

Ex post Evaluation of the Karelia ENI CBC 2014-2020 Programme



CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
TIIVISTELMÄ.....	6
1. INTRODUCTION	9
1.1. Background.....	9
2. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH	14
2.1. The evaluation team.....	14
2.2. Overall aims and objectives.....	14
2.3. Methodological approach	16
2.4. Conducting the evaluation – phases	18
2.5. Database of the evaluation.....	19
3. FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION.....	21
3.1. The effectiveness and impacts of the programme implementation	21
3.1.1. Relevance and consistency	21
3.1.2. Results and impacts	23
3.1.3. Case studies perspective	32
3.1.4 Programme’s contribution to the European level overall objectives.....	39
3.2 Programme’s co-operation aspect	40
3.2.1 Impact of Programme on Finnish-Russian co-operation, cross-border dimension of implemented projects and complementarity.....	41
3.2.2 Cross-border co-operation networks	43
3.2.3 Co-operation within the Programme structures.....	45
3.3 The Broader circumstances	46
3.3.1 Impacts on the Programme implementation.....	46
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	51

Annex 1. Case Studies

ABSTRACT

During the last 30 years, EU regional and cohesion policy has encouraged regions in the European Union member states to work together and engage in horizontal learning processes. The Karelia ENI CBC 2014-2020 Programme has continued the programme-based cooperation between the regions of Kainuu, North Karelia and Oulu Region in Finland and the Republic of Karelia on the Russian side. Lapland, North Savo, South Savo and South Karelia from the Finnish side and the regions of Leningrad, Murmansk and Archangelsk from the Russian side are defined as adjoining regions of the programme. The main goal of the Karelia Programme is to make the Programme area attractive for the people to live and work and businesses to locate and operate.

The ex-post evaluation of the Karelia ENI CBC Programme provides an overall independent assessment of the implementation, effectiveness and impacts of the Programme. The focus of external evaluation is on the assessment of achievements and results of the Programme. This summary is based on the main findings of the evaluation. The evaluation was carried out by a consortium consisting of TK-Eval (consortium leader) and The University of Eastern Finland, Spatia – Centre for Regional Research at the Karelian Institute (partner). The evaluation was conducted between February and December 2023. The evaluation team included Tommi Ålander (consortium leader) and Keimo Sillanpää from TK-Eval and Petri Kahila, Matti Fritsch and Timo Hirvonen from Spatia.

The evaluation questions set for the evaluation were answered by evaluating the existing documentation and by carrying out data collection and analysis. Our evaluation methods provide knowledge on the benefit that the Karelia ENI CBC Programme has delivered to the final beneficiaries, the project partners and the programme regions.

The priorities of the Programme and actual programme activities have responded mainly well to the regional needs of the areas. The Programme has succeeded in combining both broader regional needs and more detailed needs. This means that the development needs of the area and the development needs of the different branches of the economy and individual organisations implementing the projects are taken into account. These needs are well combined in the Programme, and it would be good if they were involved and co-ordinated also in this type of development work in the future as well. This is also particularly important from the point of view that there are not too many organisations in the area that have the real opportunity to act as project implementers.

The Programme has clearly resulted in positive development in the programme area. This can be seen from the feedback given by the actors in the evaluation. However, the Programme's role in the development of the Karelia ENI CBC programming area have weakened compared to earlier ENPI Programme external evaluation when considering the evaluation data gathered both times. But from the point of view of cross-border cooperation, the Programme's role has been considered significant.

Karelia programme has mainly achieved the set target values, and often exceeded the targets. This is a success for the Programme. To a certain extent, the set goals seem rather modest, in which case, big exceeding of the targets can be seen. The targets that include number of persons and organisations have been mostly met and exceeded except for number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector. The Programme has thus managed to reach the target group well compared to the set target values.

The biggest shortfalls in reaching the targets are found in all priorities of the Programme, e.g. number of implemented projects striving to remove the identified and analysed trade barriers/obstacles (Priority 1), number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector (Priority 2), number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas (Priority 3) and number of concrete development activities improving the operating conditions of rail traffic (Priority 4).

Concrete results can be noticed particularly in priorities 2 and 3. In addition, Vartius border-crossing investment project was seen as a good concrete result, although the increase in border crossings has not realised. Priority 2 has succeeded the most in achieving concrete results in Finland according to the programme actors. Concrete results are e.g. development of cultural tourism and cultural services and development of theatre productions. Concrete results of priority 3 are e.g. raising schoolchildren's awareness of environmental and energy efficiency, in overall improving environmental awareness (waste management especially in Russian Karelia), development of forest fire risk mapping and improving the urban environment in order to create a comfortable living environment for residents.

Priority 1 has suffered perhaps the most from the changing geopolitical situation. There are also some concrete results in priority projects, but the case study projects of this priority show that the current geopolitical situation has made it difficult for beneficiaries to utilize the results of the project. There have been some business expectations regarding Russian markets, but these intentions are watered down now after the war started by Russia in Ukraine.

The results identified by the beneficiaries were more of output-nature than results of the project implementation. In priority 1 the results can be summed up in three categories: 1) Developed and piloted “things”, 2) New or increased knowledge and 3) Exchange of information and experience including co-operation and contacts. In priority 2 one factor that unites the projects can be seen as the development of expertise: the projects have improved the competence of the participants and their stakeholders. Another factor that unites several priority 2 case projects is the involvement of local communities in the development work. In priority 3 collaboration with municipalities, regional councils and other public organisations was emphasised as important for longer-term impact of the project activities. It has kick-started further research and development work in specific topics. When the results are viewed in the programme as a whole the following general result categories can be seen particularly from the Programme actors' side 1) The experience gained from cross-border co-operation and its further utilization possibilities elsewhere and 2) Increasing environmental awareness and actions.

Long-term benefits that the Programme projects produced are basically dropping into three groups. 1) Increased knowledge and skills (incl. awareness-rising), 2) Investments made through the projects and 3) The emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks. The first two are the most common ones among the projects. Crucial factor in the sustainability of the achieved results and impacts is the changed geopolitical situation that significantly narrows the possibilities of utilising the results and impacts. To some extent the accumulated experience can be utilised elsewhere in transnational co-operation and in applying for funding from other programs. In addition, new innovations and services are in use and can be exported elsewhere and research co-operation etc. can produce more follow-up measures and impacts.

Programme's funding has been crucial for about 73% of projects. In other words, this portion of projects would probably not have been implemented, in any other form. The Programme is perceived to be of added value to regional development as a result of its focus on cross-

border aspects of development. The Programme appears important for several regional sectoral actors who find it difficult to fund their activities from other funding, for example in the cultural sector.

The impact of COVID-19 on programme implementation and the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation are things that have come up in several contexts in the evaluation. The projects saw particularly COVID-19 making co-operation difficult. COVID-19 has affected the project activities in a concrete way. The main influence categories are 1) The impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction and 2) Slowing down of project activities and progress. The projects minimised the negative effects of COVID-19 by utilizing remote connections and developing remote solutions. In addition, minimising was done by making changes to plans and operations of the project.

In overall, about half of the project Finnish implementers saw that the geopolitical situation had a negative impact on the project implementation. This negative impact hit the projects mostly after the Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The disruption to the Programme caused by Russian invasion of Ukraine has made it impossible to reach the project goals for most of the Programme projects (ongoing projects at the time). Only 14% of respondents saw that it had no affection. The termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries according to 37% of Finnish project implementers. In slightly more than half of the cases caused damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation were minimised successfully. Hence, the termination of cross-border co-operation has not been exclusively a bad thing to Finnish project actors, although it narrowed the scope of the act of cross-border co-operation. For example, in some cases it has improved co-operation between partners and made the implementation of measures faster.

Damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation varied greatly depending on the actors and the nature of the projects. Mainly no financial damage was done. The nature of the damage was mostly as follows: project content had to be changed, investments were unused, the amount of work increased, export opportunities did not realize etc. In addition, it is more likely now that development is going in a worse direction from an environmental point of view in the Republic of Karelia. It was strongly emphasised that the resources must be directed elsewhere, for example to Nordic regional co-operation. And utilize what has been learned in Karelia Programme elsewhere.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Viimeisen 30 vuoden aikana EU:n alue- ja koheesiopolitiikalla on rohkaistu Euroopan unionin jäsenvaltioiden alueita tekemään yhteistyötä ja osallistumaan horisontaalisiin oppimisprosesseihin. Karelia ENI CBC 2014-2020 -ohjelma on jatkanut Suomen puolella Kainuun, Pohjois-Karjalan ja Pohjois-Pohjanmaan sekä Venäjän puolella Karjalan tasavallan ohjelmajohdajista yhteistyötä. Ohjelman liitännäisalueita ovat Suomessa Etelä-Karjala, Etelä-Savo, Lappi ja Pohjois-Savo sekä Venäjällä Leningradin, Murmanskin ja Arkangelin alueet. Ohjelman päätavoitteena on tehdä ohjelma-alueesta houkutteleva asua ja työskennellä sekä tehdä alueesta houkutteleva yritystoiminnalle.

Karelia ENI CBC -ohjelman jälkiarviointi tarjoaa kokonaisvaltaisen riippumattoman arvion ohjelman toteutuksesta, tehokkuudesta ja vaikutuksista. Ulkoisen arvioinnin painopiste on ohjelman saavutusten ja tulosten arvioinnissa. Tämä yhteenveto perustuu arvioinnin tärkeimpiin havaintoihin. Arvioinnin toteutti konsortio, johon kuuluivat TK-Eval (konsortion johtaja) ja Itä-Suomen yliopiston Alue- ja kuntatutkimuskeskus Spatia (partneri). Arviointi suoritettiin helmi-joulukuun 2023 välisenä aikana. Arviointiryhmään kuuluivat Tommi Ålander (konsortion johtaja) ja Keimo Sillanpää TK-Evalista sekä Petri Kahila, Matti Fritsch ja Timo Hirvonen Spatiasta.

Arvioinnissa asetettuihin arviointikysymyksiin vastattiin tarkastelemalla olemassa olevaa dokumentoitua aineistoa sekä suorittamalla oma tiedonkeruu ja -analyysi. Käytössä olleiden arviointimenetelmien avulla saatiin tietoa hyödyistä, joita Karelia ENI CBC -ohjelma on tuonut lopullisille hyödynsaajille, hankekumppaneille ja ohjelma-alueille.

