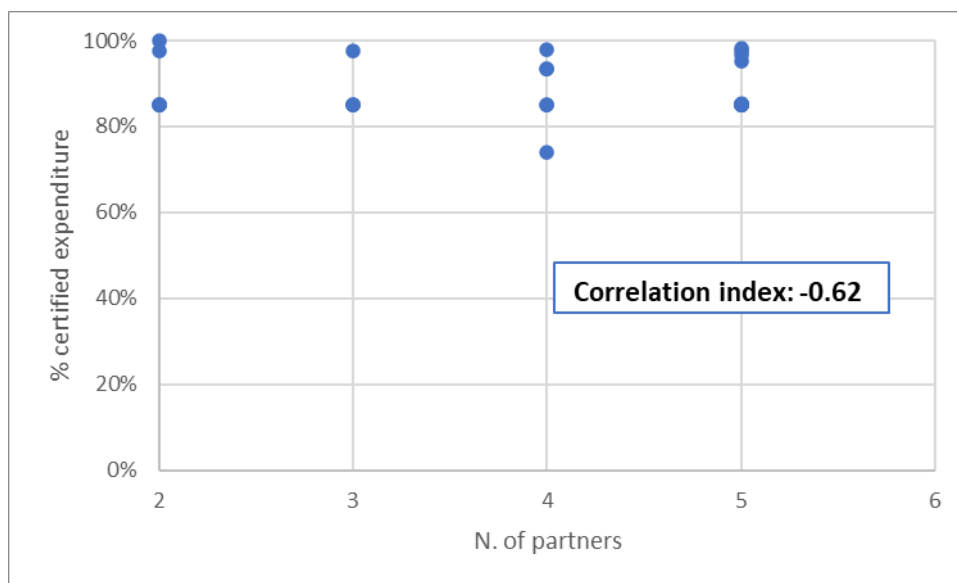
- as a first step, we have investigated possible correlation between the partnership size (i.e., the number of project partners) and the percentage of expenditures certified (i.e., total amount of expenditures certified by MA and CA out of the total budget of the project).
- secondly we have analysed possible correlation the partnership size (i.e., the number of project partners) and the number of delays in the project closure (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS).

It is important to underline that, considering that projects financed under the second call are still in the early stage, both analysis were carried out by only considering projects financed under the first call.

### ***Correlation between size of the partnership and budget absorption***

The statistical analysis of the data related to the projects financed under calls 1 and 2 shows a negative correlation between the partnership size and the percentage of certified expenditure (i.e., the correlation index is -0.62, see figure below).

Figure 5. Analysis of correlation between size of the partnership and budget absorption

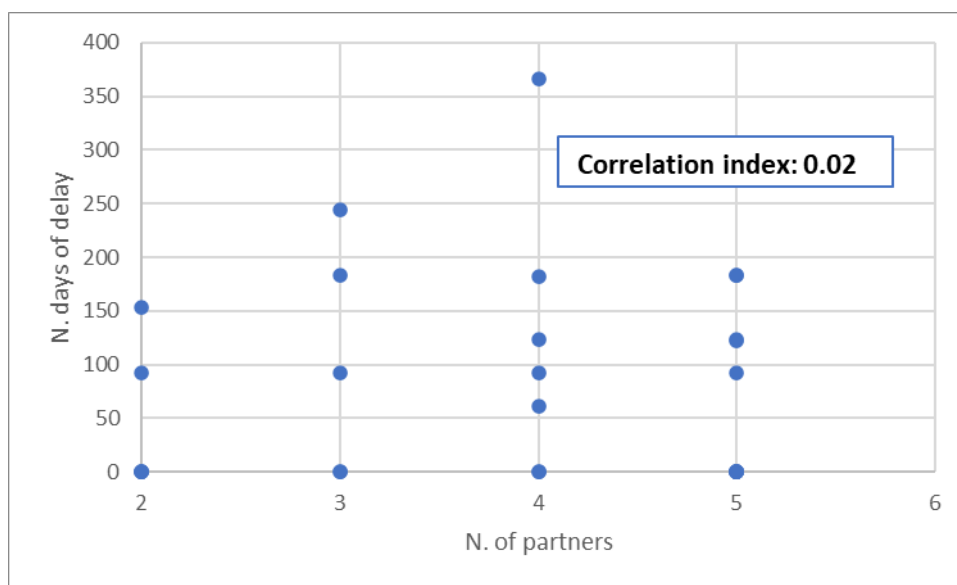


Source: own elaboration based data provided by MA/JS

**Correlation between size of the partnership and days of delay in project closure**

The lack of evidence regarding possible inefficiencies characterising the large partnerships is also confirmed by the figure below which shows an almost null correlation between the partnership size and the number of days of delays with respect to the project deadline initially established (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS)..

Figure 6. Analysis of correlation between size of the partnership and days of delay



Source: own elaboration based data provided by MA/JS

## Horizontal issues

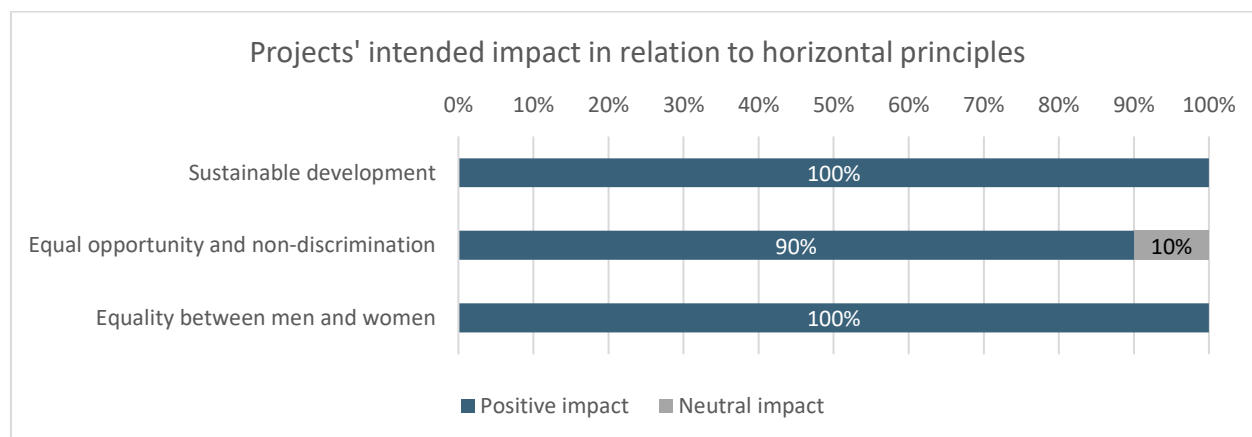
**Evaluation question 14:** Did the planned measures/projects successfully contribute to the horizontal programme principles?

**Answer:** The analysis based on the review of project application forms points to the overwhelmingly positive contribution to horizontal programme principles. Simultaneously, survey results – conducted after the projects were finalized – confirm that the projects had a positive net impact, albeit a more modest one.



Based on the analysis of programme documents, namely, application forms and project progress reports of the projects used as case studies, it can be stated that the overall intended contribution to horizontal programme principles is overwhelmingly positive. The most noticeable intended impact has been projected in the area of minimizing environmental impact and achieving sustainable development (horizontal principle Sustainable development (environment)), with 100% of the analysed projects having a net positive effect. The same is true for projects' intended contribution to the principle of Equality between men and women (100% intended positive impact). For the principle Equal opportunities and non-discrimination, a slightly lesser number of projects intended to achieve a net positive impact, i.e. 90% of them. The remaining 10% considered their contribution to the horizontal principle to be neutral.

*Figure 7. Projects' intended impact in relation to horizontal principles*



The results of the online survey conducted also point towards a largely net positive impact related to the projects' contribution to horizontal principles. Out of the total number of survey participants, 92.3% of them stated that their projects had a positive impact on creating a more supportive environment for sustainable development. Out of the same number of respondents, 76.9% considered their projects to be contributing to the creation of equal opportunities and non-discrimination and 69.2% to equality between men and women. In

comparison to the results derived from the desk analysis, the overall impact on the contribution to horizontal principles is still significant, although to a smaller extent.

Horizontal principle	The share of projects that contributed to horizontal principles	The share of projects that didn't contribute to horizontal principles
Sustainable development	92.3%	7.7%
Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	76.9%	20.1%
Equality between men and women	69.2%	30.8%

The survey participants were given the opportunity to specify how their projects contributed to horizontal principles and their comments are presented below.

### Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

*'The SeNs Wetlands project promoted equal opportunities and prevention of any kind of discrimination during each phase of its realization. Members of the project team were people born in different countries (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary), had different nationalities and were of different age (from young researchers in their twenties to a professor emeritus in her seventies). The opinions and ideas of each project member were equally valued, and the obligations were uniformly and fairly distributed. All project team members were treated in the same manner and had the same rights. Moreover, through all performed procurement procedures (including engagement of experts having an appropriate field of expertise) all applicants had the same conditions and have been treated in the same way without exception. People of different backgrounds, ages, and nationalities were engaged. Questionnaires for stakeholder surveys and leaflets used for the popularization of project goals were created in three local languages (Serbian, Croatian and Hungarian).'*"

### Sustainable development

*"Reduction GHG, increasing of renewables using."*

*"Implementation of the project was planned in such a way to reduce carbon footprint associated with travel and meetings. Travelling to all meetings, workshops and trainings was by car, but 4 persons from the same place would travel in one car. Food served at meetings had local origin which significantly reduces CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Overall, this project proposal was implemented in a way to contribute to the sustainable development of program area."*

### Equality between men and women

*"This project fully supported and contributed to gender equality by employing the same number of women and men and putting women in charge of leadership roles. All project members had equal rights in any segment of the project's realization. Many experts engaged by partners' institutions were women."*



*"Project considered the issues of gender balance throughout project implementation particularly during the composition of the project management group while organising workshops and trainings, and while performing activities in pilot areas."*



**Development of Social Care Services within the Regional Gerontology Network – ReGerNet (Lead partner - Gerontology Centre: Social and Health Institution for Providing Care to Adult Persons (RS))**

The Project had no negative impact on the ecology and the environment and as such contributes towards sustainable development. The resources used by the institutions are mainly renewable, non-renewable resources are treated in line with the national prescriptions and used minimally.

Equal opportunity and non-discrimination were respected and promoted during preparation, design and implementation of the project. All people, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity or religious views will have benefits resulting from project activities. This includes services that were provided to users, and the possibility to attend training and obtain a certificate.

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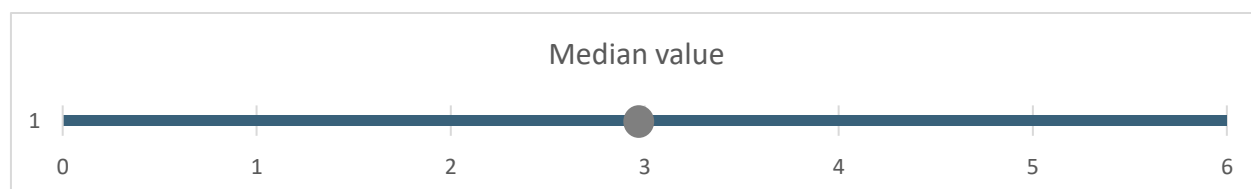
Men and women had an equal opportunity to be involved in the project. This includes the management of the project, possibility of attending training and obtaining a certificate and also the services that will be provided to end users regardless of their gender.

**Evaluation question 15:** How much has the Programme contributed to the relevant macro-regional strategies?

**Answer:** A considerable share of analysed projects was aligned with some of EUSAIR’s and EUSDR’s Pillars. On the basis of self-assessment, their perceived contribution to the two strategies can be deemed as varying between average to high.



A significant level of synergy between the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and Interreg bilateral cross-border cooperation programme can be confirmed

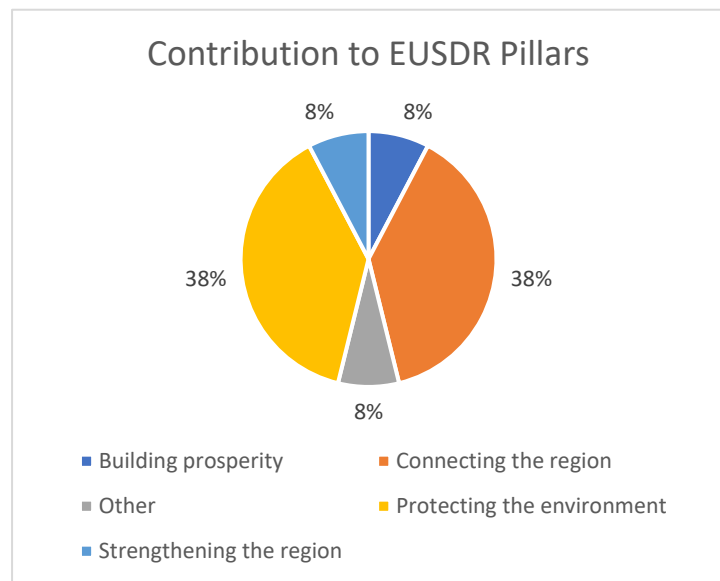


on the basis of survey results. Namely, out of the total number of respondents, 92% of them stated that their projects were aligned with EUSAIR’s Pillars. Out of these, 42% of the projects were in line with EUSAIR’s Pillar 3 (Environmental Quality), 33% with Pillar 4 (Sustainable tourism) and 25% with Pillar 2 (Connecting the region). When requested to assess the level of their contribution to EUSAIR on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= no contribution, 5= strong contribution), survey participants estimated their contribution to be at the level of 3 (median value).