Ohjelman painopisteet ja varsinaiset ohjelmatoimet ovat vastanneet pääosin hyvin alueiden tarpeisiin. Ohjelmassa on onnistuttu yhdistämään sekä laajempia alueellisia tarpeita että yksityiskohtaisempia tarpeita. Tämä tarkoittaa, että alueen kehittämistarpeet sekä eri elinkeinojen ja yksittäisten hankkeita toteuttavien organisaatioiden kehittämistarpeet on huomioitu. Nämä tarpeet yhdistyvät ohjelmassa hyvin ja olisi hyvä, jos ne saadaan sisällytettyä ja koordinoitua myös jatkossa tämän tyyppisessä kehitystyössä. Tämä on erityisen tärkeää myös siksi, että alueella ei ole liikaa organisaatioita, joilla on todellisia mahdollisuuksia toimia hankkeiden toteuttajina.

Ohjelma on selvästi vaikuttanut positiivisesti ohjelma-alueen kehitykseen. Tämä näkyy toimijoiden antamasta palautteesta. Ohjelman rooli Karelia ENI CBC -ohjelma-alueen kehittämisessä on kuitenkin heikentynyt verrattuna aikaisempaan ENPI-ohjelman ulkoiseen arviointiin molemmilla kerroilla kerätyn arviointiaineiston perusteella. Rajat ylittävän yhteistyön näkökulmasta ohjelman roolia pidetään silti merkittävänä.

Ohjelmassa on pääosin saavutettu sille asetetut numeeriset tavoitteet ja tavoitteet on usein ylitetty. Tämä on luonnollisesti onnistuminen. Asetetut tavoitteet ovat kuitenkin jossain määrin melko vaatimattomia, minkä takia tavoitteet on osaltaan ylitetty. Henkilöiden ja organisaatioiden määrää koskevat tavoitteet on saavutettu tai ylitetty lukuun ottamatta perustettujen uusien kulttuurialan yritysten määrää. Ohjelma on siis onnistunut tavoittamaan kohderyhmää hyvin asetettuihin tavoitteisiin nähden.

Toimintalinjoittain suurimmat puutteet tavoitteiden saavuttamisessa ovat seuraavissa indikaattoreissa: toteutetut hankkeet, joilla pyritään poistamaan tunnistetut ja analysoidut kaupan esteet (tl 1), perustetut uudet yritykset kulttuurialalla (tl 2), konkreettiset toimet, jotka on toteutettu rajat ylittävien alueiden biologista monimuotoisuutta koskevien uhkien

poistamiseksi (tl 3) ja konkreettiset rautatieliikenteen toimintaedellytyksiä parantavat kehittämistoimenpiteet (tl 4).

Konkreettisia tuloksia on havaittavissa erityisesti toimintalinjoissa 2 ja 3. Lisäksi Vartiuksen rajanylitysinvestointihanke nähtiin hyvänä konkreettisena tuloksena, vaikka rajanylitysten lisääntyminen ei ole toteutunut. Toimintalinjassa 2 on onnistuttu ohjelman toimijoiden mukaan parhaiten saavuttamaan konkreettisia tuloksia Suomessa. Konkreettisia tuloksia ovat mm. kulttuurimatkailun ja kulttuuripalvelujen kehittäminen sekä teatterituotantojen kehittäminen. Toimintalinjan 3 konkreettisia tuloksia ovat mm. koululaisten ympäristö- ja energiatehokkuustietoisuuden lisääminen, kokonaisvaltaisen ympäristötietoisuuden parantaminen (jätehuolto erityisesti Venäjän Karjalassa), metsäpaloriskikartoituksen kehittäminen ja kaupunkiympäristön parantaminen asukkaille viihtyisän elinympäristön luomiseksi.

Toimintalinja 1 on kärsinyt kenties eniten muuttuneesta geopoliittisesta tilanteesta. Myös tämän toimintalinjan hankkeissa on nähtävissä konkreettisia tuloksia, mutta toimintalinjan tapaustutkimushankkeet osoittavat, että nykyinen geopoliittinen tilanne on vaikeuttanut hankkeiden tulosten hyödyntämistä. Hyödynsaajilla ja toimijoilla on ollut liiketoiminnallisia odotuksia Venäjän markkinoiden suhteen, mutta nämä aikomukset ovat vesittyneet Venäjän Ukrainassa aloittaman sodan myötä.

Hyödynsaajien tunnistamat tulokset ovat luonteeltaan enemmän hankkeiden tuotoksia kuin tuloksia. Toimintalinjan 1 osalta nämä voidaan tiivistää kolmeen kategoriaan: 1) kehitetyt ja pilotoitiedut erilaiset asiat, 2) uusi tai lisääntynyt tieto ja 3) tiedon ja kokemusten vaihto, mukaan lukien yhteistyö ja kontaktit. Toimintalinjassa 2 yhtenä hankkeita yhdistävänä tekijänä voidaan nähdä osaamisen kehittyminen: hankkeet ovat parantaneet osallistujien ja heidän sidosryhmiensä osaamista. Toinen useita toimintalinjan 2 tapaushankkeita yhdistävä tekijä on paikallisten yhteisöjen osallistuminen kehitysohjelmaan. Toimintalinjassa 3 korostettiin yhteistyötä kuntien, maakuntien ja muiden julkisten organisaatioiden kanssa hankkeiden toiminnan pidemmän aikavälin vaikuttavuuden kannalta. Tämä yhteistyö on käynnistänyt lisätutkimus- ja kehitysohjelmia joillakin aihealueilla. Kun tuloksia tarkastellaan ohjelmassa kokonaisuutena, seuraavat yleiset tulokset näkyvät erityisesti ohjelman toimijoiden näkökulmasta: 1) rajat ylittävistä yhteistyöstä saadut kokemukset ja sen jatkokäyttömahdollisuudet muualla sekä 2) ympäristötietoisuuden ja -toimien lisääntyminen.

Projektien tuottamat pitkän aikavälin hyödyt jakautuvat periaatteessa kolmeen ryhmään. 1) Tietojen ja taitojen lisääminen (ml. tietoisuuden lisääminen), 2) hankkeiden kautta tehdyt investoinnit ja 3) yhteistyöverkostojen syntyminen ja vahvistuminen. Kaksi ensimmäistä ovat yleisimpiä. Saavutettujen tulosten ja vaikutusten kestävyys vaikuttaa ratkaisevasti muuttuneeseen geopoliittiseen tilanteeseen, joka kaventaa merkittävästi tulosten ja vaikutusten hyödyntämismahdollisuuksia. Kertynyttä kokemusta voidaan jossain määrin hyödyntää muualla kansainvälisessä yhteistyössä ja muiden ohjelmien rahoituksen hakemisessa. Lisäksi uudet innovaatiot ja palvelut ovat käytössä ja niitä voidaan viedä muualle. Tutkimusyhteistyö ja muu yhteistyö voivat tuottaa jatkotoimenpiteitä ja vaikutuksia.

Yksi oleellinen merkki ohjelman lisäarvosta on sen rahoituksen merkitys. Ohjelman rahoitus on ollut ratkaisevaa noin 73 prosentille hankkeista. Toisin sanoen tätä osaa hankkeista ei todennäköisesti olisi toteutettu ilman ohjelmaa. Ohjelman nähtiin tuoneen lisäarvoa aluekehitykseen, koska se keskittyy rajat ylittäviin kehittämissäkökulmiin. Ohjelma on tärkeä useiden sektoreiden alueellisille toimijoille, joiden on vaikea rahoittaa tämäntyyppistä kehittämistoimintaa muulla rahoituksella, esimerkiksi kulttuurialalla.

Koronapandemian vaikutus ohjelman toteutukseen ja Venäjän kanssa tehtävän rajat ylittävän yhteistyön keskeyttämisen vaikutukset tulivat arvioinnissa esille useissa yhteyksissä. Erityisesti koronapandemian on nähty vaikeuttaneen yhteistyötä hankkeissa. Koronapandemia on vaikuttanut hankkeiden toimintaan konkreettisella tavalla. Tärkeimmät vaikutuskategoriat ovat 1) vierailujen ja suoran kasvokkaisen vuorovaikutuksen mahdottomuus ja 2) projektitoiminnan ja projektien edistymisen hidastuminen. Projekteissa onnistuttiin minimoimaan koronapandemian negatiiviset vaikutukset hyödyntämällä etäyhteyksiä ja kehittämällä etäratkaisuja. Lisäksi haittoja minimoitiin tekemällä muutoksia projektien suunnitelmiin ja toimintaan.

Kaiken kaikkiaan noin puolet hankkeen suomalaisista toteuttajista koki geopoliittisella tilanteella olleen kielteisen vaikutuksen hankkeiden toteutukseen. Tämä negatiivinen vaikutus iski hankkeisiin lähinnä Venäjän Ukrainaa vastaan aloittaman sodan syttymisen jälkeen. Venäjän sotatoimet vaikuttivat ohjelmatoimintaan siten, että suurimmalla osalla hankkeita oli mahdotonta saavuttaa tavoitteita (tuossa vaiheessa käynnissä olevista hankkeista). Vain 14 prosenttia hankkeista näki, ettei sillä ollut vaikutusta asiaan. Rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettaminen aiheutti vahinkoa suomalaisille edunsaajille. Näin näki 37 prosenttia suomalaisista hankkeiden toteuttajista. Hieman yli puolessa tapauksista rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettamisesta aiheutuneet vahingot minimoitiin onnistuneesti. Rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettaminen ei ole ollut pelkästään huono asia suomalaisille projektitoimijoille, vaikka se kavensikin rajat ylittävän yhteistyön toimintaa. Se on esimerkiksi joissain tapauksissa parantanut kumppaneiden välistä yhteistyötä ja nopeuttanut toimenpiteiden toteuttamista.

Rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettamisesta aiheutuneet vahingot vaihtelivat suuresti toimijoiden ja hankkeiden luonteen mukaan. Taloudellista vahinkoa ei pääosin aiheutunut toimijoille. Vahinkojen luonne oli yleisimmin seuraava: projektien sisältöä jouduttiin muuttamaan, investoinnit jäivät käyttämättä, työn määrä lisääntyi, vientimahdollisuudet eivät toteutuneet jne. Lisäksi on todennäköisempää, että nyt kehitys ympäristön kannalta on menossa huonompaan suuntaan Karjalan tasavallassa. Toimijat korostivat, että resurssit on nyt suunnattava muualla, esimerkiksi pohjoismaiseen alueyhteistyöhön. Jatkossa on myös tärkeää hyödyntää Karelia-ohjelmassa opittua muualla.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an ex-post evaluation of the Karelia ENI CBC Programme, which has been implemented on the Finnish-Russian border during the EU's 2014-2020 programming period. A consortium consisting of TK-Eval and Spatia was commissioned by the Programme authorities in February 2023 to carry out the evaluation and produce the report. The main purpose of this exercise is to provide an overall independent assessment of the effectiveness and impacts of the implementation of the programme. The assessment, and this report, thus, aim to help the key programme stakeholders on both national and regional levels to further improve the implementation of future CBC programmes. The sources of information utilised by the project consortium in their analysis included written documents and reports, statistical information, surveys among the project participants and the members of the JMC/JSC as well as in-depth, semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries of the Programme.

1.1. Background

European Territorial co-operation

During the last 30 years, EU regional and cohesion policy has encouraged regions in the European Union member states to work together and engage in horizontal learning processes. The main idea underpinning the launching of the first Interreg initiative in 1990, initially a Community Initiative that has since been mainstreamed into Cohesion Policy, underlined the common conviction that borders between states should not hinder the balanced development and integration of the European territory. The underlying argument is that peripherality and isolation of border regions is mainly the result of borders artificially cutting off border communities economically, socially and culturally, thereby hampering balanced and harmonious development. Sometimes border areas are also neglected in national policymaking. Territorial co-operation, facilitating direct and inter-regional contacts can provide significant stimulus for synergies and develop impulses through co-operation, networking, joint problem-solving and region-building; all contributing to effective harnessing of existing and potential development opportunities and integrating formerly disconnected borderlands. Cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation takes place under European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) that is an established strand of the EU Cohesion Policy framework, being financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Territorial co-operation and macro-regional initiatives are seen as specific ways in which to achieve territorial cohesion within a new policy space, also across the external borders of the EU. The scope for reinforcing cross-border co-operation has developed even more as an item of importance after the enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007, as the number of both internal and external borders has increased. Cross-border co-operation across the Finnish-Russian border has a relatively long tradition and has evolved since the early 1990s under different framework conditions and in parallel with important political and socio-economic developments on both sides of the border. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland initiated its own CBC instrument in form of the so-called Neighbouring Area Co-operation (Lähialueyhteistyö), which started in 1992 and ran until 2012. The EU entered the picture in 1995 when Finland's accession qualified the country for the Interreg Community Initiative. The northern sparsely populated areas also increasingly presented their territorial specificities and resultant aims jointly towards the EC, for example by drawing attention to the problems for service provision and economic activity brought about by 'sparsity', i.e. the lack of people within a certain amount of distance and remoteness from economic centers.

A major step towards CBC on this first EU-Russia land border was when a CBC component was added to the Tacis programme for which Russia had been eligible since 1991 (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States). This, however, involved a rather awkward combination of an internal Community Initiative (Interreg) with EU external policy principles and funding, which also entailed difficulties in the concrete application of these tools for the purpose of CBC in this region. Driven by these experienced difficulties, the EU Neighbourhood Programme (2004-2006), ENPI programme instrument (2007-2013) and ENI programme instrument (2014-2020) have progressively simplified the cross-border dimension of co-operation through successive administrative reforms which have brought the governance of CBC programmes on the external borders closer to the practices at the internal borders of the EU.

However, in recent years CBC across the Finnish-Russian border has experienced a number of challenges. In 2014, after the Russian annexation of Crimea, the inclusion of the CBC programmes with Russia into the sanctions was discussed. The COVID pandemic starting in 2020 posed a challenge to collaborative work within the projects with much of the interaction moving online. Finally, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European Commission decided to suspend co-operation with Russia and Belarus, although EU beneficiaries were able to continue project work as long as activities and financial flows on the Russian and Belarusian were ceased.

Karelia ENI CBC Programme 2014-2020

There are 15 ENI CBC Programmes in existence along the EU's eastern and southern borders. The Karelia CBC programme area is the central CBC area on the Finnish-Russian border, sandwiched between the northern Kolarctic and more southern Southeast Finland – Russia CBC programme areas. The Karelia CBC area is characterised by sparse population, extensive forests and, on the Finnish side, a relatively even coverage of small and medium-sized cities. The Russian side is more monocentric, with the capital of Petrozavodsk being by far the largest urban centre. Overall, the Karelia CBC area has a population of appr. 1.2 million in an area of 263 667 km² distributed relatively evenly across the border. The Karelia ENI CBC area has an approximately 700 km long land border that is served by three international border crossing points.

The Karelia ENI CBC programming area includes the regions of Kainuu, North Karelia and Oulu region from Finland and the Republic of Karelia from Russia (core regions). Lapland, North Savo, South Savo and South Karelia from the Finnish side and the regions of Leningrad, Murmansk and Archangelsk from the Russian side are defined as adjoining regions of the programme. A specific feature of the programming area at hand is the existence of Euregio Karelia. The Euregio Karelia is a political forum that was established in 2000 in order to facilitate regional level cross-border co-operation by maintaining a strategic and political dialogue cross the border and by providing a concrete arena for cross-border co-operation and local practice. Euregio Karelia includes the same geographic regions as the Karelia CBC core area.



Figure 1. The ENI programming areas on the Finnish-Russian border (Kareliacbc.fi).

A definitive feature of the programme area is its peripheral nature and sparse population. The major challenges being faced by the regions are decreasing population rates, decline in birth rates and net outmigration of the working age population. Long distances, inadequate traffic connections, low capacity of border crossing points and weak language skills pose further problems. Inherent strengths of the regions are, for example, the diverse and clean nature, joint cultural heritage, the higher education sector and abundant natural resources.

The Karelia CBC Programme shall contribute to regional development with activities that have a clear cross-border dimension and co-operation nature. Activities shall benefit regions and stakeholders on both sides of the border. The Programme complements other regional development programmes operating on the regions. At the same time the programme may also be an initiator for development activities/chains. The overall objective of the Karelia ENI CBC Programme is *to make the Programme area attractive for the people to live and work and businesses to locate and operate*. To achieve this goal, the objective is to (3 overarching strategic objectives) promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders (A); address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security (B) and promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods

and capital (C). In order to increase the impacts and efficiency of the Programme, the Programme was required to focus on a maximum of four thematic objectives out of the 10 created under the strategic objectives and proposed in the programming document 2014–2020 for ENI Cross Border Co-operation. The CBC programmes with Russian participation are to be implemented within the following guidelines for actions stipulated in the Concept for Cross-Border Co-operation of the Russian Federation. These guidelines are:

- a) co-operation in cross-border trade
- b) co-operation in investment projects
- c) co-operation in transport and logistics and communication
- d) co-operation in sustainable exploitation of natural resources and environmental protection
- e) co-operation in law-enforcement
- f) co-operation in regulating migration and labour market
- g) co-operation in science and research and people-to-people contacts.

The four Thematic objectives chosen for the Karelia CBC Programme are:

- Business and SME development (1)
- Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage (3)
- Environmental protection, climate change adaptation (6)
- Promotion of border management, and border security (10)

Based on these objectives, the programme has been divided into four priorities supporting the main objective. Priorities of the Programme were:

1. ***Growing cross-border business co-operation*** (Priority 1). The objective is to improve the business co-operation across the border and to create new working possibilities through cross-border co-operation for those already living in the region and for people willing to move to the region with a special focus on young people.
Priority contributes the Thematic Objective *Business and SME development (1)*.
2. ***Attractive cultural environment*** (Priority 2). The objective is to facilitate the development of sustainable, diverse and versatile cultural services.
Priority contributes the Thematic Objective *Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage (3)*.
3. ***Clean and comfortable region to live*** (Priority 3). The objective is to improve the people's physical living and working environment.
This priority contributes to the achievement of the Thematic Objective *Environmental protection and climate change adaptation (6)*.
4. ***Well-functioning border crossing*** (Priority 4). The objective is to remove the bottlenecks and improve the safety of the Programme area's international border crossing points and this way to lower the barriers to people travel and goods transport across the border.
This priority contributes to the achievement of the Thematic Objective *Promotion of border management, and border security (10)*.

The key organisations in the management of the programme are the Managing Authority (MA), the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and the Joint Selection Committee (JSC). The Managing Authority (MA) is responsible for “the management and implementation of the joint operational programme” according to the regulations set out by the European Commission. The designated Managing Authority of the Karelia programme is the Council of Oulu Region, which is located in Oulu (Finland). The Programme has also a branch office in Petrozavodsk that helps management bodies in the implementation of the programme. The Branch Office was closed at the end of March 2022 due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) consists of national and regional representatives of both participating countries and is responsible for the overall guidance of the programme implementation as well as appointing the Joint Selection Committee. The JSC also consist of members from both participating countries and is responsible for providing recommendations on the selection of projects to be funded. Since the beginning of the invasion, the Russian JMC members have not participated in the work of the committee.

The total budget of the Karelia ENI CBC programme was 43 million euros of which the EU-financing for Programme for the years 2014-2020 covered 50%. In addition, both Finland and Russia were indicating equal amount of funding for the Programme. Also the project partners were participating on financing the implementation of their projects.

2. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH

2.1. The evaluation team

The evaluation consortium consisting of TK-Eval (Kuopio, Finland) and Spatia – Centre for Regional Research at the Karelian Institute (Joensuu, Finland) was selected to provide an independent assessment of the results and impact of the Programme. TK-Eval acted as the consortium leader for the evaluation project. The evaluation team includes Tommi Ålander (responsible evaluator) and Keimo Sillanpää from TK-Eval and Petri Kahila, Matti Fritsch and Timo Hirvonen from Spatia – the Centre for Regional Research at the Karelian Institute. The evaluation was conducted between February 2023 and December 2023.

2.2. Overall aims and objectives

According to Terms of Reference specifications, the Programme evaluation must provide an overall independent assessment about the effectiveness and impacts of the implementation of the programme to serve the decision makers on both national and regional level in the implementation of future CBC Programmes. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the consequent suspension of Financing Agreements and the following cessation of CBC activities between the EU, its Member States and the Russian Federation, have resulted in programme implementation disruption. Before the invasion, the COVID-19 epidemic also had a significant impact on programme implementation. The focus of the evaluation is on **programme performance**, but the perspective is adjusted to take into account the impact of these global crises on programme implementation.