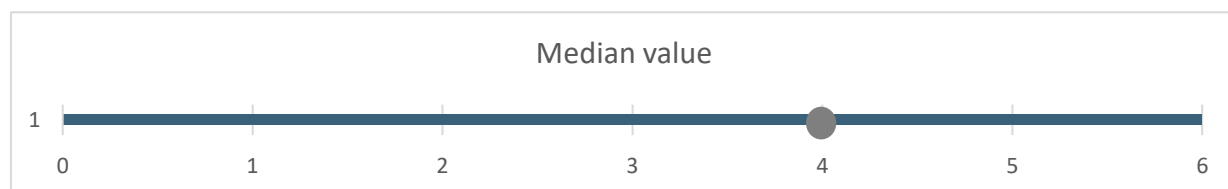
For example, the respondents stated that in the scope of EUSAIR’s Pillar 2 (Connecting the region) their projects were particularly successful in creating institutional ties through the establishment of clusters. The clusters positively impacted competitiveness and innovativeness in several sectors (agriculture, paper industry and mechanical engineering). The contribution to Sustainable tourism can be observed in the promotion of cultural heritage, connecting regions, people and countries. These results contributed to better and standardized quality of tourism services, in line with EUSAIR’s objectives. As for Pillar 3 (Environmental Quality), the respondents emphasized their impact on the promotion of renewable energy, exchange of knowledge and know-how, utilisation of renewable energy on local levels, as well as the development of strategies and policies on local and cross-border levels.

Figure 8. Contribution to EUSDR Pillars

Concerning the contribution of the analysed projects to the EUSDR Pillars, a significant share of survey respondents (38%) recognized that the implemented projects correspond to EUSDR’s goal of Protecting the environment, and further 38% aligned their project close to EUSDR’s goal of Connecting the region. The results of the survey are presented in the chart.



When requested to assess the level of their contribution to EUSDR on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= no contribution, 5= strong contribution), survey participants estimated their contribution to be at the level of 4 (median value).



The respondents recognized their alignment with the EUSDR mostly in terms of diversification of tourist offer, building connections and institutional ties, and implementing innovative solutions that foster conditions for better environmental protection. By exchanging experiences and implementing a joint project, the respondents recognized a significant contribution to the prosperity of the Danube Region and a further need to strengthen transnational cooperation.



**Development of Social Care Services within the Regional Gerontology Network – ReGerNet (Lead partner - Gerontology Centre: Social and Health Institution for Providing Care to Adult Persons (RS))**

Priority Area 9 "Investing in People and Skills" of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) activities are focusing on actions to improve the performance and quality of education and training systems, to foster cooperation between key stakeholders regarding the labour market, education and research policies, to promote social cohesion, active citizenship and to empower actors on all levels in the Danube Region, to improve cross-sector policy coordination, to fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalized communities and to promote gender equality. The project enabled social inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly elderly people and emphasized the active participation of beneficiaries of social services and the development of their independence. Provision of social services is at the same time a great opportunity for increasing the employment of persons belonging to less employable groups – particularly women. Since there is a huge deficit of qualified caregivers, training of staff and introducing new elderly-care services, contributed to the employability of people.

**Evaluation question 16:** Have the established communication goals been achieved and how have the target groups accepted the Programme?

**Answer:** Most of the Programme communication goals have been achieved, such as the goal to ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups within project and/or Programme area, and/or to the general public. Target groups gained new knowledge and improved their capacities which were the initially expected impacts of the projects.



The document Communication Strategy of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020 sets out overall communication objectives that will be achieved by contributing to related specific communication objectives, through using communication tools and measures, and implementing communication activities.

### **Overall communication objective 1 (CO1):**

To contribute to the generation and quality of the cross-border cooperation operations

- 1.1 To ensure successful communication between the programme bodies in order to implement the Programme and related Communication Strategy successfully
- 1.2 To raise awareness about Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia – Serbia 2014-2020 and its funding opportunities
- 1.3 To support the beneficiaries during operation implementation in order to ensure successful implementation of operations

### **Overall communication objective 2 (CO2):**

To raise awareness and disseminate the information about the Programme and benefits of cross-border cooperation and to ensure coordination with other relevant programmes Interreg IPA CBC Programme Croatia-Serbia 2014-2020 – Communication Strategy

- 2.1 To raise awareness about the Programme and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups in the programme area and to the general public
- 2.2 To ensure successful external communication towards their relevant programmes (Interreg, mainstream, macro-regional strategies) and share of good practice with them in order to contribute to effective functioning of the Programme



According to the web survey, most of the Programme communication goals have been achieved, such as the goal to ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes (Interreg, mainstream, macro-regional strategies), which was highlighted by 3 out of 16 respondents or 18.75% of respondents, and to raise awareness about the Programme and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups in the project and/or Programme area and/or to the general public, which was emphasized by 13 out of 16 respondents or 81,25% of them.



In all case studies it can be noticed that target groups gained new knowledge and improved their capacities which were the initially expected impacts of the projects. In most of the projects all target values were exceeded, which was not initially foreseen.



### **Mosquito control in cross-border Area – MOS-Cros (Lead partner - Public Health Institute Sombor (RS))**

Project MOS-Cros contributed to programme communication objectives, mainly by extensive cooperation between cross-border stakeholders and by increasing the level of knowledge and awareness about MDBs and project activities, through workshops, training sessions and visits to local public authorities, schools and elderly care centres.

### **Implementation of crossborder joint actions toward environment protection in agriculture – IMPACT-ENVI (Lead partner - J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek (HR))**

Project IMPACT-ENVI contributed to the Programme communication objectives by raising awareness and increasing knowledge about agricultural production technologies and their impact on the environment. This was achieved through numerous workshops, roundtables, media coverage, but also through daily interaction with local farmers and other agricultural producers.

## SO 1.1: Improving the quality of the facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care

**Evaluation question 17:** Have new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors been introduced thanks to the interventions of the Programme?

**Evaluation question 18:** To what extent has the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the program?

**Answer:** Data from the survey indicate that new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors have been introduced mostly thanks to the interventions of the Programme, such as by developing, testing or adopting cross-border initiatives, tools, services and/or related pilot projects aiming to enhance quality, improve accessibility (increased number of service users) and effectiveness of public health care, social services and institutions and by improving competences/skills of key stakeholders. This suggests that the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the Programme.



The conducted survey had a low response rate. Under PA1 and SO 1.1. eight projects were approved, but only two Lead Partners provided answers to the survey. Results obtained from the survey suggest that 2 out of 2 projects are in line with the planned timeline of the project towards its results, and therefore there is no risk related to delivery. Additionally, both respondents emphasize that their projects have achieved or are expecting to achieve the planned results, and none of them expect results that had not been initially planned.

Regarding Covid-19 pandemic, 2 out of 2 replies to the survey highlighted the fact that projects have been able to deliver all foreseen activities, with no substantial change of plans, which means that their intervention logic has not been jeopardized by such external circumstances.

The answers from the survey suggested that one project had focused its activities on specific target groups, while the other did not. Respondents mentioned children, the elderly and local authorities as target groups that they focused on.

Data from the survey further indicate that new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors have been introduced thanks to the interventions of the Programme:

- by developing, testing or adopting cross-border initiatives, tools, services and/or related pilot projects aiming to enhance quality, improve accessibility (in the form of increased number of service users) and effectiveness of public health care and social services and institutions (2 out of 7 replies, 28.57%);
- by improving competences/skills of key stakeholders (2 out of 7 respondents, 28.57%);
- through studies and research in the field of health care and social care services (1 out of 7 answers, 14.28%);
- by financing small-scale infrastructural interventions, purchase of new equipment (1 out of 7 answers, 14.28%);
- through policy instruments for improving the cross-border coordination in the field of public health and social care sectors (1 out of 7 answers, 14.28%).

Thanks to the activities financed by the Programme, the availability of services in public health and social care sectors were improved in terms of better access to health and social care services, increased knowledges/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the field of public health and social care sectors and emergence of new services offered in the health and social care sector.



### **Mosquito Control in Cross-border Area (Lead partner – Public Health Institute Sombor (RS))**

Example of project contribution to specific objective 1.1: Improving the quality of the facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care:

- Establishment of a cross-border integrated system (ICT tool) of mosquito and MBDs surveillance
- Procurement of surveillance and laboratory equipment and training for public health professionals in West Bačka District and Osijek-Baranja County
- Mosquito population containment in critical locations in both regions by environmentally responsible mosquito abatement treatments, increase of knowledge of relevant actors and the public on individual mosquito population control measures and potential MBD threats
- Organised meetings, workshops and training sessions for different target groups
- Introduction of a new monitoring/evaluation system (through infrastructure, platform or methodology used by both Croatian and Serbian institutions)

## SO 2.1: Enforce integrated cross-border monitoring / management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection

**Evaluation question 19:** How much has risk management been strengthened and improved through activities financed from the programme?

**Evaluation question 20:** How did the interventions of the programme affect the environment and biodiversity in the programme area?

**Evaluation question 21:** Have the activities related to the importance of nature conservation been implemented, enhanced understanding of the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems among the local population and visitors of the area?

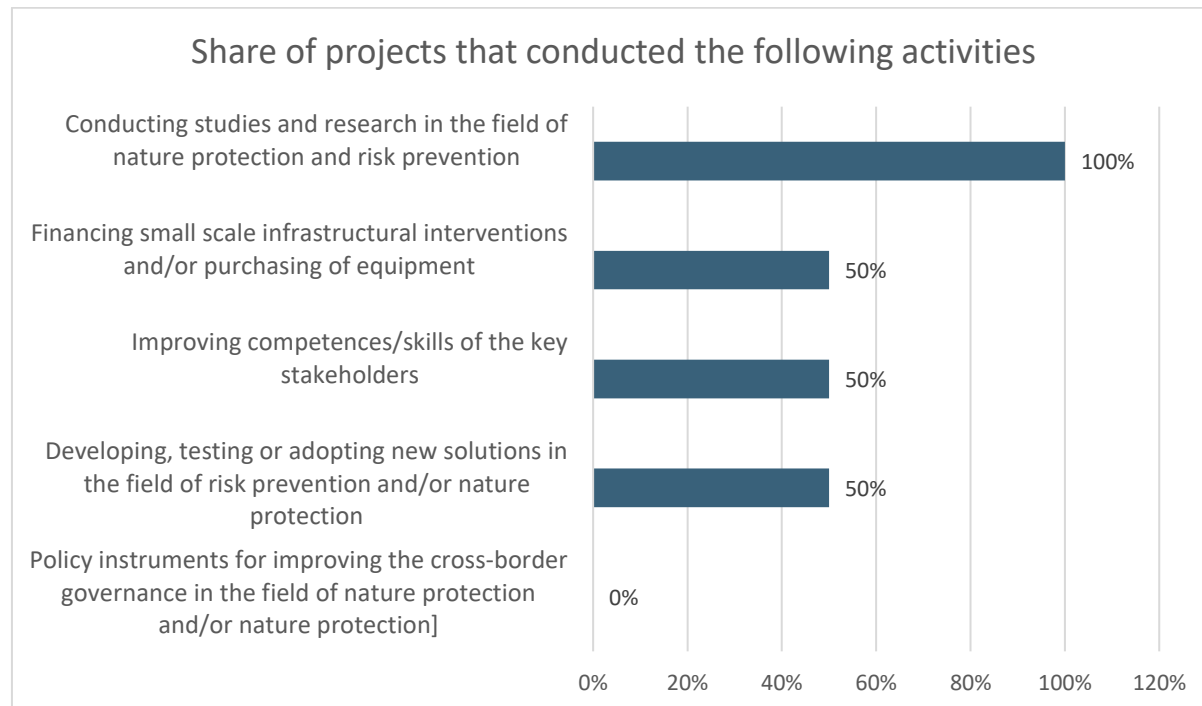
**Answer:** Within projects in the scope of Specific Objective 2.1. activities were conducted that exerted a positive impact and strengthened risk management systems. That was achieved mostly through conducting studies and research in the field of nature protection and risk prevention. Simultaneously, their impact was the weakest on the development of policy instruments for improving cross-border governance in the field. Concerning interventions that were intended to have an impact on biodiversity and awareness-raising, the evaluation team observed that the projects were successful in achieving their stated objectives.



In the scope of PA 2 “Protecting the environment and biodiversity, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency”, one of the SOs is “To enforce integrated cross-border monitoring / management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection”. The evaluation team conducted a web survey in order to estimate the level of impact the implemented projects had on strengthening risk management, on biodiversity and environment as well as raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation efforts. Due to a very low response rate, the findings presented below are not without certain limitations. Under PA2 and SO 2.1. six projects were approved, but only two Lead Partners provided answers to the survey.

Concerning the goal of improving or strengthening risk management systems, survey respondents tackled the aforementioned issue most noticeably by conducting studies and research in the field of nature protection and risk prevention. Likewise, the respondents stated that results in the area were achieved through financing small scale infrastructural interventions, improving the competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders as well as through the development and implementation of new solutions. None of the respondents stated that they focused on the development of policy instruments for improving cross-border governance in the field. The results of the survey are presented below.

Figure 9. A share of projects that conducted the following activities



Out of the total number of survey respondents, only one project focused on a specific type of risk/hazard. In that particular case, the project’s objectives were directed at minimizing damages



from floods and pollution. One other project focused on specific habitats, namely, wetlands. All of the respondents stated they had a positive impact on increasing knowledge/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and creating conditions for better protection of biodiversity. Only one project recognized its impact on improving governance in the field of nature protection and risk prevention. However, the projects' impact on such capacities to respond to risks has not been observed.

Concerning the effect of the intervention on the understanding of the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems among the local population and visitors to the area, the survey results do not point towards a definitive answer to these questions, so a case study was used as the primary method of analysis.



**Wetlands Ecosystem Services Assessment in Croatia-Serbia cross border region - EcoWET (Lead partner - Nature Conservation Movement of Sremska Mitrovica (RS))**

EcoWET project was initiated primarily to address the issue of degradation of wetland ecosystems caused by varying human activities. Also, this project aimed to deal with low level of awareness of positive impact that wetland ecosystems have for human environment and, more broadly, for the whole society. Three key objectives were identified in the project. Starting with the first, this project's goal was to improve the management of protected wetland areas in the project area, by connecting monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem services. Secondly, the project's objective was to strengthen cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation of relevant stakeholders in the project area. Here the project builds on already existing network that was established during the project Living Danube. Lastly, another objective of the EcoWET project was to raise public awareness on importance of wetlands and their services for society, with special focus on locals in the project area.

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Some of the achievements include Action plan for improving ecosystem services in six pilot areas; construction of ecosystem processors (constructed wetlands); Guidance on mapping, assessment and monitoring of ecosystem services; well-organised media campaigns and a documentary film on ecosystem services in pilot areas. These remarkable results contributed to sustainable management of protected areas, increased cooperation of all stakeholders (nature protection sector, local government, public utilities companies, sectoral agencies, civil society organisations), especially between the two public agencies for forest management (Hrvatske šume, Vojvodinašume). The key results of this project were quite diverse so they can be placed in several categories, such as 'Development of solutions or products', 'Testing/piloting (small-scale infrastructure, projects)', and 'New monitoring and evaluation systems'.

## SO 2.2: Promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency

**Evaluation question 22:** Did the projects develop new energy solutions?

**Evaluation question 23:** Can changes in public awareness be recognised as a result of the promotion of sustainable energy sources?

**Evaluation question 24:** How much did the implemented project activities contribute to the reduction of electricity consumption in public buildings in the programme area?

**Answer:** Under the specific objective 2.2. three interventions have been implemented within the 1<sup>st</sup> Call for Proposals (finalisation of projects: one project ended at the beginning of 2019, while two projects ended at the beginning of 2020). The outputs and results of these projects suggest that the cross border area has experienced an increase in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources. The contribution to the PA2 indicator *Additional capacity of renewable energy production* consists of 3,6 MW renewable energy produced by the 3 implemented projects. Furthermore, implemented project activities led to better governance in energy planning (tools, regulatory frameworks, standards), increased awareness of the benefits coming from the use of energy efficiency measures, increased capacity of policy makers in the sustainable energy planning and reduction of energy consumption.



Data gathered through desk research and survey suggest that all of the three implemented projects developed new energy solutions which were tested and approved within the project duration. All of the implemented projects under the SO 2.2. can be categorized as joint pilot and demonstration projects on innovative technologies and solutions in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy resources. They resulted in the installation of:

- solar power plants,
- biogas cogeneration plant,
- biogas production plant,
- solar public lighting,
- photovoltaic hybrid power plant.

One of the projects implemented within SO 2.2. piloted wooden pellet circular economy process as a solution which promotes the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency.



Within projects implemented under SO 2.2. several educational and promotional activities were held and promotional material was developed aimed at awareness raising on the utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency. Those activities were targeted at several groups, i.e. pupils, students, school principals, decision-makers, general public. The use of renewable energy sources was promoted also through innovative actions (i.e. local

competition in producing electricity). According to the progress reports and survey results, aforementioned activities resulted in increase of knowledge about energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources in the cross-border region.



The conducted survey had a low response rate. Under PA2 and SO 2.2. seven projects were approved, but only three Lead Partners provided answers to the survey. Data from the survey show that implemented project activities contribute to the reduction of electricity consumption in public buildings in the programme area mostly by financing small scale infrastructural interventions, improving competences/skills and raising awareness of the key stakeholders, through developing, testing and adopting new solutions in the field of renewable energies and energy efficiency.

All project activities were completed on schedule and no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. As most projects ended shortly before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect projects in any way.

Example of the project contribution to specific objective 2.2: Promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency

Project	Contribution to SO 2.2
ES-GEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>decreased energy consumption by implementation of the EE reconstructions in combination with the use of renewable energy sources</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reduction in the installed power of lighting by 79.19% (from 5,883 kW to 1,224 kW)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a new, independent pellet heating system and a thermal solar system for the preparation of sanitary hot water (DHW) has been installed. The impact of energy replacement (switching from district heating on pellets as a heating energy source) was visible on the primary energy, which decreased by as much as 118,859 kWh/a or 95.35%, and the same impact of energy changed had on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which decreased by 38.454 tCO<sub>2</sub> or 95.35%.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>energy consumption monitoring system was established by installation of the automatic devices for energy consumption monitoring and energy and water meters reading</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased knowledge about energy efficiency in cross-border region</li> </ul>



### **Education for Sustainability - Green and Energy Efficient Schools - ES – GEES (Lead partner - City of Osijek (HR))**

*"The main achievement of the project was energy reconstruction of Primary School "Ljudevit Gaj" in Osijek and Technical School "Mileva Mari-Ajnštajn" in Novi Sad. Reconstruction of the school in Osijek included installation of Photovoltaic power plant and LED lighting pilot, which led to a reduction in the installed power of lighting in the sports hall by 79.19%. Reconstruction works on the school in Novi Sad included Wooden pellet circular economy process establishment pilot, which tested a new heating pellet heating system. Also, thermal solar system for the preparation of sanitary hot water (DHW) has been installed on the roof of the greenhouse. Furthermore, an energy consumption monitoring system was established in both schools, which enabled a more detailed and efficient energy consumption management. In addition, several workshops for students and school principals were successfully organised. The afore-mentioned results can be best placed in the categories of 'Testing/piloting (small-scale infrastructure projects)' and 'New monitoring and evaluation systems'."*

## SO 3.1: Strengthen, diversify and integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets

**Evaluation question 25:** Did the interventions of the programme contribute to the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer in the programme area?

**Evaluation question 26:** How much has programme interventions enabled better management of cultural and natural heritage?

**Evaluation question 27:** How much did the projects contribute to increasing the number of visitors and/or the number of overnight stays in the programme area?

**Answer:** Interventions of the programme had notable impact on the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer, which is evidenced by the results of several projects that managed to create new touristic content and make it more accessible and attractive for visitors in the programme area. Results of project activities indicate that the management of cultural and natural heritage was significantly improved, mostly through training sessions and seminars with relevant stakeholders. Even though some of the projects recorded increased numbers of visitors and/or overnight stays in those project areas, the overall figures for the whole programme area are below the target value, whose fulfilment was further hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The web survey provided some more insight into the following issues: what is the state of play of achieving projects' results, what was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects' activities, what is the contribution of the projects to SO 3.1, what target groups and

specific sectors did the projects address, what type of small-scale infrastructural interventions were made, and finally, what type of common strategies were developed. The conducted survey had a low response rate. Under PA3 and SO 3.1. ten projects were approved, but only four Lead Partners provided answers to the survey.

Responses recorded in the survey indicate that all four projects (EXPLORE CRO-SRB, ViCTour, S.O.S., VISITUS) were finalised in time, without any significant delays. Only one of them (EXPLORE CRO-SRB) indicated that they experienced some delays and cancellations of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while the rest did not have the pandemic as an obstacle.

Data from the survey indicate that implemented project activities contribute to strengthening and diversifying the touristic offer, and facilitating better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage, by developing new tourism products/niches (all four respondents), such as new digital and virtual content, visual identities, new tourist routes and experiences. 'Addressing specific target groups' was the answer selected by three respondents (EXPLORE CRO-SRB, ViCTour, S.O.S.). Two respondents saw 'Developing common strategies for better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage' as their project's contribution to this SO (EXPLORE CRO-SRB, ViCTour), while one respondent (S.O.S.) marked 'financing small scale infrastructural interventions' as their contribution.

Regarding the specific target groups that were addressed, all four respondents pointed out organisations dealing with tourism and cultural and natural heritage, three of them (EXPLORE CRO-SRB, S.O.S., ViCTour) selected general population as the addressed target group. Two respondents also singled out enterprises as the specific target group of their project (EXPLORE CRO-SRB, ViCTour). Regarding specific sectors, 'food and wine' and 'sport and outdoor activities' were selected responses by the lead partner of EXPLORE CRO-SRB. Other three respondents indicated 'culture and sightseeing' (S.O.S.), 'new and digital technologies ( holograms, VR/AR, totems, etc.)' (ViCTour), and 'persons with visual impairment and blindness' (VISITUS).

When it comes to small-scale infrastructural interventions, three respondents (S.O.S., ViCTour, VISITUS) used the projects to finance the procurement of new equipment. Two respondents (S.O.S., ViCTour) also marked installations and 'requalification of natural/cultural heritage' as their answer, while the lead partner of S.O.S. also added renovation of touristic spaces.

Finally, when it comes to common strategies, all four respondents indicated they developed common branding, promotional materials and advisory systems. Three of them (S.O.S., ViCTour, VISITUS) also selected cross-border action plans for sustainable tourism, while the lead partners of EXPLORE CRO-SRB, S.O.S. and VISITUS marked common touristic packages as their answer as well.



Looking at the overall contribution of the projects to SO 3.1, in terms of numbers of visitors, COVID-19 pandemic has slightly reduced the number of arrivals and overnight stays in the programme area, due to national and international travel restrictions. According to the Annual Implementation Report (2020), the number of overnight stays in 2020 was nearly 13% lower (908.051 overnight stays in 2020) than the baseline value in 2014 (1.037.837 overnight

stays). Nevertheless, in the upcoming years it is expected that the number of visitors will rise and eventually even surpass the target value set for 2023 (1.041.358).

Example of project contribution to SO 3.1: Strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage:

Project	Contribution to SO 3.1
<b>EXPLORE CRO-SRB</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>development of tourism in the region by enhancing the skills and capacities of stakeholders and operators in the sector</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased tourist potential of the region</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>created a joint offer of tourist products and services, thus increasing the competitiveness of the region's tourist sector</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>organised meetings, round tables and training sessions for tourism providers</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promotion of project activities and the whole programme through intensive campaign via social media, TV and radio</li> </ul>

*Source: Application form and progress reports*



**EXtraordinary PLeasure of Our REgion - Common gastro, eco and recreation routes of Croatia and Serbia – EXPLORE CRO-SRB (Lead partner - Development Agency of Slavonski Brod Ltd. (HR))**

*"We have achieved everything and more than that. For example, as far as the general public is concerned, it was planned that a few thousand of them will be informed, and in the end we had over 2 million people through campaigns, social networks, on gastro.hr, on TV, on these specialized gastro and tourist portals and programs. And it was carried out in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, we managed to cover a lot. As for some tourism products, three joint tourism products were planned, however we eventually achieved four" (representative of the lead partner).*

## SO 4.1: Improve competitiveness of the Programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters, education and research organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products / services / patents / trademarks in the Programme area

**Evaluation question 28:** How much has institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved?

**Evaluation question 29:** Did the interventions of the programme strengthen competitiveness and the business environment in the programme area?

**Evaluation question 30:** Did programme interventions affect the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programming area?

**Answer:** Institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved in the following sectors: green economy, sustainable agriculture and automotive industry. All projects contributed to encouraging the exchange of best practices in the application of ICT, new technologies, processes, products or services to be directly used by the enterprises. Programme interventions affected the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programming area, which was seen in project Eco Build where the activities of the project included innovating and developing new standardised products, services and patents with agricultural biomass as their main feature.