The purpose of the evaluation is described in more detail as follows:

The main objective of the evaluation is to provide an overall independent assessment of the programme **implementation and its effectiveness and impacts** in the programme area. The focus of evaluation is on the assessment of **achievements and results** of the programme. From this perspective, the evaluation should look for evidence of why, whether or how these results are linked to the implementation of the programme and seek to identify the factors driving or hindering progress.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have had a strong impact on the implementation of the programme. The evaluation should give an assessment of the programme implementation, but with consideration of these extraordinary circumstances. The consequences of these crises were different in their nature. COVID-19 posed a large-scale administrative problem for programme implementation, but it did not change the nature of the work. The invasion, however, brought an end to cross-border co-operation with Russia, which has made it impossible to complete the programme as originally planned.

As such, **the programme** can be viewed as having **two phases of implementation**: 1) the CBC phase, dictated by the Joint Operational Programme, and 2) the programme implementation disruption phase, which focuses on minimizing damage to the EU and Finland. The shift between these two phases can be considered to have occurred on February 24th 2022, even though the Financing Agreements were officially suspended on March 11th. A new regulation has been written by the Commission to support the implementation of the

programmes in this second phase. As per the decisions of the European Commission and the suspension of the Financing Agreement, all expenditures incurred on the Russian side after March 11th are considered ineligible.

The evaluation covers the Karelia ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme and its implementation during the programming period. **Below is a list of key issues and certain additional themes that form the thematic scope of the evaluation. The thematic frame of the evaluation can be divided into three parts: 1) the effectiveness and impacts of the programme implementation, 2) the co-operation aspect and 3) the broader circumstances.**

The effectiveness and impacts of the programme implementation:

- the relevance and consistency of the selected priorities compared to the Joint Operational Programme
- results and impacts of each priority compared to the set objectives
- the sustainability of the achieved results and impacts
- regional impacts: how the impacts of each priority are realized on different sides of the border
- achievement of co-operation goals set by the European Commission (Programming document for EU support to ENI Cross-Border Co-operation 2014-2020, chapter 6.4
https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/financing-the-enp/cbc_2014-2020_programming_document_en.pdf)

The co-operation aspect:

- the Programme's impact on the co-operation between Finland and Russia in general
- cross-border nature of implemented projects and the complementarity of the programme to other instruments

The broader circumstances:

- the programme's added value to the European level overall objectives
- the impact of COVID-19 on programme implementation and cross-border co-operation
- the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on programme implementation

The finalised set of evaluation questions are:

- Are the goals appropriate? Are the goals right in relation to the needs?
- To what extent was the programme able to achieve its goals?
- Which goals were not reached? Were they not reached because of the programme implementation disruption or for other reasons?
- Are the indicators set purposefully/successfully?
- Territorial co-operation between the EU and Russia is likely to have ended for the time being. What are the durable benefits for regions achieved by the programme?
- Was programme funding used efficiently and purposefully? Before and after the cut-off date?
- What was achieved by completing the programme on the Finnish side? Was it worth the effort?
- Were the damages to Finnish beneficiaries successfully minimised?

- What does the future of the regions look like in the changed circumstances? What is the impact of closing the CBC programme to the regions? Has the programme left a visible legacy that can be used in future activities in the region?

2.3. Methodological approach

The evaluation of the Programme has been an interactive process between the client and the external evaluators. Quantitative (structured questionnaires) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) research methods have been applied and obtained data have been analysed with the help of triangulation (i.e. cross-checking of findings on the basis of different sources of information). Triangulation allowed the evaluators to identify and verify highly significant data on background factors and territorial aspects of the Programme's implementation.

The evaluation methods will be based on a customer-oriented approach that provides knowledge on the benefit that the Karelia ENI CBC Programme has delivered to *the final beneficiaries, the project partners and the programme regions*. A customer-oriented approach is emphasised throughout the evaluation process. In order to obtain useful information on project process, successes and failures, the customers and other participants will be closely involved in the evaluation process. The evaluation will not only include the tangible and measurable results of activities with regard to projects, but if possible, also their spill-over benefits that may improve the customers' economic, social and human development. The intention is to allow different groups to identify changes resulting from the projects. The key question is whether they have benefited and also what the projects' strengths and weaknesses were. Triangulation (see figure 3) is used to compare the group information.

There is a variety of concepts applied to differentiate between various types of stakeholders, beneficiaries, or customers. In this evaluation, the evaluators will apply the following terminology based on a customer-oriented evaluation approach:

1. Stakeholders: Individuals or institutions that may, directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, affect or be affected by a project or programme
2. Beneficiaries: Those who benefit in whatever way from the implementation of the project. Distinction may be made between:
 - a. Target group(s): The group/entity who will be directly positively affected by the project at the Project Purpose level. This may include the staff from partner organisations
 - b. Final beneficiaries: Those who benefit from the project in the long term at the level of the society or sector at large, e.g. consumers because of improved agricultural production and marketing.
3. Project partners: Those who implement the projects (who are also stakeholders and may be a target group)
4. Regions: Those regions that are defined as belonging to the Karelia ENI CBC Programme area

The Programme's capability and capacity to support different customers at the project level is a guiding principle in the evaluation methodology. A strong emphasis in the evaluation process will be on the **learning process**, which will be informed by interviews and questionnaires targeted at customers at all levels in both participating countries. A strong overall theme is the importance of interaction in both learning and codifying; as well as generating new knowledge. Learning is not only important at the individual level, but also at the institutional level. Therefore, the findings of the evaluation at the Programme and the project level will not only

contribute meeting the objective of accountability, but also feed into learning processes and policy choices.

When approaching the evaluation process at the project implementation level, we have to bear in mind the mutual nature of development policies. On the one hand, development policies deal with quantifiable effects, and, on the other hand, with the explanations of emerged effects. Particular methods help to explain and understand the intended and unintended effects of various interventions. Other methods help to establish explanations for the intervention that possibly has generated acquired change. It is of utmost importance to identify and estimate the causal effects between these two strands. In the evaluation process, causality is an important dimension in order to determine what is taken to be an intervention and what is taken to be the outcome produced by the intervention, i.e. its impacts or effects. Therefore, the evaluators are convinced that the approach to successful impact analysis is a **triangulation of methods** that allows grasping all the above-described dimensions successfully. This principle is called triangulation because it allows the usage of more than two approaches and combines different research methods to give a range of perspectives (figure below).

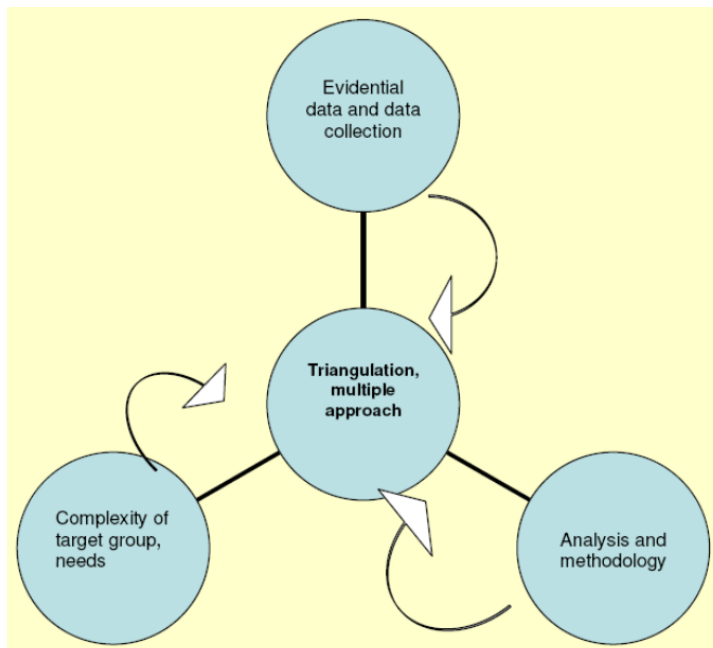


Figure 2. The Triangulation Evaluation Method.

The triangulation of methods applies quantitative and qualitative procedures for data collection. This procedure allows highly significant data with respect to the generality of the findings to be emphasised, and also of gaining more sensitive information, delivering general statements about background factors and also territorial aspects. Another advantage of the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is that there is a real added value because the information from both data collecting procedures is not compiled in separation. This process also generates cross-references between datasets, thus validating each other. In the evaluation process of Karelia ENI CBC Programme, questionnaires and interviews are specifically structured as quantitative and qualitative data collecting instruments, so that identical aspects regarding contents can be commented from different perspectives. In this

manner, comparisons can be applied using data interpretation. Connections or discrepancies between the different perspectives of those questioned can be determined and discussed.

Methodologically the evaluation process needs first to draw on the critical review of the annual reports of the Programme in order to capture perspectives on the specific features of the Karelia ENI CBC Programme. This is necessary in order to broaden access to actual intrinsic performance of the Programme. Generally, this will be the starting point for the more specific evaluation process. The approach chosen in this evaluation task is both realistic and pragmatic. Evaluators' intention is to deliver an accurate evaluation based on quantitative and qualitative evidence collected at levels as close as possible to the final beneficiaries of the Programme. At the same time, findings are expected to be robust thanks to the mobilisation of a methodology as rigorous and sound as possible.

The specific methodology for evaluation of the Programme implementation and operationalisation is comprised of:

1. Desk based research will concentrate on programming documents, annual reports and other relevant programming sources.
2. A survey is carried out to differentiate a) programme demand and supply and b) actors who are involved in the coordination and management of the Programme. There are direct and indirect beneficiaries (policy makers, practitioners) as regards to Programme implementation and impact. The fact that the actors involved in the programme from both sides are limited and known but it will facilitate a comprehensive approach and completeness of information gathered with the support of this web-based survey. This method also forms base for the case studies.
3. Semi-structured interviews will be employed with the most relevant stakeholders at both programme and project level to validate the results of two previous steps. Interviews will also be used when making the case studies in the evaluation.

2.4. Conducting the evaluation – phases

The following table shows the concrete phases of the evaluation, including the applied methods and produced output. In addition, short descriptions of how each phases was done are provided.