The Programme area experienced significant problems due to the low level of ICT solutions and lack of new technologies. Thus, the interventions under PA 4 and SO 4.1 addressed the main challenges and needs as regards enhancing competitiveness and the development of a business environment in the Programme area. The reported value for indicator “Range of cluster activities enhancing innovation, new technologies and ICT solutions” is only 3 in 2020, which is a significant decrease since 2015, when the same value was 13. Since 2015, several existing clusters ceased to exist, due to the low interest of the members or due to decreased funding possibilities from the participating countries. The target value for 2023 is 18, which is expected to be reached, based on the information from relevant authorities, which was noted in the Annual Implementation Report 2020.



The web survey gave us an insight into different issues, like the state of play of achieving projects’ results, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects’ activities and the contribution of the projects to SO 4.1. The conducted survey, as mentioned before, had a low response rate. Under PA4 and SO 4.1. twelve projects were approved, but only three Lead Partners provided answers to the survey.

COVID-19 pandemic had almost no impact on their project activities. Only one respondent stated that they had delivered the foreseen activities, but with some delays due to COVID-19. All projects were finalized. One of the respondents finalized their project with delay, while the other 2 respondents finalized their projects in time. According to responses in the survey, all projects achieved or are planning to achieve the intended results (3 responses). All three respondents reported on increased cooperation among entrepreneurial supporting institutions, clusters, educational and research organisations and entrepreneurs; and contribution to the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions. Two respondents shared information on new products, services, patents or trademarks, while one respondent informed of increased competitiveness in the programme area.

Responses recorded within the survey (3 responses) indicate that projects contributed to improving institutional infrastructure and services to accelerate the development of competitiveness and business environment in three sectors: green economy, sustainable agriculture and automotive industry. Data from the survey (3 responses) also indicated that all projects contributed to encouraging the exchange of best practices in the application of ICT, new technologies, processes, products or services to be directly used by the enterprises, while only one project recorded contribution to creating innovative clusters and networks between research and business actors and another project recorded contribution to creating or supporting development agencies, technological and competence centres, laboratories and local ICT infrastructure.

Businesses/SMEs were involved as a target group of respondents' project activities in only one project and their recorded response indicates that the skills and competences of the SMEs involved have increased as a result of project activities in two dimensions: capacity to innovate and capacity to compete.

Example of project contribution to SO 4.1 Enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of a business environment in the programme area

Project	Contribution to SO 4.1
<b>Eco Build</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improved competitiveness of regional economy subjects</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>defined four new products by using biomass ash</li> <li>transfer of knowledge from project participants to local agriculturists, industry and construction companies</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>networking of industry and construction companies</li> <li>strengthened cooperation between businesses and support institutions, clusters, education and research organisations and entrepreneurs</li> </ul>
<b>CROSS TREE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strengthened sector of agriculture</li> <li>promoted principles of integrated and organic agricultural production</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>development of rural areas</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>development of regional agricultural market</li> </ul>



- strengthened capacities of regional institutions in managing the cooperation opportunities supported by the EU



### **Agricultural Waste – Challenges and Business Opportunities (Lead partner - University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek (HR))**

*"The key objective was to boost competitiveness of businesses and enterprises and to further evolve the business environment in the programme area. This objective was meant to be achieved by, firstly, enhancing cooperation between entrepreneurs and research, education and business support organisations, and secondly, by innovating and developing new standardised products, services and patents with agricultural biomass as their main feature. Consequently, another objective was to resolve the issue of inadequate disposal of agricultural biomass and to encourage circular waste management."*

*"Some of the achievements included design and set-up of a project website and visibility tools; successfully organised kick-off and closing conferences; conducted research on biomass ashes as building materials; development of new products; dissemination of project results through published papers, reports, seminars, fairs and workshops; increased technological and educational capacity; enhanced cooperation between project partners. All of the above-mentioned achieved results can be categorised as 'Development of solutions and products', as the project resulted with new products and valuable knowledge in the area of agricultural biomass waste management."*

## Annex 1 – Case studies

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Mosquito Control in Cross-border Area
<b>Acronym</b>	MOS-Cross
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 982 167.50
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 834 842.37
<b>Duration</b>	15/07/2017 – 14/10/2019
<b>SO</b>	1.1 -To improve the quality of facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	3
<b>Lead Partner</b>	Public Health Institute Sombor (RS)
<b>Other Partners</b>	European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (RS) Institute of Public Health for the Osijek-Baranja County (HR)

## 1. Project summary

MOS-Cross project was intended to address the issue of increasing public health threat in the Danube Region of new mosquito-borne diseases (MBDs). Frequent floods provide excellent preconditions for the increase of mosquito population in the region since mosquitos need water for their development. Also, the project area faces a serious problem related to the presence of West Nile virus causing West Nile fever that in some cases ended with unfortunate deaths of some patients.

Three key objectives were identified in the project. Firstly, the goal was to increase cross-border coordination on mosquito prevention, surveillance and control activities and establishment of an early warning system for presence of MBDs. Secondly, this project's objective was to efficiently control mosquito population (native to Europe and invasive mosquito species) in West Bačka District and Osijek-Baranja County by source reduction and adult mosquito control measures with environmentally responsible mosquito abatement treatments. Lastly, the third objective was to educate the public and representatives of local government authorities on mosquito abatement and control measures and threats of potential MBDs.

According to the partners in this project (Public Health Institute Sombor, Serbia; European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Serbia; Institute of Public Health for the Osijek-Baranja County, Croatia), cross-border cooperation was necessary and even inevitable, as regions on both sides of the border share the same problems with mosquitoes and the regions could not provide a timely response to potential MBD threats without active communication and coordinated actions.

## 2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 14/10/2019. Furthermore, no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. According to the project partner (Institute of Public Health for the Osijek-Baranja County, Croatia), everything in the implementation went smoothly, and even if any minor hindrances occurred on the way, they were swiftly resolved. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

## 3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Some of the achievements include establishment of a cross-border integrated system (ICT tool) of mosquito and MBDs surveillance, procurement of surveillance and laboratory equipment and training for public health professionals in West Bačka District and Osijek-Baranja County, mosquito population containment in critical locations in both regions by environmentally responsible

mosquito abatement treatments, increase of knowledge of relevant actors and the public on individual mosquito population control measures and potential MBD threats. In addition to the afore-mentioned results, project partners successfully organised meetings, workshops and training sessions for different target groups. Key results can be categorised as 'New monitoring and evaluation systems'.

Five different target groups were identified and reached in this project. The first target group consisted of local and public authorities in the project area, who were given recommendations for efficient and environmentally responsible mosquito abatement treatments. The second target group included education/training centres and schools, where students were taught about individual mosquito control measures for households and protection measures. Target group 3 was the general public, which was reached out to via local media. Next target group consisted of other stakeholders, including public health workers. The final target group was infrastructure and (public) service providers, which mainly targeted institutions for elderly care in order to inform older population about MDBs and other issues in the project.

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. One added value was certainly creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, but the key added value was cross-border introduction of a new monitoring/evaluation system (through an infrastructure, platform or methodology used by both Croatian and Serbian institutions).

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

Shared monitoring and evaluation system has provided for continuous cooperation between the partners on this project. They continue to exchange information and new build on the results achieved in the MOS-Cross project. Furthermore, partners in both countries transfer their knowledge to other stakeholders and new partners. At the moment, another project is being implemented, this time involving public health institutes in Požega (Croatia) and Novi Sad (Serbia). According to the Croatian project partner, the main challenge of further sustainability of project activities is funding, which is "most important because all material and staff work hours need to be financed (...) at your own expense. That makes it more difficult to conduct all activities to the full extent".

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the project partner (Institute of Public Health for the Osijek-Baranja County, Croatia) states that one issue with INTERREG programme is that it has limited funding possibilities: "When we calculated the cost of everything that we wanted to do, including drones, it would have cost at least 3 million euro". Nevertheless, most of the needs in this area were successfully addressed, without any major unforeseen challenges.

This project contributed positively to two horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development and equality between men and women), while it had neutral impact for the horizontal principle of Equal opportunity and non-discrimination. The positive contribution was reflected in favouring ecologically acceptable abatement measures, and in including knowledge and experiences in certain fields of both men and women for the benefit of all.

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), more specifically to its objective to preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soil, and to improve the quality of facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care. Moreover, this project added to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), by enhancing cooperation between different stakeholders and decision-makers in Croatia and Serbia.

Finally, this project contributed to the programme communication objectives, mainly by extensive cooperation between the cross-border stakeholders and by increasing the level of knowledge and awareness about MDBs and the project activities, through workshops, training sessions and visits to local public authorities, schools and elderly care centres.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Development of Social Care Services within the Regional Gerontology Network
<b>Acronym</b>	ReGerNet
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 526 361.10
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 447 239.31
<b>Duration</b>	15/07/2017 – 14/11/2019
<b>SO</b>	1.1 - To improve the quality of facilities, services and skills in the area of public health and social care
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	4
<b>Lead Partner</b>	Gerontology Centre: Social and Health Institution for Providing Care to Adult Persons (RS)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Home for Elderly and Disabled Persons Osijek (HR) Home for Elderly and Retired Persons Apatin (RS) Home for Elderly and Disabled Persons Đakovo (HR)

## 1. Project summary

The project “Development of Social Care Services within the Regional Gerontology Network - **ReGerNet**” started in July 2017 and finished in November 2019 (28 months implementation period). The lead partner organization was Gerontology Centre: Social and Health Institution for Providing Care to Adult Persons in Serbia, Home for Elderly and Disabled Persons Osijek in Croatia, Home for elderly and retired persons Apatin in Serbia and Home for Elderly and Disabled Persons Đakovo in Croatia. Total eligible budget was EUR 526.361.

Dramatic fall of number of population in the region combined with the average age of the population that is among the oldest in Europe makes a strong argument towards development of existing services and introduction of new ones, especially insufficient non-institutional social welfare services.

The main objective of the Project was to improve the quality of social, gerontology and geriatric care based on the best practices of the partner institutions, which was achieved by investing in infrastructure, human resources potential and intensive exchange of knowledge in the cross-border region. Project’s approach in addressing these common challenges consists of joint effort in expanding the community-based services (by opening gerontology clubs) and overcome the shortage of qualified service providers (by training caregivers), using the knowledge and experience of project partners.

The target groups of the project are mainly the elderly, as service users, persons with disabilities, the local community, decision-makers at the local level, as well as the general public.

The main outputs of the project are trained caregivers, adapted facilities of gerontology clubs and regional academy, web portal and an enhanced non-institutional social protection system. Achieving project objectives and results is possible only through cross-border cooperation. Partners through their employees and management possess very specific skills and that is valuable to the other partner(s). Furthermore, the suggested partnership encourages exchange of knowledge and experience between experts from the region, and of note is that Project, due to its specific humanistic character, promotes good neighborhood relations in the region.

## 2. Progress of activities

Population that is getting older and increase in number of one-person households, the existing structure of social protection in Osijek-Baranja County and West-Bačka district require an approach that will improve non-institutional social protection services. That is why partners decided to have gerontology clubs opened in homes in Osijek, Đakovo and Apatin, intended for retirees who live in their own homes, but do have need for services like: possibility of buying cooked meal, services of washing and ironing and organizing social, cultural, entertaining and recreational activities, enhancing in that way their life quality and preventing or postponing their accommodation in institutions.



By the end of the Project, all project activities have been implemented without major delays or impediments to implementation. There were small delays, which led to the request for an extension of the project implementation by approximately three months. There were some administrative reasons, and some construction works that were late due to adverse weather conditions. Of the four partners, the three partners did not need an extension, only a lead partner, but that delay was minimal.

### 3. Project results and impact

The main project results were following: training programs for caregivers, which are in full accordance with domestic regulation in that area, created by joint efforts of partner organizations; renovated facilities; equipped and established gerontology clubs; a new regional multilingual web portal presenting contents of relevance for providers and users of social protection services in the region, has been created; Regional Academy for caregivers training (RACT), within the organizational structure of the GCSU, has been established; caregivers have been trained during the project implementation; Gerontology clubs and caregivers' services have been provided to the final beneficiaries.

All the most important mentioned project results significantly contribute to the Programme result/outcome, which can be expressed through indicator of the number of elderly persons who became users of some of the services mentioned within the project.

### 4. Sustainability and capitalization

Project outputs will be further used in the day-to-day activities of partner institutions. Sustainability will be ensured through support from local, regional and republic authorities. Non-institutional services will be partly financed by the local authorities. The ownership of the project is the responsibility of Gerontology Centre, as the lead partner, although each of the partners intends to continue to use the services introduced by the project, while the renewed facilities remain a permanent reminder of the value of the realization of the project and the contribution of the Donor.

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## 5. Horizontal issues

The Project had no negative impact on the ecology and the environment and as such contributes towards sustainable development. The resources used by the institutions are mainly renewable, non-renewable resources are treated in line with the national prescriptions and used minimally.

Equal opportunity and non-discrimination were respected and promoted during preparation, design and implementation of the project. All people, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity or religious views will have benefits resulting from project activities. This includes services that were provided to users, and the possibility to attend training and obtain a certificate.

Men and women had an equal opportunity to be involved in the project. This includes the management of the project, possibility of attending training and obtaining a certificate and also the services that will be provided to end users regardless of their gender.

Priority Area 9 "Investing in People and Skills" of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) activities are focusing on actions to improve the performance and quality of education and training systems, to foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labor market, education and research policies, to promote social cohesion, active citizenship and to empower actors on all levels in the Danube Region, to improve cross-sector policy coordination, to fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalized communities and to promote gender equality. The project enabled social inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly elderly people and emphasized the active participation of beneficiaries of social services and the development of their independence. Provision of social services is at the same time a great opportunity for increasing the employment of persons belonging to less employable groups – particularly women. Since there is a huge deficit of qualified caregivers, training of staff and introducing the new elderly-care services, contributed to the employability of people.

The communication with the target groups was conducted by means of media messages directed towards the wider public. This ensured not only the visibility of the project but also the visibility of the entire Interreg - IPA CBC Croatia – Serbia programme. Methods and techniques which were used for communication with target groups were newspaper and magazine articles, leaflets, joint publication distribution, radio and TV broadcasts, internet reports, etc. In addition, a very important channel of communication was a website designed and created during the project.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Implementation of cross-border joint actions toward environment protection in agriculture
<b>Acronym</b>	IMPACT-ENVI
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 570 251.16
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 484 713.47
<b>Duration</b>	15/06/2017 – 14/06/2019
<b>SO</b>	2.1 - To enforce integrated cross-border monitoring/management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	4
<b>Lead Partner</b>	J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek (HR)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Educons University (RS) Industry and Trade School in Županja (HR) Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops (RS)

## 1. Project summary

The main problem that this project aimed to address is the negative environmental impact of certain agricultural production technologies. This issue was set to be solved by reaching the following key objectives.

Firstly, IMPACT-ENVI sought to detect and minimise specific risks of environmental pollution from agriculture activity in the project area by establishing a monitoring system in all NUTS-3 regions of the project area that would determine the impact of agricultural production on the environment. Secondly, the project's objective was to establish joint sustainable agriculture management in the project area in order to mitigate the risks and to contribute to both Croatia and Serbia reaching EU goals when it comes to climate change, water conservation, air and soil quality, biodiversity and management of environmental risks. Third objective was to increase skills and knowledge about good agriculture practice in the project area and to raise awareness about harmful agricultural technologies.

According to the lead partner (J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek), the main driving factors for entering a cross-border partnership in this project with other partners (Educons University; Industry and Trade School in Županja; Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops) was the similar climate, water and soil conditions and similar habits when it comes to agricultural production that has a negative environmental impact. Project areas in both countries were high-risk areas and in need of cross-border cooperation in order to reach the above-mentioned objectives and to solve the environmental problems which are not limited to regional or national borders.

## 2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 14/06/2019. Furthermore, no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

## 3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Some of the achievements include successfully organised kick-off meeting and final conference; recruiting project managers; purchasing office and laboratory equipment; surveying local agricultural producers, analysing samples of soil, vegetables, herbs, stored products, fertilizers, feces, animal blood, organising round tables, workshops, publishing brochures and leaflets. The key results of this project were quite diverse so they can be placed in several categories, such as 'Identification of specific needs/issues in the project area', 'Development of solutions or products' and 'New monitoring and evaluation systems'.

All five target groups were reached in this project, starting with local public authorities (authorities of City of Osijek, Osijek-Baranja County, AP Vojvodina), higher education professionals and researchers with academic background in agricultural science, continuing with education/training centres and schools. The fourth target group included SMEs who participated in many seminars, workshops and roundtables organised within this project. The final target group was the general public which was reached through local and national media. All target values were reached in full.

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. Alongside creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, improvement of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories, and environmental sustainability, the key added value of cross-border cooperation was cross-border introduction of a new monitoring/evaluation system, which enabled screening of soil and water quality, then screening of livestock and vegetable production status, and screening of invasive species, diseases and pests.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

Some practices that were introduced during the project continue even today. According to the lead partner, local farmers “come occasionally and bring soil for analysis, ask for instructions on fertilisation, supplementation and soil improvers”. In addition, some education activities were also continued and there is still demand for new workshops and seminars. At the moment, the lead partner has no finalised plans to pursue new project activities but they have expressed the will to apply for another project in the following period.

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner states that the “INTERREG objectives are quite broadly set”. Another remark was aimed at the share of co-financing burden (15%) which was carried by the partners. Perhaps a lower percentage of their share would make it easier to fully conduct all activities. Nevertheless, everything in the project implementation went smoothly and without any major challenges. What also needs to be mentioned here is a very productive synergy between the partners, but also full support from local and regional authorities in the programme area.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in environmentally friendly management of the project, in focusing on sustainable agricultural production, in providing equal and non-discriminatory opportunities for all to take part in the project, and in defining the project objectives in such a way that they take into account the needs of women and men equally.

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), and more specifically to its Priority area 6 (“to preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and

soils"). Furthermore, the IMPACT-ENVI project made its contribution to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), particularly to its Pillar 3 (Environmental quality) and the specific objectives of this pillar to ensure a good environmental and ecological status of the marine and coastal environment specific objectives, as land-based environmental issues can also cause harmful environmental impact in the coastal regions.

Finally, this project added to the realisation of the programme communication objectives, mainly by raising awareness and increasing knowledge about agricultural production technologies and their impact on the environment. This was achieved through numerous workshops, roundtables, media coverage, but also through daily interaction with local farmers and other agricultural producers.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Wetlands Ecosystem Services Assessment in Croatia-Serbia cross border region
<b>Acronym</b>	EcoWET
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 355 013.14
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 301 761.16
<b>Duration</b>	15/06/2017 – 14/06/2019
<b>SO</b>	2.1 - To enforce integrated cross-border monitoring/management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	4
<b>Lead Partner</b>	Nature Conservation Movement of Sremska Mitrovica (RS)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Association for nature and environment protection Green Osijek (HR) Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province (RS) Public institution agency for management of protected natural values in Osijek-Baranja County (HR)

## 1. Project summary

EcoWET project was initiated primarily to address the issue of degradation of wetland ecosystems caused by varying human activities. Also, this project aimed to deal with low level of awareness of positive impact that wetland ecosystems have for human environment and, more broadly, for the whole society.

Three key objectives were identified in the project. Starting with the first, this project's goal was to improve the management of protected wetland areas in the project area, by connecting monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem services. Secondly, the project's objective was to strengthen cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation of relevant stakeholders in the project area. Here the project builds on already existing network that was established during the project Living Danube. Lastly, another objective of the EcoWET project was to raise public awareness on importance of wetlands and their services for society, with special focus on locals in the project area.

According to the lead partner in the project (Nature Conservation Movement of Sremska Mitrovica), deciding on entering a cross-border cooperation with other partners (Association for nature and environment protection Green Osijek; Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province; Public institution agency for management of protected natural values in Osijek-Baranja County) was an easy choice: "Natural ecosystems do not recognise administrative borders. (...) If you only protect the area in Croatia, or only in Serbia, you haven't done much. (...) You cannot protect nature without cross-border cooperation". Additionally, project areas in both countries share the same problems of uncontrolled land-use, unsuitable agriculture, unsustainable forestry, urbanisation, illegal dumping, water exploitation and pollution, as well as non-sustainable tourism and recreation.

## 2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 14/06/2019. Furthermore, no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. The lead partner does admit, however, that there were some slight delays in the implementation, especially with the construction of ecosystem processors because of the complexity of construction works, but all within the deadline of each reporting period. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

## 3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Some of the achievements include Action plan for improving ecosystem services in six pilot areas; construction of ecosystem processors (constructed wetlands); Guidance on mapping, assessment



and monitoring of ecosystem services; well-organised media campaigns and a documentary film on ecosystem services in pilot areas. These remarkable results contributed to sustainable management of protected areas, increased cooperation of all stakeholders (nature protection sector, local government, public utilities companies, sectoral agencies, civil society organisations), especially between the two public agencies for forest management (Hrvatske šume, Vojvodinašume). The key results of this project were quite diverse so they can be placed in several categories, such as 'Development of solutions or products', 'Testing/piloting (small-scale infrastructure, projects)', and 'New monitoring and evaluation systems'.

Six different target groups were identified and reached in this project. The first three target groups consisted of local, regional, and national public authorities, respectively. Target group 4 included sectoral agencies, which are also the final beneficiaries of the project, as they are in charge of managing protected areas. Target group 5 assembled interest groups, including NGOs, and the final target group were higher education and research organisations and professionals. When it comes to the project's impact on the afore-mentioned target groups, the lead partner believes that this project was 'the missing piece' that was lacking before in order to integrate all the stakeholders and lay foundations for future cooperation.

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. One added value was certainly creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, but two key added values were local or regional introduction/development or testing of new services and products, and cross-border introduction of a new monitoring/evaluation system.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

The lead partner and one of the other partners (Association for nature and environment protection Green Osijek) have already started to plan and conduct new activities beyond the scope of EcoWET project. The main objective of these activities is revitalisation of wetland habitats in the project area through increased cooperation of public agencies for water management (Hrvatske vode, Vojvodinavode). Just as EcoWET project developed from one of the previous projects (Living Danube), the new project will take one step further from EcoWET and further develop the protection of nature in the area. Regarding the funding of new activities, the lead partner hopes to rely as much as possible on EU funds, but also on national funds.

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it mostly covers all the needs in the programme area. Likewise, all the needs in this project were successfully addressed, without any unforeseen challenges.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women).

This contribution was reflected in creating conditions for better quality of life, especially health, but also to sustainability of economy that relies on preserved natural resources. Furthermore, the project's contribution regarding the horizontal principles can be seen in ensuring that all citizens have a right to an equitable and fair development, and in considering the gender balance as an important parameter.

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), more specifically to its Priority Axis (PA) 03 (Supporting wetland and floodplain restoration as an effective mean of enhancing flood protection), PA05 (Environmental risks), PA06 (Biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils), and PA09 (Investing in People and Skills). Moreover, this project added to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), by contributing to its Pillar 3, Topic 2 (Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity).

Finally, this project contributed to the programme communication objectives, mainly by increasing knowledge of the target groups about wetland ecosystem protection and assessment of their ecosystem services, and by raising awareness of the wider public on the importance and usefulness of wetland ecosystems for the whole society. This message of value of wetland ecosystems was also disseminated through workshops, conferences, trainings, but also through local, national, and social media.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Education for Sustainability - Green and Energy Efficient Schools
<b>Acronym</b>	ES - GEES
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 1 395 189.70
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 1 185 911.24
<b>Duration</b>	15/07/2017 – 14/01/2020
<b>SO</b>	2.2 - To promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	5
<b>Lead Partner</b>	City of Osijek (HR)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Public Institution County Development Agency of Osijek-Baranja County (HR) Renewable energy sources Ltd. (HR) Technical school "Mileva Maric-Ajnštajn" (RS) Regional Development Agency Bačka Ltd. (RS)

## 1. Project summary

ES - GEES project was initiated primarily to address the issues of energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources in public buildings. This project also coped with low levels of awareness and general knowledge about energy demands and energy consumption. In addition, the project aimed to deal with cross-border knowledge exchange and cooperation between the public authorities of the programme countries.

Three key objectives were identified in the project. Firstly, ES - GEES project's goal was to increase energy efficiency by energy reconstruction of two schools in Croatia and Serbia (Primary School "Ljudevit Gaj" in Osijek, Croatia and Technical School "Mileva Marić-Ajnštajn" in Novi Sad, Serbia). Secondly, the objective of this project was to implement renewable energy resources in energy reconstruction of the two schools. Finally, one more objective of the project was to increase the level of knowledge about energy efficiency in the project area.

The issues that this project wanted to address and the objectives it aimed to achieve could best be achieved within the framework of a cross-border partnership. Partners in the ES – GEES project (City of Osijek, lead partner; Public Institution County Development Agency of Osijek-Baranja County, project partner; Renewable energy sources Ltd, project partner; Technical school "Mileva Marić-Ajnštajn", project partner; Regional Development Agency Bačka Ltd, project partner) emphasised the importance of cross-border learning and knowledge exchange, as project partners in Serbia have benefited greatly from the transfer of knowledge, experience and solutions that the lead and project partners in Croatia have already implemented. In addition, regions on both sides of the border face similar issues of increasing energy efficiency in public buildings and aim for the same EU standards.