Phases of the Evaluation	
Phase 1	Inception discussion
Method	Kick-off meeting with the client online.
Output	Detailed work plan for the evaluation and for the analysis of reference documents, indicating specific outputs and briefing papers. Inception report after the meeting.
Phase 2	Strategic analysis of reference documents
Method	Desk analysis (Analysis using e.g. classifying, cross-tabulation, ratio calculations (frequency analysis), comparative analysis, qualitative analysis utilising interpretation).
Output	Preliminary analysis of the evaluation questions in the light of various documents.
Phase 3	Desk analysis according to the evaluation questions
Method	Desk analysis (Analysis using e.g. classifying, cross-tabulation, comparative analysis, qualitative analysis utilising interpretation).
Output	Preliminary analysis feeding information to data collection of evaluation

Phase 4	Elaboration of data collection
Method	Desk analysis and consultation with the client. This analysis provided a possibility for the detailed preparation of questionnaires and interview questionnaires and agreement with the client on the specific list of persons and institutions to be interviewed. The analysis was also a preparatory stage for selecting the case studies for deeper analysis.
Output	Proposal of interviewees including the selection of projects to case studies and final beneficiary interviews. Interview questions and questionnaires.
Phase 5	Conducting the data collection
Method	Interviews, case studies and web-based questionnaires. The web-based questionnaires were sent to (a) representatives of the projects (lead partners and partners) and (b) the members of JMC and JSC. The questionnaire was be sent only to Finnish groups. The questionnaire was conducted in Finnish and in English. Case studies were conducted by interviewing project lead partners and projects' final beneficiaries. This data collection was targeted only to Finnish actors.
Output	Database of questionnaires and interviews, case studies
Phase 6	Analysis of the collected data
Method	The results of the questionnaires and interviews were analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative approach. Quantifications were made from the questions when applicable. Qualitative methods were used especially in analysing the open answers.
Output	Preliminary analysis to evaluation questions, Case studies giving deeper information about the results and impacts form the projects' beneficiary point of view.
Phase 7	Synthesising Programme and project level analysis
Method	Analysis of the project level in the evaluation sheds light on significant issues on relevance, consistency, results and impacts of the Programme Priorities as well as sustainability and durability of the Programme. Utilizing the methods used in the earlier phases.
Output	Analysis feeding input to the evaluation report
Phase 8	The evaluation report
Method	The evaluation report is based on gathered and analysed material. Summarising all results of previous activities
Output	Final evaluation report in English including summaries in English and Finnish.

2.5. Database of the evaluation

The data collection of the evaluation was directed at three target groups: 1) representatives of the projects (lead partners and partners), 2) the members of the Joint Selection Committee (JSC) and the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and 3) beneficiaries of the projects funded by the Programme. The evaluation survey for the project representatives was carried out in Finnish and English. The questionnaire was sent only to Finnish partners. The survey was sent by e-mail to 120 project respondents. Some of the e-mail addresses were incorrect and altogether 52 recipients were reached from Finland. This gave a response rate of 57%. The questionnaire was also sent to associates and interest groups. This group included the

members of the Joint Selection Committee and Joint Monitoring Committee. It was sent to 14 persons. Answers were received from 8 recipients. This gave a response rate of 57%.

In addition to desk study, case studies were conducted through a review of the Final Reports (where available) of the case projects and interviews. Interviews were made online or face-to-face and were targeted especially at lead partners and projects' final beneficiaries. Selection criteria for the sample of beneficiaries as well as selection of the case projects were elaborated in close co-operation with the MA. Through the interviews we particularly aimed at collecting information about the results and sustainability of the selected projects at the organisational level. The sample of beneficiaries included projects from different thematic objectives/priorities, projects of different size (micro projects, regular projects, and Large Infrastructure Projects) and content, and managed by different kind of organisations. The sample was extended to the whole Programme area in Finnish side. The sample included:

- Priority 1: 5 projects
- Priority 2: 5 projects
- Priority 3: 5 projects
- Priority 4: 1 project.

This means that for altogether 16 projects (case studies) interviews were conducted. On average, 1,75 interviews were conducted per case, which result in a total number of 28 interviews. Russian parties involved in the projects were not interviewed. In some of the case projects, it was not possible to reach interviewees, but relevant documented material was found on these projects instead. Not a single case project had to be changed due to accessibility challenges. Altogether 88 persons involved in the programme implementation were reached and their opinions were collected. This number of recipients provided a good background for analysis.

The following table summarizes the data collection of the evaluation:

Table 1. The data collection of the evaluation

The summary of the evaluation data collection		
Data source	Recipients, number	Response rate %
The project questionnaire	52	57
The JMC/JSC questionnaire	8	57
Beneficiary interviews (case studies)	28	
TOTAL	88	

3. FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

3.1. The effectiveness and impacts of the programme implementation

3.1.1. Relevance and consistency

Relevance refers to the question whether actual programme activities have corresponded to the objectives identified in the Programme document and to the actual regional needs. The overall objective of the Programme was *to make the Programme area attractive for the people to live and work and businesses to locate and operate*. This overall objective was operationalized through three overarching objectives, i.e. (A) promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders, (B) address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security and (C) promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital. Karelia CBC has contributed to the achievement of all above mentioned three strategic objectives. In addition, there were four chosen thematic objectives for the Karelia Programme: Business and SME development (1), promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage (3), environmental protection, climate change adaptation and (6) promotion of border management, and border security (10). Priorities have been created on the basis of the selected thematic objectives (one priority for each thematic objective). Considering the evaluation question of “the relevance and consistency of the selected priorities compared to the Joint Operational Programme”, it is obvious that there is a good relevance and consistency due to this program logic. Selected priorities are well in line with to the JOP, because thematic objectives are derived from overarching objectives and from overall objective and thematic objectives form (are same as) formed Programme priorities.

The questionnaire that was sent out to members of the JMC and the JSC provide, as a result of their overall overview and knowledge of the Programme activities, some important information with regard to the Programme’s relevance and sensitivity to regional needs. The JMC and JSC members were asked how they see some statements concerning the Karelia CBC Programme and its implementation. According to the answers Karelia ENI CBC Programme has clearly resulted in positive development in the programme area. The Programme also expedited the implementation of regionally important development projects and took into consideration the needs and specificities of different sectors of economic activity. In these views, however, the main line was “somewhat agree”. What comes to Programme’s role in the development of the Karelia ENI CBC programming area, respondents mainly saw that the Programme did not really have an essential role. Compared to the findings of the previous program evaluation (ENPI external evaluation, seven years ago), respondents' views have changed regarding programme’s role in the programming area. The role is now seen as less important in this respect.

Clarifications to the answers in this section provide more detailed information about the Programme relevancy. Regarding the Programme’s role in the development of the Karelia ENI CBC programming area, it was clarified for example that Karelia CBC had limited resources, and it cannot be considered the main tool for the development of the region. However, from the point of view of cross-border co-operation, its role was considered significant. From the point of view of regional development, it was mentioned that the Programme’s connection to the goals of the regional development programmes was not very strong, but it supported the development of the region for its part and served especially the development and operation of implementing organisations and their co-operation networks,

which in turn promotes the development of the entire region. In addition, it was raised that the final reports of the projects rarely refer to the regional development programmes.

It is apparent that the cross-border component of regional development is not necessarily the most important one in regions with diverse intra-regional, national and wider international connections and linkages. What is important to consider is that the respondents also broadly agree that the Programme took properly into account the needs and characteristics of the different branches of the economy, as this provides some indication for accomplishment of regional relevance. However, the fact that only a relatively small number of the JMC/JSC members ‘agreed completely’ with this statement could mean that there is still room for improvement with regard to this topic.

The next question regarding the statements concerning projects takes a deeper step into the relevance aspects of the programme. Also here there is broad consensus among the JMC and JSC members that the projects have strengthened cross-border co-operation, thereby contributing to the development and well-being of the Programme area. Among the respondents there was also conviction that the projects were, and ought to be, based more on the development needs of the programme area than on the development needs of individual organisations implementing the projects. However, the overall agreement with both statements shows that resulting projects are a combination of the two. And the best situation is that organisations and programme areas development needs are common and in the same direction. Besides, there are not too many organisations in the regions that have the opportunity to act as project implementers. So, it is important that the Programme should serve both perspectives. Respondents were very unanimous that the projects were quite successful considering the resources available.

It is good to summarize the perspective of regional needs in the following distribution of answers. The priorities of the Programme have responded mainly well to the regional needs of the areas according to project implementers (project survey). About ¾ of the project implementers were quite strongly of that opinion. 12% considered priorities responding only moderately to the regional needs of their areas. The respondents of the priority 2 (attractive cultural environment) saw the priority their project belonged to responding particularly well to the regional needs of the area. The responses given from the priority 1 and 3 were following the average distribution of answers.

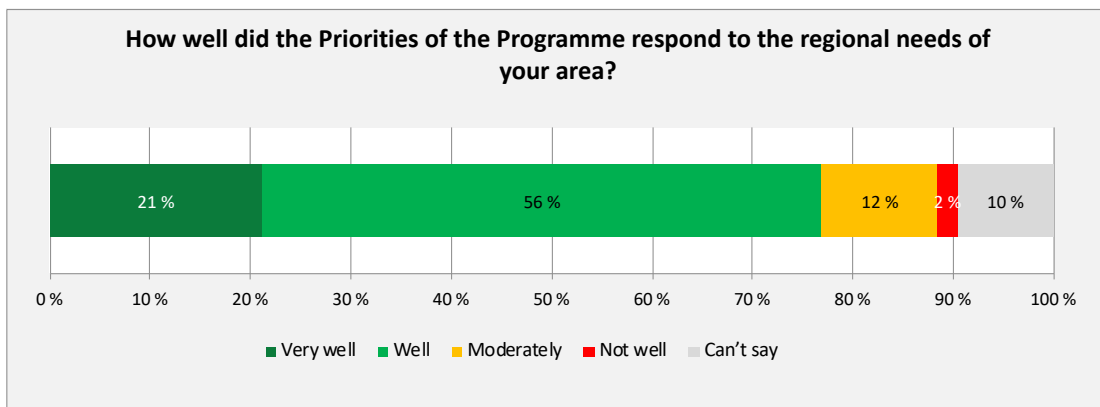


Figure 3. How well did the priorities of the Programme respond to the regional needs of your area? Only answer from the perspective of the priority your project belonged to (Project questionnaire).

JMC and JSC members were asked how they see some potential problems in the implementation of the Karelia CBC Programme. They were presented with the following statement: the Programme did not respond to regional needs. Half of the respondents strongly disagreed, and half disagreed to some extent. According to this distribution of answers, it can be said that the Programme seems to respond quite well to regional needs.

There was consensus among both the JMC/JSC members and the project implementers that most important themes were covered in the Programme. Nevertheless, quarter of JMC and JSC members and almost a quarter of the project respondents felt that some important themes were left out (see next figure). Some thematic areas that were mentioned as being not represented very well were:

- *Cleantech-type solutions such as themes related to water purification. These were added in the new program season, which was canceled due to the war situation.*
- *Karelian language and culture.*
- *Development of conditions for nature tourism.*
- *Societal coherence and common socio-cultural understanding across borders.*
- *Forecasting environmental damage and cutting emissions. Now the focus was on increasing diversity, which does not correspond to this in all respects.*

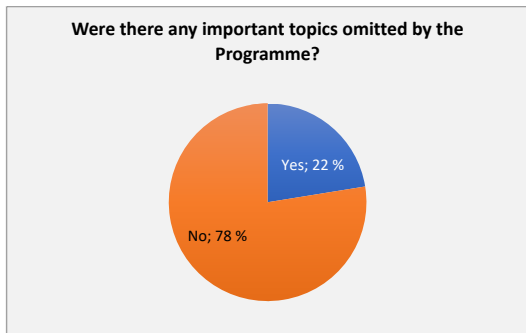


Figure 1 Were any important omitted by the Programme? (Project questionnaire).

3.1.2. Results and impacts

The Programme total budget for the operating years 2014–2020 was 43.0 M€. A total of 61 projects were financed from the Programme. In the situation of mid-December 2023 final reports were submitted by 56 projects and 2 projects were still continuing. In the following there is some further information about the funding and payments (mid-December 2023):

- Commitments 37 441 376 € - 101,19 % of the financial frame
- Total payments: 29 085 641 €
- Verified and audited amounts: 30 501 353 €
- Released funding from closed projects: 4 467 884 €

Regarding the types of the organisation involved in Karelia CBC projects in Finland there's a wide variety of different organisations. Involvement of Finnish educational and research organisations has been very significant for the Programme operations. In the lead partners operating in Finland, these clearly make up the largest part. A reasonable large part of the partners in Finland have also been private companies. Different public actors also play a rather large role in the operations of the Programme.

Table 2. Types of organisation involved in Karelia CBC projects in Finland.

Types of the organisation involved in Karelia CBC projects in Finland:			
	Lead Partners	Partners	Total
International organisations	0	0	0
Private companies	3	25	28
Educational and research organisations	21	35	56
Non-governmental actors	1	11	12
Other public actors	2	8	10
Regional and local public actors	1	14	15
National public authorities	3	11	14
Total (Finnish organisations)	31	104	135

In order to monitor the implementation of the Programme, output indicators have been formed by Priorities. The following table summarizes the output indicators with target values and realizations (results).

Table 3. Target values and results of the Programme Output Indicators (mid-December 2023).

Priorities and Output Indicators	Target	Result
Priority 1: Growing cross-border business co-operation		
OI 1.1 Number of feasibility studies and sectoral analyses identifying the barriers and problems in different business sectors	5	9
OI 1.2 Number of implemented projects striving to remove the identified and analysed trade barriers/obstacles	10	3
OI 1.3 Number of enterprises substantially and actively involved in projects	30	338
OI 1.4 Number of actions implemented in order to increase the investments in the region	5	1
Priority 2: Attractive cultural environment		
OI 2.1 Number of cultural organisations using programme support	40	139
OI 2.2 Number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector	5	2
OI 2.3 Number of cultural organisations using programme support for cross sectoral co-operations	15	16
OI 2.4 Number of young persons/members of special target groups reached with activities aiming at increased integration	50	1254
Priority 3: Clean and comfortable region to live		
OI 3.1 Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities	100	1269
OI 3.2 Number of investment initiatives got to the project financing pipeline	5	6
OI 3.3 Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas	10	6
OI 3.4 Number of persons actively participating in projects using nature as a tool to improve the health and wellbeing	50	595
Priority 4: Well-functioning border crossings		
OI 4.2 Increased throughput capacity of trucks on the border crossing points	250	300
OI 4.4 Number of concrete development activities improving the operating conditions of rail traffic	2	1

Karelia programme has mainly achieved the set target values, and often exceeded these targets. The biggest exceeding of the target are seen in numbers of persons participating, particularly in Priority three and two, as well as in number of enterprises involved in Priority one. The biggest shortfalls are found in basically in all Priorities, e.g. number of implemented projects striving to remove the identified and analysed trade barriers/obstacles (Priority 1), number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector (Priority 2), number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas (Priority 3) and number of concrete development activities improving the operating conditions of rail traffic (Priority 4). In overall, the targets that include number of persons and organisations have been mostly met and exceeded with the exception of number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector. It can be noticed that the Programme has thus managed to reach the target group well.

The JMC and JSC members were asked in the questionnaire how well was the Karelia ENI CBC Programme able to develop the chosen Priorities of the Programme. The question got mainly rather positive responses particularly regarding the Priorities 2 to 4. Priority 2, attractive cultural environment got the best reviews (almost 90 % of the responses were on the positive side on the scale). Priorities 3 (clean and comfortable region to live) and 4 (well-functioning border crossing) were seen in a twofold way: half of the respondents saw the Programme being quite successful in promoting these priorities. With regard to priority 1, growing cross-border business co-operation, success was seen in varying degrees, with the answers focusing on “moderately” assessments.

The JMC and JSC members were asked to name the Priorities that succeeded the most in achieving concrete results in Finland and to name what were these concrete results. The answers followed what was seen in the previous answer distribution. Concrete results were noticed particularly in Priorities 2 and 3. In addition, Vartius border-crossing investment project was seen as a good concrete result, although the increase in border crossings has not realized. It was foreseen that good functional border facilities are still needed in the future. Regarding the Priority 2 concrete results like development of cultural tourism and cultural services and development of theatre productions were raised. Quite a lot of concrete results were brought up in relation to Priority 3. These were e.g. raising schoolchildren's awareness of environmental and energy efficiency, in overall improving environmental awareness (waste management especially in Russian Karelia), development of forest fire risk mapping and improving the urban environment in order to create a comfortable living environment for residents.

In the JMC and JSC questionnaire respondents were asked to name three main results that were produced through the implementation of the Karelia ENI CBC Programme. Answers fall mainly into two different groups: 1) the experience gained from cross-border co-operation and its further utilization possibilities elsewhere and 2) increasing environmental awareness and actions. What comes to the results regarding the experience gained from cross-border co-operation and its further utilization possibilities elsewhere, the actors in the region have practiced transnational co-operation with a challenging partner country which was seen as accumulated expertise that can be used in other international co-operation. This means also that know-how of project implementors has increased and therefore ability to apply transnational funding and implement transnational projects is better than before. In addition, the ability to work remotely has improved and the performance of project co-operation under COVID conditions can also be used elsewhere (e.g. in co-operation with Sweden, Norway and Baltic Countries). Accumulated experience was seen as usable in utilizing the results from the perspective of tourism marketing etc. The answers concerning increasing environmental awareness and actions highlighted for example solutions related to waste management in

sparsely populated areas and development of waste management and water management on the side of the Republic of Karelia. Individual highlights were also presented. These included for example environmental education co-operation of schools, infrastructure development/border security, museum projects and development and internationalization of cultural activities of local communities.

The JMC and JSC members were asked to assess how well Karelia ENI CBC managed to contribute to EU’s three overarching strategic objectives. These strategic objectives are:

- a. promotion of economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common border
- b. addressing common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security
- c. promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital

According to the answers the Programme has been the best at responding to promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common border. About 75% of respondents saw this positively. Regarding the second strategic objective (addressing common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security) opinions are more divided, but are still mostly positive (appr. 63% on positive side). What comes to the third strategic objective (promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital), respondents mainly saw that the Programme contributed to this objective mainly moderately or not well (appr 63% of respondents were of that opinion).

The project implementers were asked in the questionnaire whether the planned project results were achieved during the project time. Overall, the planned project results seem to be achieved quite well. 29% of the respondent were of the opinion that planned project results were achieved completely and 48% thought that results were achieved mostly (see next figure). 21% of respondents thought that this has happened only limitedly and just 2% said “not at all”. Some comparisons were made in this question regarding the opinions of the project implementers. The comparisons were made between the projects that were still underway when Russia started the war against Ukraine and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the war. There were huge differences in the answers regarding the issue. The projects implemented before the start of the war responded to this question clearly more positively. They answered either “completely” or “mostly”. None of those project respondents thought that planned project results were achieved just limitedly or not at all. Compared to the findings of the previous program evaluation (ENPI 7 years ago), respondents' views are now more cautious. According to this comparison, the planned project results are achieved in the current Programme under evaluation more limitedly.

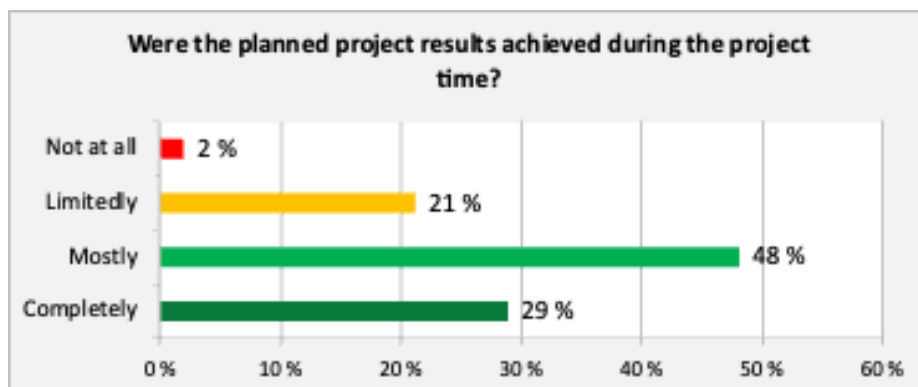


Figure 5. Answers to the question: Were the planned project results achieved during the project time? (Project questionnaire).