## 2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 14/01/2020. Furthermore, no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. Although, the lead partner admits that there were some slight delays that were caused by one of the subcontractors. As this project ended shortly before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

## 3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. The main achievement of the project was energy reconstruction of Primary School "Ljudevit Gaj" in Osijek and Technical School "Mileva Marić-Ajnštajn" in Novi Sad. Reconstruction of the school in Osijek included installation of Photovoltaic power plant and LED lighting pilot, which led to a reduction in the installed power of lighting in the sports hall by 79.19%. Reconstruction works on

the school in Novi Sad included Wooden pellet circular economy process establishment pilot, which tested a new heating pellet heating system. Also, thermal solar system for the preparation of sanitary hot water (DHW) has been installed on the roof of the greenhouse. Furthermore, an energy consumption monitoring system was established in both schools, which enabled a more detailed and efficient energy consumption management. In addition, several workshops for students and school principals were successfully organised. The afore-mentioned results can be best placed in the categories of 'Testing/piloting (small-scale infrastructure, projects)' and 'New monitoring and evaluation systems'.

Four different target groups were identified and reached out to in this project. The first group consisted of local public authorities of both countries. Target group 2 aimed at reaching the general public through social, digital and other media. Next target group included higher education and research professionals and institutions. Final target group consisted of SMEs in the field of construction, energetics, energy renovation and renewals, companies from the IT sector, consultants of European funds and institutions for providing intellectual services. All but one target groups (higher education and research) were reached according to the target values.

Key cross-border added values in the ES – GEES project are the following: creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, improvement of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories, and introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

Sustainability of the project is secured through permanent usage of new equipment for energy consumption monitoring. Also, energy reconstruction of the two schools serves as a prime example for future energy reconstruction of public buildings in both countries. One remarkable goal that adds to the sustainability of this project is increasing capacity of Photovoltaic power plant, which covers not only the demands of the sports hall, but of the entire school in Osijek. This power plant capacity enlargement is funded completely with City of Osijek's own financial resources.

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it mostly covers all the needs in the programme area. Likewise, all the needs in this project were successfully addressed, without any unforeseen challenges.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and more efficient use of renewable energy resources. Furthermore, this project's positive contribution to the horizontal principles can

be seen in providing non-discriminatory opportunities to participate in the project activities and in ensuring that the needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured throughout all project activities.

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), more specifically to its Pillar 1 (connecting the Danube region) and its Priority Axis 2 (to encourage more sustainable energy). Moreover, this project added to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), by contributing to its Pillar 2 (connecting the region through promoting the sustainable use of energy) and to its Pillar 3 (preserving, protecting and improving of the quality of the environment).

Finally, this project contributed to the programme communication objectives, mainly by increasing knowledge and awareness of the issues of energy consumption and use of renewable energy resources. The project included dissemination workshops and transfer of knowledge meetings among the partners and between the partners and target groups.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	EXploitation of Different Energy sources for GREen Energy production
<b>Acronym</b>	X DEGREE
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 1 696 345.95
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 1 441 894.06
<b>Duration</b>	15/07/2017 – 14/01/2020
<b>SO</b>	2.1 - To promote the use of sustainable energy and energy efficiency
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	5
<b>Lead Partner</b>	University of Novi Sad (RS)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Public Utility Company Vodokanal Sombor (RS) European Affairs Fund of AP Vojvodina (RS) Vinkovci Water Supply and Sewerage Ltd. (HR) Agricultural Institute Osijek (HR)

## 1. Project summary

The project Exploitation of Different Energy Sources for Green Energy Production - X DEGREE is the result of a cooperation among 5 partners from Serbia and Croatia aimed at promoting and improving the use of different renewable energy sources (RES) in the cross-border region.

The Serbian-Croatian cross-border area is characterized by a low level of energy efficiency and a high dependence of public utility companies in the field of drinking water supply and wastewater treatment. In addition, the region does not sufficiently exploit its potential in the field of renewable energies and environmental protection.

In light of these common challenges, the project intended to increase the energy efficiency and self-sufficiency of the wastewater treatment facilities using RES, making a better use of biomass in biogas production plants, and raising public awareness related to the potential of RES in the cross-border area. X DEGREE adopted an integrated approach to achieve a positive effect on the improvement of the local environmental quality, and energy efficiency.

The following partners were involved in the process: Novi Sad University (RS) as Lead Partner, Public Utility Company Vodokanal Sombor (RS), European Affairs Fund of AP Vojvodina (RS), Vinkovci Water Supply and Sewerage Ltd. (HR), Agricultural Institute Osijek (HR).

The main outputs produced by the project were:

- A biogas power plant built in Sombor;
- 6 solar power plants;
- the biomass testing laboratory at the Agricultural Institute in Osijek expanded;
- a new laboratory for quality testing and biogas production formula development set up at the University in Novi Sad.

The main target groups affected by the project include utility companies, local communities, local power distribution companies, agricultural institutes, the stakeholders at "green energy" market and high education and scientific institutions.

When X DEGREE was conceived, it was considered that cross-border partnership could have been fruitful for the development of this project since the 2 cross-border regions were presenting complementary needs and potentials. The partner from Vinkovci (HR) had equipment for water sewage, but it did not have enough knowledge concerning biogas energy production. For this reason, the Croatian public utility company needed the support and the technical documentation of the LP and Vodokanal Sombor (RS) to replicate the plant. On the other hand, the partner from Vinkovci wanted to establish a solar energy plant for treating wastewater and Vinkovci already employed this technology. At the same time, Vodokanal Sombor wanted to expand its use of biogas and the project allowed to set up a new lab for the testing of news biomass fuel recipes.



However, from the interview it emerged that due to lack of capacity and the differences between national laws and regulations of the 2 countries, cross-border cooperation has not made a significant contribution to the achievement of results but has rather been perceived as an obstacle in some cases. In particular, the lack of experience in cross-border cooperation of the two public utility companies made it necessary to have a fifth partner (European Affairs Fund of AP Vojvodina) to carry out project management and communication activities and to indicate the university of Novi Sad as LP, having already extensive experience in international cooperation.

## 2. Progress of activities

The project ended the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and during its realization, all activities were finished and all of the projects outputs achieved. Likewise, also the project management activities were concluded according to the plan.

However, throughout all the projects stages some delays have been experienced. One of the main causes is related to frequent personnel changes in the project partners organizations' management structures. This phenomenon was mainly concerning public utility companies and it made significantly more challenging planning activities and organizing Steering committee meetings. For example, a year after the X DEGREE project was launched in 2017 the management of the public utility company Vodokanal Sombor was completely replaced with people who did not have the necessary skills to carry out the process.

The timely implementation of the activities was also hampered by administrative issues, in particular with regards to the preparation of the documentation for the public procurement. Indeed, a serious problem affecting Serbian partners, including therefore also the lead partner, was related to the obligation to use the PRAG procurement procedure. According to the lead partner, they were not informed on how to prepare the paperwork and did not have any qualified personnel in their organisation to provide them with the necessary information (although the JS supported them to a limited extent).

## 3. Project results and impact

As already mentioned, the project managed to achieve all the expected results, which mainly consist in small-scale infrastructures for piloting and testing activities. In particular, the following achievements should be mentioned:

- The construction and commissioning of a biogas cogeneration plant with 200kW electric and 230kW heat power in Public Utility Company "Vodokanal" in Sombor;
- The reconstruction of a biogas production plant with the increased production capacity of about 3893 m<sup>3</sup>/day installed at the site of the device for purification of wastewaters in "Vodokanal" in Sombor.
- The equipping and commissioning of a brand-new mobile laboratory for quality testing and biogas production formula development at the University in Novi Sad. The laboratory is

used for analysis of raw materials potential in terms biogas production and recipes preparation.

- The construction of six 380kW photovoltaic power plants in the property of Vinkovci Water Supply and Sewerage Ltd. The plants were installed on water reservoirs, on roofs of administration buildings, and on the pools for sludge treatments, depending on the location.
- The equipping of a new laboratory for the quality analysis of biomass in the Agriculture Institute in Osijek;
- The preparation of an analytical study on the potentials of renewable energy sources as part of the activities implemented by the European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Figure 10. 380kW photovoltaic power plant



Source: <http://www.xdegree.eu/results/result3/>

A significant positive impact of the project in the cross-border area was the raising of awareness and knowledge about the use of biogas plants. There are very few co-generation plants based on biogas in the project area, and the one developed by X DEGREE in Sombor was the first one installed in a public utility company that has been working non-stop. Once the plant was put into function, other utility companies in Serbia gained interest and wanted to replicate the plant. Similarly, also other types of companies showed interest in the facility. For example, representatives of one of the biggest breweries in Serbia went to Sombor to observe how the X DEGREE plant was working, as the company has its own wastewater treatment facility and wants to develop its own small-scale biogas power plant.

In this sense, the X DEGREE facilities have been used as a 'showcase' for learning purposes. The two plants developed in Sombor and Vinkovci represent sources of useful information such as:

how a biogas and solar power plants should be designed and built, who can design it, where to find the material, who are the best suppliers and especially what benefits it produces in terms of cost and environment. This educational and informative function performed by the project was probably the main source of added value.

Nevertheless, the project development was hindered by different internal and external problems. Firstly, the lack of capacity of public utility companies to cooperate with and to manage a team of international partners. As a matter of fact, the real Lead Partner of X DEGREE should have been one of the water supply companies in Croatia or Serbia, but these organizations are not used to international cooperation in their day-to-day activities, so they did not have the competences to carry out such a project. On the other hand, Novi Sad University often cooperates with foreign countries but on different types of projects. It is usually involved in more research-oriented initiatives, so they were not prepared to manage activities such as the ones required by the IPA CBC project. Fortunately, in the process they were supported by European Affairs Fund of AP Vojvodina, the fifth and smallest partner, which helped them to prepare the proposal, as well as perform project management and communication activities.

A further obstacle to cooperation consisted in the different regulations and bureaucracy requirements in force in Croatia and Serbia which do not allow the partners to adopt the same solutions and documentation in developing the plants and the laboratories.

Finally, the involvement in this project contributed at increasing the capacities of the Novi Sad University and European Affairs Fund of AP Vojvodina, while when it comes to the public utility companies, the project requirements were often out of their reach/capacities, and they tended to delegate their tasks to third parties under payment.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

With regards to the sustainability of X DEGREE, the facilities and the laboratories are continuing to work even after the project was finalised. On the financial level, this does not imply a major effort, indeed, all the projects outputs require low maintenance costs and the partners can economically benefit from their use.

Public utility companies can now produce their own energy and are more independent so they will incur in lower energy costs. While the laboratories represent an important resource for the University and Agricultural institute Osijek and are not expensive to keep operational since rely on basic technologies. The mobile laboratory allows the University to build knowledge and develop competences and is used carry out studies for whoever is interested in producing biogas, namely, people can bring their raw materials to the laboratory, and the university will provide them recipes for biomass. Furthermore, it can be used by researchers to gather data, developing PhD thesis and carrying out experiments. With regards to the Agricultural institute Osijek laboratory, they can keep using it for their regular work.

Novi Sad University has no intention to participate in new IPA CBC for the programming period 2021-2027. They would need to cooperate with public authorities which often, in Serbia at least, do not have appropriate competences and capacities to carry out this typology of projects and cooperate with other countries.

Furthermore, another element that discourages Serbian partners from taking part in the programme is the public procurement procedures. From the interview it emerged that more support is needed for preparing public procurement documentation in Serbia such as permanent advisers (professionals) at local/regional/national level who can guarantee for all the documentation avoiding final beneficiaries getting penalized for formal mistakes.

*Figure 11. Mobile laboratory in Novi Sad*



Source: <http://www.xdegree.eu/results/result2/>

## 5. Horizontal issues

Concerning the programme strategy, one major problem has emerged: the impossibility for private companies to participate as partners in the projects. The programme is aimed to support SMEs entrance in the market and to help them being competitive, however with regard to project implementation SMEs are not eligible partners, they can only be identified as target groups. In this case, for example the contribution of the local micro and SMEs, start-ups etc. for the achievement of the objectives would have been a valued added for X DEGREE. Moreover, the fact that companies cannot benefit from the project output for 5 years after its end does not contribute to their involvement in the initiatives funded by the programme.

The project has contributed to the programme communication goals participating to different events and disseminating its results. Communication activities were finished according to the plan and all the partners were involved in the process. Media coverage activities include advertising on TV media, radio, newspaper, and billboards to ensure better visibility of the project. The press events were organized to inform the public about project results. Three promotional Film were released. The project results were promoted at the fairs (such as Agriculture fair in Novi Sad,

Energy fair in Novi Sad), round tables (Sombor and Vinkovci), and scientific conferences (Novi Sad, Vienna). Three study tours for students were organized: two in Sombor and one in Vinkovci. Project website and social media were regularly updated with news, media, etc.