An interesting question to examine is what kind of results the project actors see as having been created. This is examined by how many times certain project results are raised by the project respondents. The most common project result is the creation of new networks and modes of collaboration based on this examination. The second often respondents mentioned increased awareness regarding the operating environment. Finding new and innovative modes of action regarding the project's objectives comes third. Not so often, but still quite many respondents raised also making needed investments, development of new approaches to networked learning and better co-ordination between the actors participating in the project.

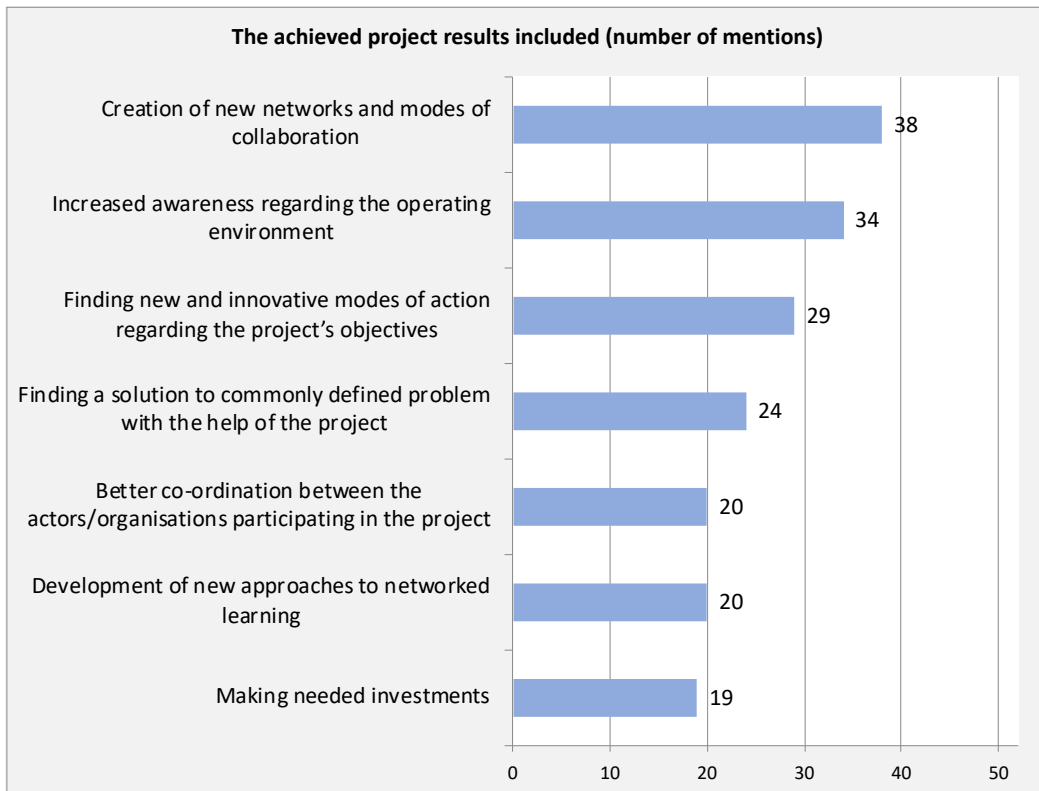


Figure 6. The achieved project results included... (Project questionnaire).

The comparisons were made in this question between the projects that were still underway when Russia started the war against Ukraine and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the war. There were some differences in the answers regarding the issue. The projects that were still underway when war started responded to this question somewhat positively in few results. In these projects, there were more results like making needed investments, development of new approaches to networked learning, better co-ordination between the actors participating in the project and increased awareness regarding the operating environment. Comparison to the findings of the previous programme evaluation can be done only on an indicative level in this question. It can be said that the main line in the results is very similar. The creation of new networks and modes of collaboration was the main result then and now, as well as making needed investments is the result half as often.

Respondents to the project questionnaire were asked to give their opinion about the aspects that their projects produced the most benefit for. Increasing environmental awareness and improvement of the operating environment for business were the two that stood out the most. In addition, removal of barriers to cross-border economic co-operation was one of the most

important aspects that projects produced benefit for. Things like use of nature in the promotion of health and wellbeing and development of inclusive cultural activities for young people at risk of marginalization were not recognized as that kind of aspects. When comparing these observations to the JMC/JSC members' answers, the view is very similar to project implementers. JMC and JSC respondents also highlighted increasing environmental awareness but also improvement of skills and capacities among cultural stakeholders.

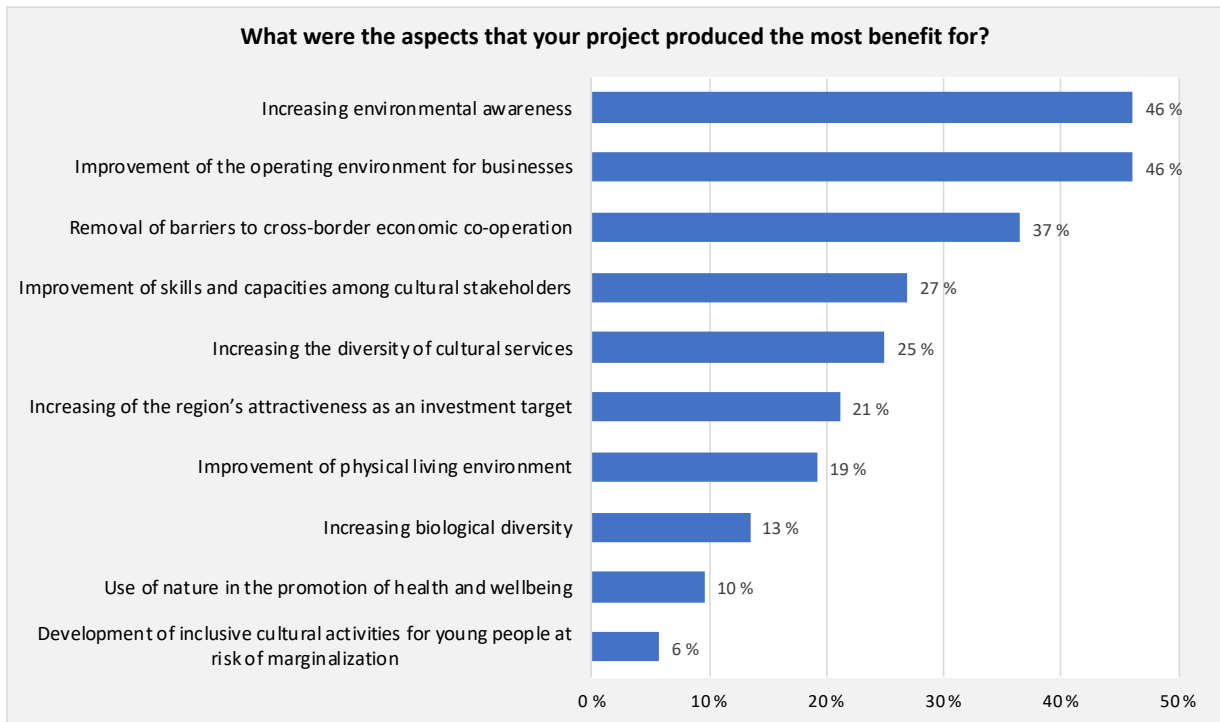


Figure 7. What were the aspects that your project produced the most benefit for? (Project questionnaire).

The project implementers were asked what were the long-term benefits that their projects produced. Long-term benefits are basically dropping into three groups. The first two are the most common according to the respondent. The first one is increased knowledge and skills (incl. awareness-rising). In this context, it was also essential for respondents to see the possibilities of utilizing accomplished knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills were related to concrete issues such as waste management, military history etc. or to general awareness of the needs of the operating environment. Prepared publications and guides have been acting as important tools for delivering knowledge and skills. The second one is investments made through the projects. Investments were seen benefiting local residents, travellers, energy sector etc., also in the future. Investments that were brought up were for example different waste collection points, recycling facilities, investments aimed at the border facilities, investments at biogas, investments that prevent nutrient load in waters, various developed and tested models etc. The third one is the emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks. This is something that can now be benefitted only partly due to current geopolitical situation, almost entirely only between Finnish partners.

How did JMC and JSC respondents see the permanent or long-term effects that resulted from the Programme? The answers were very much in line with the points raised by the project actors. JMC and JSC members' perspective was naturally on a slightly more general level. Respondents also highlighted increased knowledge and skills, made investments and collaboration. In addition, they highlighted a new kind of thinking born, accumulated

experience to be utilized elsewhere in transnational co-operation and in applying for funding from other programs, new innovations and services, research co-operation etc. Moreover, with the help of the projects it has been possible to eliminate jointly identified problems and co-operation challenges.

The project implementers were also asked, how do they see different actors benefitting from the project. The following figure brings up the response distribution. According to this, the lead partners and partners benefited the most from the projects. Actually, project partners are the biggest benefiteres. Target groups have been benefiting from the projects almost like the lead partners, but those answers including “a little” are slightly increasing. Beneficiaries taking advantage of the projects were often local residents, municipalities, schools, educational institutions, enterprises, local authorities, village associations etc.

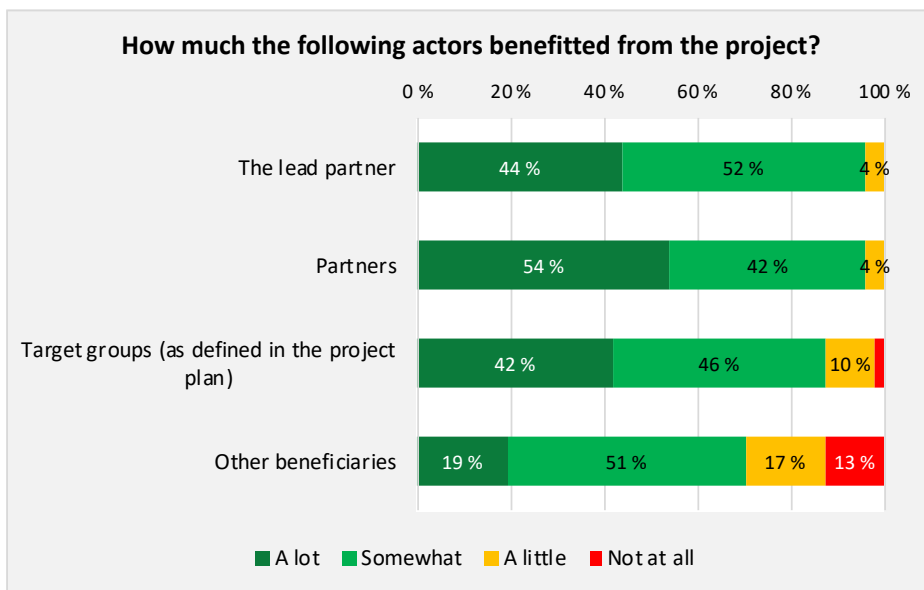


Figure 8. How much the following actors benefitted from the project? (Project questionnaire).