The LP suggested that a communication plan targeting exclusively people who operate in the area of intervention of the project would have been much more effective and efficient. For X DEGREE has proved extremely useful going to fairs, there they had the chance to discuss their project results with a dedicated public, do networking and spread knowledge (e.g. the South-East Europe agricultural fair – 15 000 people a day). Finally, communication activities are considered very time-consuming: EU affairs Vojvodina spent as much time to organise communication activities as the LP doing the technical work on the project.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Extraordinary PLeasure of Our REgion - Common gastro, eco and recreation routes of Croatia and Serbia
<b>Acronym</b>	EXPLORE CRO-SRB
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 368 110.94
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 312 894.29
<b>Duration</b>	15/07/2017 – 14/07/2019
<b>SO</b>	3.1 - To strengthen, diversify and integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	4
<b>Lead Partner</b>	Development Agency of Slavonski Brod Ltd. (HR)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Regional Development Agency Panonreg (RS) Fund for Microregional Tourism Cluster Subotica Palic (RS) Tourism cluster "Slavonska košarica" (HR)

## 1. Project summary

Project "EXPLORE CRO-SRB" was conducted 24 months, between 15<sup>th</sup> July 2017 and 14<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Lead organization of the project was Development Agency of Slavonski Brod Ltd. with three partners. First partner organization was Regional Development Agency Panonreg from Serbia, second was Fund tourist cluster of the microregion Subotica Palić from Serbia and third was Tourist cluster "Slavonska košarica" from Croatia. The main objective of the project was promotion of the sustainable economic development of the cross-border region through effective use of the region's tourist potential. The main objective of the project contributes to the specific objective 3.1. (SO 3.1.: "To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross-border approach and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage") priority axis 3. (PA 3.: "Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage").

*"The goal is what we and they have established in the field is basically the fact that all these small producers, some small providers of tourist services and that they are poorly accessible and poorly visible, so some basic goal was to create common tourist routes and a complete offer"* (representative of the lead partner).

The project was focused on natural, historic and cultural resources, which are economically underexploited, due to many reasons stemming in poor tourism infrastructure, low level of marketing of region's cultural heritage, the lack of information exchange within the tourism industry and undiversified tourist offer. The weakness was also the lack of communication between tourist operators in Croatia and Serbia, lack of effective destination management on local/regional level and absence of an effective marketing strategy able to valorize and promote the area.

*"Cross-border partnership with Serbia was needed because our offer is quite similar and complements each other well both in terms of gastronomic offer and in terms of recreation, especially some kind of eco-tourism"* (representative of the lead partner).

## 2. Progress of activities

As project ended in July 2019, all project activities were conducted by the end date. Furthermore, project did not have any delays in implementation, so all activities could be achieved as planned or more than planned. Only obstacle during the implementation was uncertainty about funding, which was often connected with a delay.

*"The only thing I might point out is that we never knew when we could count on money, when they would give it to us. Sometimes the payment went within a couple of days, sometimes up to a month, and there was a situation where we waited up to nine months"* (representative of the lead partner).

### 3. Project results and impact

Although the project did not achieved results that were not initially foreseen, this project has managed to achieve all expected results. The results achieved in this project were: 1. PR and external communication plan created; 2. 6 researches conducted and the results stabbed in the form of three studies; 3. 3 round tables held in order to define 3 common tourism routes; 4. Gastro, eco and recreation specifics (points) of the cross-border region linked together in 3 common routes; 5. Short promo movie recorded; 6. 50 stakeholders, as the main promoters of created routes, educated; 7. 10-month intensive social media marketing campaign conducted; 8. e-cluster platform established; 9. 20 cooperations established between 20 tourism entities (common tourist services).

*"We have achieved everything and more than that. For example, as far as the general public is concerned, it was planned that a few thousand of them will be informed, and in the end we had over 2 million people through campaigns, social networks, on gastro.hr, on TV, on these specialized gastro and tourist portals and programs. And it was carried out in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, we managed to cover a lot. As for some tourism products, three joint tourism products were planned, however we eventually achieved four" (representative of the lead partner).*

Expected impact on the target group was to make market easier to access for the small producers and increase their visibility, which was achieved with project activities. As a key cross-border and local added value of this project, the interviewed representative of the lead partner pointed out creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners and improvement of policy instruments (plans, agreements) at local or regional level.

*"Through marketing campaign and promotional videos on the portals, we managed to introduce a wider circle of people to Slavonia, Baranja, because it can be said that we are still quite an unknown destination. Some travel packages have been created for travel agencies, so in that sense, yes. They all profited or we will profit at some later period than that" (representative of the lead partner).*

### 4. Sustainability and capitalization

Financial sustainability was ensured after the project implementation by project team organizations using and supporting marketing of tourism products created by the project and further development of common product packages. Assets for further financing of activities were found in local/regional budgets, development funds and own (partner) contribution. Institutional sustainability was ensured by the central IT booking system which will be regular program for cooperation of target regions and institutions included in the project. Sustainability on policy level was ensured by the formulation of recommendation for improvement of the situation with the tourist offer in the region that is a product of the project. Sustainability of e-cluster platform was planned to be based on premium products which users can buy through web shop/online booking,



but there were problems with the platform after it was uploaded.

*"First the system crashed, later our page was hacked, so we lost all the content from the platform and now we are slowly waiting for some money to pay someone to upload it for us. Basically, we are working to raise that platform again. Sustainability was to be achieved through that platform. At the moment, I can't say that the project is still sustainable, but I hope that in a few months we will be able to solve it and get the platform back to work"*(representative of the lead partner).

*"Currently, what we are doing is trying to bring that platform back to life and we will fund it from our own resources. We have been waiting for some kind of tender for funding since this happened, but there was nothing. I don't know if it will be, but we will use our own funds to ensure sustainability through the platform"*(representative of the lead partner).

The representative of the lead partner was very interested about applying for a new project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme to capitalise on the results of this project. *"We already have a ready project application with Novi Sad and Stražilov, which is again in the field of tourism. Reconstruction, adrenaline park and I can't remember what else, but we are planning it"* (representative of the lead partner).

## 5. Horizontal issues

Project has also contributed to the horizontal principles of the programme such as equality, non-discrimination, sustainable development. Important objective was promotion of the sustainable economic development of the cross-border region through effective use of the region's tourist potential. Sustainable tourism in its purest sense is an industry which attempts to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. Engagement of persons with appropriate and necessary competence, as well as the selection of existing staff who were employed on the project, have not been based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion of belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The project made no difference between men and women in the selection process of candidates during employment. Also, this project made no difference between men and women working on this project, it promoted equality and eliminate discrimination.

The Danube Strategy (EUSDR) preferred synergies between partners, exchange of knowledge, growth, opening up the region inward and outward, finding solutions to the challenges which are the objectives of the project. The project was based on the context and requirements of this strategy and its activities are aimed at highlighting the differences but also the connection of the common elements. Promoting the mobility of people are expected multiple benefits. And this project intends to support project partners together to attract not only people coming from other regions to visit both cross-border regions, but also to give an incentive to people living in one of these two cross-border regions to visit the other one. EUSAIR strategy supports projects that improve the attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity of the region through sustainable tourism. The project within this strategy highlighted the formation of inter-regional new touristic

products and services. These touristic products promoted cultural heritage, improved access to special groups of people and extended the touristic season, all what is important for this Strategy.

This project had also contributed to the programme communication goals with different measures of informing the public. *"During the implementation we had a lot of articles in the media, we had marketing campaign and promotion through various portals. We participated in fairs and I can also say that there was a lot of interest. Nearly two and a half million people were covered"* (representative of the lead partner).

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Virtual and Cultural Tourism
<b>Acronym</b>	VICTour
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 924 327.00
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 785 677.95
<b>Duration</b>	15/06/2017 – 14/10/2019
<b>SO</b>	3.1 - To strengthen, diversify and integrate the cross-border tourism offer and better manage cultural and natural heritage assets
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	5
<b>Lead Partner</b>	Vukovar Srijem County (HR)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Tourist Board of Vukovar Srijem County (HR) Tourism organisation of Vojvodina (RS) Faculty of Economics at the University of Novi Sad (RS) European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (RS)

## 1. Project summary

The Virtual and Cultural Tourism – VicTour project is the result of a cooperation among five partners from Serbia and Croatia aimed at enhancing continental tourism by gathering the region's thematic routes under one, commonly recognisable brand. The project will approach these goals by combining innovative and modern marketing tools with ICT equipment, in order to create a unique tourism offer in Vukovar-Srijem County (HR) and Srem district (RS).

The natural, cultural and historical richness of the cross-border area and its peculiarities, if compared to larger tourist destinations, have not been exploited to the fullest over the last years. The target area is also characterised by a lot of different thematic routes based on a specific thematic tourist offer and presenting individual identities. However, in absence of an integrated approach, these offers couldn't fully reach the desired audience and provide adequate support to the tourist offer of the region.

The project promoted the formulation of a more attractive, dynamic and competitive tourist offer, as well as a better management of cultural and natural heritage, in order to increase the attractiveness of the region and to sustain its social, economic and territorial development. To this end, VicTour strongly relied on the innovative and modern use of promotion and advertising by means of IT tools such as holograms, augmented reality, interactive totems, a multimedia audio guide and an electronic workbook.

The following partners were involved in the process: the Vukovar Srijem County (HR) as lead partner, the Tourist Board of Vukovar Srijem County (HR), the Tourism organization of Vojvodina (RS), the Faculty of Economics at the University of Novi Sad (RS) and the European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (RS).

The main results achieved by the project were:

- Marketing plans
- Promotional films
- The delivering of holograms augmented reality and interactive totems
- Higher quality tourist services

The main target groups affected by VicTour were the tourist boards, the museums, the travel agencies, the SMEs operating in the tourism field, tourists, and the general public.

The cross-border partnership could constitute an added value for the project purposes since both cross-border regions present similar problems and characteristics in the tourism sector. For example, a poor use of new and attractive technologies was observed in all the targeted area. For this reason, cooperation is ideal for implementing innovative approaches in tourism promotion. The approach adopted by the project was to implement innovative solution highly focusing on joint know-how transfer, the joint development of tourist offer, the joint promotion of the whole targeted area, etc. Combining experience and knowledge from one side to the other, it was possible to make the entire area more attractive for tourists.

## 2. Progress of activities

The project ended on 14 October 2019 and, during its realisation, all activities were finalised and all the results achieved.

From the interview it emerged that, during its implementation, the project experienced several deviations including delays from the work plan. In particular, some of the activities did not follow the dynamic plan adopted at the very beginning of the implementation phase. The main reasons behind these dysfunctionalities were of administrative nature, specifically, issues related to public procurement. The partners from Serbia also experienced some difficulties in finding a proper company for holograms: since it is a new technology, it is still quite hard to find a service provider on the market, therefore they delivered that activity at the very end of the project.

Figure 12. Holograms



Source: <https://www.interreg-croatia-serbia2014-2020.eu/project/victour/>

## 3. Project results and impact

The project managed to achieve all the set results, namely:

- A recognized identity for the cross-border region;
- a higher-quality level of tourist promotion;
- improved capacities of tourist services providers, and
- increased visibility of tourist offer of the cross-border region.

Most of the activities performed were focused on the improvement of the existing tourist offer and on raising the quality of promotion by using new information and communication technologies (ICT). Through the adoption of ICT tools, ViCTour contributed to the innovation, monitoring and adaptation to modern trends and individualised requirements of tourists.

The main purpose of introducing new technologies in tourism was the promotion of cultural and historical heritage, enhancing the visitor experience and enabling the inclusion of all application users with new technologies, and ultimately increasing the number of tourist arrivals.

The main output produced by the projects were the following:

- Marketing plans for two regions: Vojvodina and Vukovar-Srijem County. The developed marketing plans will provide further steps and activities for better use of natural and cultural heritage and will define recommendations for joint development and diversification of the cross-border tourist offer of Srijem.
- The Croatian side developed a visual identity for the region and the slogan for tourist destination „Protkani zlatom“. This visual identity was developed for 7 tourist boards in the region.
- By applying new technologies and ICT solutions, the project contributed to innovation, monitoring, and adaptation to modern trends and the individualized requirements of tourists.
- six free format holograms were set up in the two counties, in particular 3 per county: Vukovar (HR), Vinkovci (HR), Ilok (HR), Adaševci (RS), Sremska Mitrovica (RS), and Vrdnik (RS).
- All the Project Partners developed Augmented and Virtual reality which can be seen in Vukovar, Vinkovci, Ilok, Županja, and Sremska Mitrovica, Adaševci and in the Tourist organization of Vojvodina.
- Interactive totems were delivered only for VSC and they are installed in Vukovar, Vinkovci, Županja, Ilok, Otok, and Nijemci.
- Web portal and mobile applications were developed only for the Serbian side.
- Promotional films, to present the cultural and natural beauties of the two regions.

Figure 13. Vukovar Augmented reality



Source: <https://www.interreg-croatia-serbia2014-2020.eu/project/victour/>

With regards to the impact the project had on the target groups, the interview reveals that, by training tourist guides and enriching the tourist offer with new technologies, the number of overnight stays and arrivals in the cross-border area has increased. In turn, this had a positive effect on companies operating in the tourism sector, including small family farms and accommodation units, and also on sales capacities.

One of the most successful initiatives implemented by the project consisted in the projection holograms depicting famous historical figures who were born or lived, even for a short period of time, in the Vukovar-Srijem county, such as Lavoslav Ružička, Ivan Kozarac, Nikola Iločki, showing as these people once lived. Through the adoption of holograms and other technologies, the project indirectly approached the importance of history for the development of an area, city or state, in addition to enriching the tourist offer and making this destination more recognisable.

Bearing in mind the requirements and possibilities of tourist service provision, as well as its impact on the success of the overall tourist offer, the lead partner noticed that capacity building activities of relevant stakeholders in tourism are needed to improve their practical knowledge and additional skills. This has contributed to the development of sustainable tourism, strengthening and diversifying the cross-border tourist offer and increasing the number of arrivals and overnight stays in the program area, which is the ultimate result.

The added value produced by the project mainly consisted in the further development of joint strategies and synergies in managing a sustainable tourism environment, mutual exchange of knowledge and know-how in the wider regional area and breaking down socio-cultural and physical barrier between the two countries.

Through the good elaboration of project activities and the possibility of purchasing equipment, which would have been unattainable for some areas, the project demonstrated the benefits of

cross-border cooperation and ensured coordination with other relevant programmes. Good partnership coordination has created quality cross-border cooperation which is the basis for future cooperation in further projects.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

The sustainability of the project will be ensured through several elements. Firstly, the partners of the project are almost all representative institutions with a long tradition, which is an important factor for the durability of activities. Secondly, the sustainability of marketing plans is ensured by the continuation of implementation of project activities of regional and local/municipal tourism boards. At the same time, the marketing plans will be the basis for the future projects preparation for tourism development for a 5-year period. Thirdly, after the project implementation, one sample of marketing plans will be delivered to local tourist boards. Furthermore, tourist boards will directly support the project through promotion activities (brochures, events, fairs). Finally, all purchased ICT equipment will remain operative and will be accessible to all the tourists and local population. Maintenance of ICT equipment purchased through the project will be the responsibility of institutions that will be using it (local tourist boards, museums, etc.).

The biggest challenge for the sustainability of the project is to keep tourists interested in the purchased technologies as well as attracting new tourists. Also, depreciation and maintenance of purchased equipment after the 5-year expiration will be challenging for tourist boards, museums, etc. Vukovar-Srijem County has been using its own resources to maintain the project tools operational.

From the interview, it emerged that the Vukovar-Srijem County would apply for a new project in the IPA cross-border cooperation program 2021-2027. In particular in the field of the Implementation of policies / solutions (e.g. testing, piloting).

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

The priority axis related to the development of tourism and preservation of cultural and natural heritage turned out to be a good foundation for developing the project idea. Activities that included the procurement of new ICT equipment has influenced the strengthening, diversification and integrated cross-border development of tourism and better natural and cultural heritage management.

The project started with the aim of better positioning Vukovar-Srijem County and Srem district in the tourist context, diversification and providing a better recognition of the area by means of new technologies. However, during the drafting and implementations phases of the project, new challenges arose related to the better placement, presentation and promotion of these technologies at major European fairs, but the partners were not funded by the EU to carry out these extra promotional activities.

Since the projects also aims to sustain social, economic and territorial development, which includes wider space of two countries, it can be considered complementary with EU Danube Strategy for the Danube Region. In particular, according to project specific goals and planning activities VicTour is in synergies with two priority areas of EUSDR:



- 3) To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts;
- 8) To support the competitiveness of enterprises.

This project is also linked to EUSAIR through promoting the cultural heritage, connect regions, people and countries at European level without pollution which affects the overall increase in the attractiveness of the area, which is the main objective to EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

With a multifunctional mobile stand and promotional materials, all the partners directly support the project through promotional activities (brochures, events, fairs). The study trip, in addition to members of the project team, included media from Croatia and Serbia. Through all the project activities, the partners were committed to strengthening cross-border cooperation and contribute to the communication objectives of the Programme. Through social networks and promotional materials, they raised awareness and provided information about the Programme goals and opportunities.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Agricultural Waste – Challenges and Business Opportunities
<b>Acronym</b>	Eco build
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 464 582.50
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 394 895.12
<b>Duration</b>	01/08/2017 – 31/01/2020
<b>SO</b>	4.1 - To improve competitiveness of the programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters, education and research organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products/services/patents/trademarks in the programme area
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	2
<b>Lead Partner</b>	University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek (HR)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Faculty of Technical Sciences - University in Novi Sad (RS)

## 1. Project summary

This project's intention was to address several main issues that are shared in the same manner by many businesses and enterprises in the programme area. Firstly, the project aimed to tackle low competitiveness. Secondly, it dealt with a relatively poor level of networking between businesses. Finally, the project addressed the issue of inadequate disposal of agricultural harvest residue-biomass.

The key objective was to boost competitiveness of businesses and enterprises and to further evolve the business environment in the programme area. This objective was meant to be achieved by, firstly, enhancing cooperation between entrepreneurs and research, education and business support organisations, and secondly, by innovating and developing new standardised products, services and patents with agricultural biomass as their main feature. Consequently, another objective was to resolve the issue of inadequate disposal of agricultural biomass and to encourage circular waste management.

According to the partners in the project (University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek; Faculty of Technical Sciences - University in Novi Sad), the afore-mentioned objectives could not have been reached without a cross-border partnership, as the participating regions in both countries, Croatia and Serbia, share the same problems and challenges when it comes to biomass from crop residues disposal. Also, there was a significant potential of cross-border learning and cross-border application of practices already existing in one of the countries. Perhaps the most important reason for commencing this cross-border partnership was the experience and knowledge of both partners, mutual trust and reliability.

## 2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 31/01/2020. Furthermore, no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. The only minor hindrance, according to the lead partner (University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture Osijek), was occasional lack of understanding of specific technical terms among the partners and other participants in the project, such as local agriculture producers. As this project ended shortly before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

## 3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Some of the achievements include design and set-up of project website and visibility tools; successfully organised kick-off and closing conferences; conducted research on biomass ashes as

building materials; development of new products; dissemination of project results through published papers, reports, seminars, fairs and workshops; increased technological and educational capacity; enhanced cooperation between the project partners. All of the above-mentioned achieved results can be categorised as 'Development of solutions and products', as the project resulted with new products and valuable knowledge in the area of agricultural biomass waste management.

Five different target groups were identified and reached in this project. The first target group consisted of higher education professionals and researchers from different academic backgrounds (civil engineering, economy, agriculture and energetics). Target group 2 involved businesses and enterprises, excluding SMEs who were part of Target group 3. The next target group encompassed business support organisations. The final target group was the general public. What is important to note here is that the project managed to surpass the target value for all target groups. Additionally, the lead partner emphasises that the project activities "have raised the awareness of the importance of building networks and, by doing so, contributed to development of the programme area".

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. Alongside creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, improvement of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories, and local or regional introduction/development or testing of new services and products, the key cross-border added value is environmental sustainability, as the project brought new approach of tackling agricultural waste in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

As stated in the interview with the lead partner, currently there are no plans to engage in new project activities, as the other partner (Faculty of Technical Sciences - University in Novi Sad) is involved with several other projects. Since the experience of cooperation between the two partners from this project was very positive, the lead partner has decided not to pursue project activities with a new partner.

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner could not say with certainty if they are fully in line with the needs of regions in the programme area. Nevertheless, no significant challenges emerged during the implementation.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in creating a more sustainable cross-border environment and use of renewable resources, in providing equal and non-discriminatory opportunities for all to take

part in the project, and in setting a threshold of 20% female participants in the overall number of participants.

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), and more specifically to its three priorities: connecting the Danube Region, protecting the environment in the Danube Region, and building prosperity in the Danube Region. Furthermore, the project could also find its place in contributing to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), as it provides a solution to solid waste from land-based sources, including biomass ashes, which poses a serious threat to the maritime environment of the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

Finally, the Eco Build project added to the realisation of the programme communication objectives. It strengthened the cooperation between regional businesses by organising free events for the members of all target groups and by increasing the level of knowledge and awareness of the issue of agricultural waste. Then, the research results on the development of new products were promoted and disseminated through seminars and round tables, which also contributed to increased cooperation of cross-border research organisations. In addition, further promotion of all project activities and outputs was done through conferences, fairs, publication of newspaper articles, TV and radio coverage.

<b>Project Description</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Development of new treenursery products for fastgrowing fruit industry based on local genetic resources and modern technologies
<b>Acronym</b>	CROSS TREE
<b>Total Budget</b>	EUR 524 308.95
<b>EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)</b>	EUR 445 662.59
<b>Duration</b>	15/07/2017 – 14/01/2020
<b>SO</b>	4.1 - To improve competitiveness of the programme area through strengthening cooperation between business support institutions, clusters, education and research organisations and entrepreneurs with aim to develop new products/services/patents/trademarks in the programme area
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>N. of Partners</b>	3
<b>Lead Partner</b>	University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Agriculture (RS)
<b>Other Partners</b>	Agricultural Institute Osijek (HR) Public Institution County Development Agency of Osijek-Baranja County (HR)

## 1. Project summary

CROSS TREE project was initiated to address the challenges that fruit tree nursery industry and fruit production industry on both sides of border were facing due to modernization and market fluctuations. Some specific issues that were meant to be addressed were low competitiveness and lack of professional skills.

Three key objectives were identified in the project. Starting with the first, this project's goal was to encourage using local natural resources, that possess useful traits like pests resistance, quality and climate change adaptability. Secondly, the objective was to upgrade skills and knowledge transfer by enhancing cooperation between education and research institutions in the project area and by jointly developing new skills in the industry. Thirdly, this project's objective was to use the newly acquired knowledge for product development, thus increasing the competitiveness of fruit production industry.

Partners on this project (University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Agriculture, lead partner; Agricultural Institute Osijek; Public Institution County Development Agency of Osijek-Baranja County) have already worked together on the project apple.net, so once they realised they had similar problems and similar ideas on how to solve them they decided to enter a cross-border cooperation.

## 2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 14/01/2020. Furthermore, no delays were reported in project implementation and the project objectives were fully achieved. The lead partner does admit, however, that there were some slight delays in the implementation: "Some delays happened in the beginning of the project implementation, because in our industry it does play a significant role whether we start with project activities in January or in July, for example. We prepared everything to start at one point, but then the beginning of the project had to be postponed, so we had to change the plan of activities a bit". As this project ended shortly before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

## 3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Some of the achievements include acquirement of new skills and knowledge in nursery production and local products development, then upgraded quality of fruit tree nursery products in both cross border regions through process of guided product standardisation and introduction of new products and technologies, and creation of cross-border linkages between business, academic and public sector aimed at increased competitiveness and efficiency. These key results can be categorised as 'Development of solutions or products'. In addition, this project, unexpectedly,

“resulted in increased interest of younger generation in fruit production industry, which in turn resulted in a new study programme at the University of Novi Sad”.

Seven different target groups were identified and reached in this project. The first target group consisted of higher education and research institutions who were most impacted by acquiring new knowledge. Second target group were SMEs who benefited from this new knowledge and developed additional skills in their industry. Next two target groups encompassed local and regional public authorities. Target group 5 consisted of interest groups including NGOs, who took part in exchanging knowledge and information through workshops. Target group 6 included enterprise (excluding SMEs), and the final target group were business support organisations.

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. One added value was certainly creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, but two key added values were improvement of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories, and local or regional introduction/development or testing of new services and products. What has accelerated and enhanced the cross-border cooperation was mutual trust and experience of working together between the partners.

#### **4. Sustainability and capitalisation**

Sustainability of CROSS TREE project is secured through long lasting field trials (demonstration fields) using nursery trees that were developed within the project framework. The lead partner expressed the will to engage in new project activities with other project partners. However, no plans have been made yet.

#### **5. Horizontal issues**

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it is “quite limited in scope, it does not consider the specific needs of agricultural industry, especially those parts of the industry, such as fruit and vines, where it is not so easy to have short-term results”.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in focusing on development of organic nursery products (trees) which is a novelty in agriculture, then in ensuring access for persons with disabilities to all project activities oriented towards knowledge transfer, project results dissemination, and in promoting participation of both women and men in the project team.

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), more specifically to its priority areas ‘Institutional capacity and cooperation’, ‘Biodiversity, landscapes, air and soil quality’, ‘Knowledge society’, ‘People and skills’, and ‘Competitiveness’. Moreover, this project added to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), by contributing to its pillar 3. Environmental quality, Topic 2: Transnational terrestrial habitats and



biodiversity, Action 4: Awareness-raising activities on implementation and financial aspects of environmentally friendly farming practices complementing restoration and preservation of biodiversity.

Finally, this project contributed to the programme communication objectives, mainly by increasing the level of knowledge about fruit production, using local resources and new products developed within the project. Project partners organised workshops and meetings with all stakeholders to exchange information and to transfer knowledge between each other. The project and its results were also publicised via various media channels.

## Annex 2 – Web survey figures

Total number of projects included	Number of web survey responses	Web survey response rate
43	14	32,55%