Another interesting question to examine in the evaluation is what the most important results or benefits for participating project organisations themselves were. The answers here are very much in the same line with the question of long-term benefits that projects produced. The answers fall into same categories: 1) increased knowledge and skills (incl. awareness-rising), 2) investments made through the projects and 3) the emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks. What is essential in these is their further utilization according to the project implementers. Increased knowledge and skills include benefits like promotion of scholarship, illustrative videos and communication/teaching materials, publications, guides, trainings etc. Investments include investment that are now in use for example solar power systems, bio business investments, forecasting model, various infra improvements, better waste management, measuring station, smoother traffic and service, mobileapps, etc. The emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks include issues like increased competence in the co-operation, getting to know the partners better which helps to co-operate better etc.

What were the regional impacts of Karelia ENPI CBC projects? This is one of the key questions in the evaluation and we approached it for example by providing some statements concerning the possible regional impacts of projects. According to the project respondents, one of the greatest regional impacts of projects were that the projects facilitated networking

and the exchange of good practices. In addition, projects were seen generating new project ideas and initiatives and helped to develop good practices and expertise rather well. About half of the respondents stated that project results advanced co-operation activities and project results led to concrete activities around projects' topics. Regional impacts were seen rather modest regarding the influence on project results into development plans or strategies in the region.

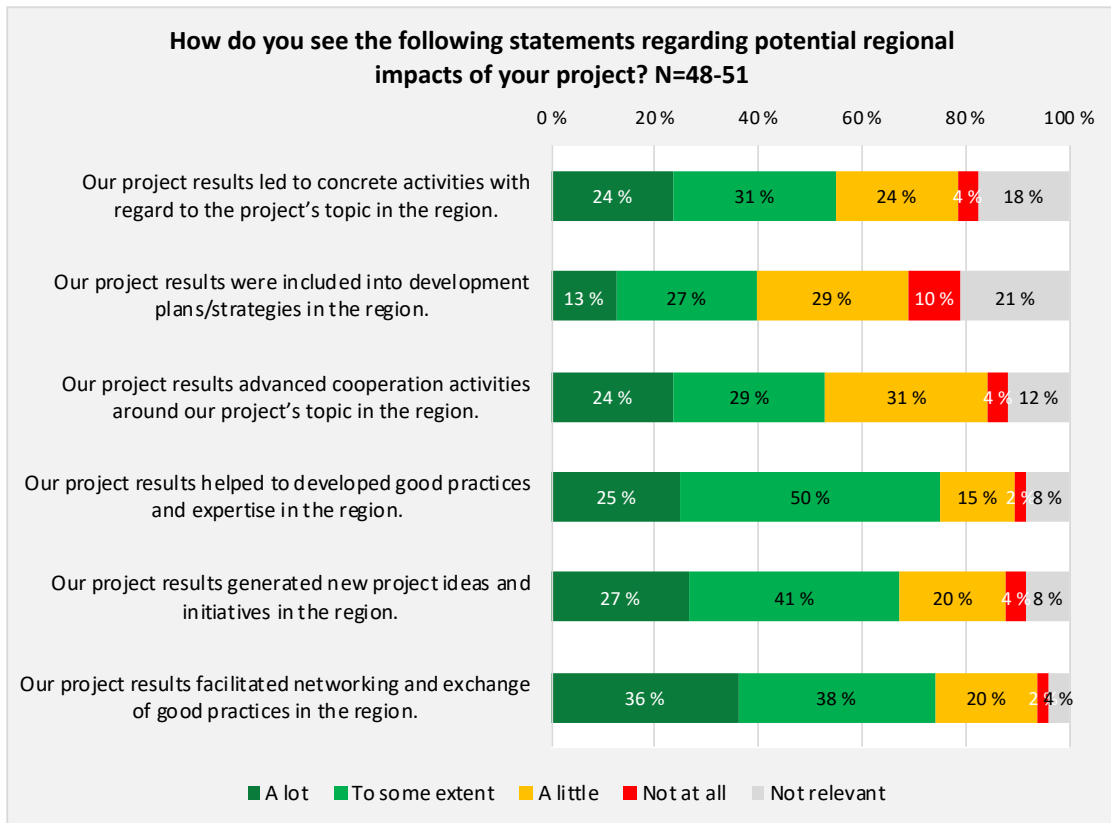


Figure 9. How do you see the following statements regarding potential regional impacts of your project? (Project questionnaire).

When project implementers were asked about projects' added value for their regions, the respondents had the opinion that added value has been produced mostly to some extent. The added value has been the most pronounced in advancing organisation's institutional knowledge and competence. The second most (of the statements in the following figure) the projects were seen to have produced added value in terms of improved competences to operate in transnational development work. The rest of the statements in the figure were seen more divided which is seen particularly statement creating capacities to use new funding instruments and attracting new participants to the Programme. But still, that kind of added value have been noticed by half of the projects.

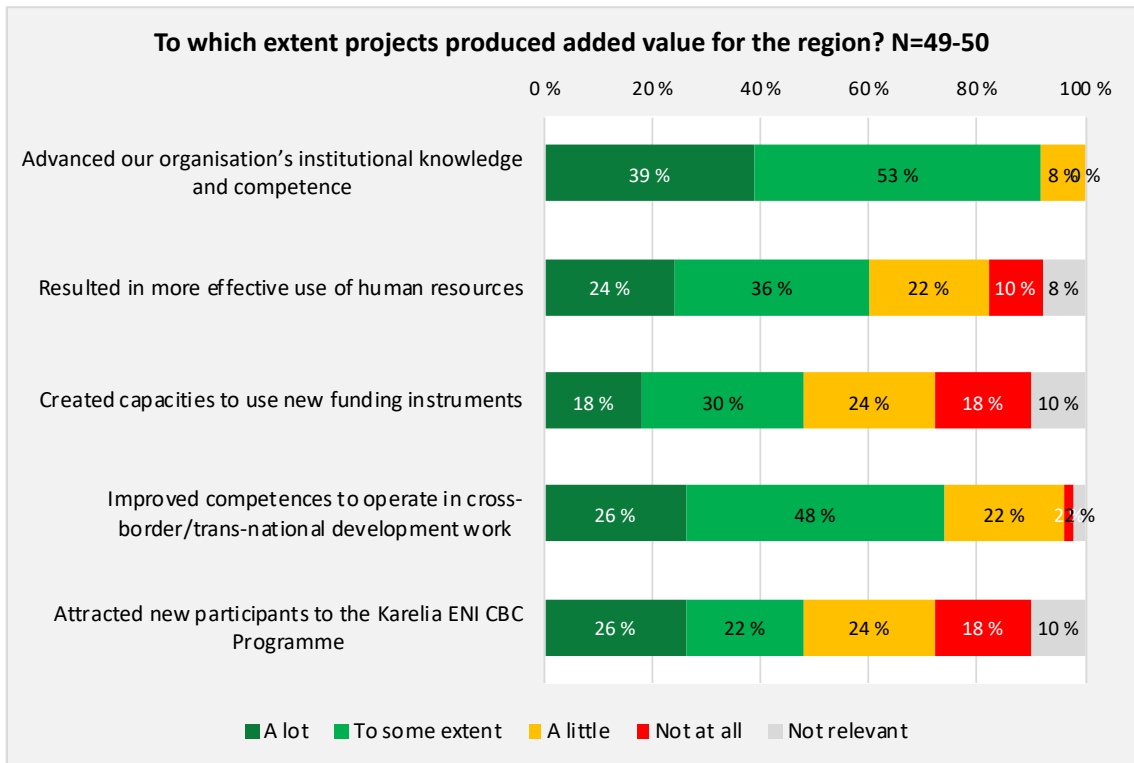


Figure 10. To which extent your project produced added value for your region? (Project questionnaire).

In the next figure, the shares of the project respondents' answers regarding the project results' promotion of regional or local development and growth are presented. The respondents mostly had the opinion that their projects 'to some extent' have had regional or local development effects. The comparisons were made in this question between the projects that were still underway when Russia started the war against Ukraine and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the war. There were some differences in the answers regarding the issue. The projects that were still underway when war started responded to this question somewhat more positively.

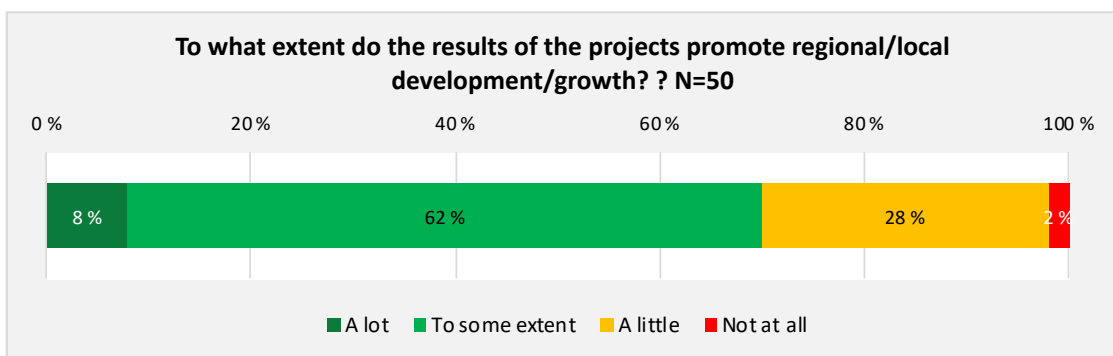


Figure 11. Answers to the question: To what extent do your project's results promote regional/local development/growth? (Project questionnaire).

The project actors were asked one fundamental question about the importance of the funding received from the programme: would similar activities (that now have been implemented in your project) have been done without the financial support of the Karelia ENI CBC 2014–2020 programme? About 73% of respondents mentioned that Programme's funding was crucial, in other words their projects would certainly not have been carried out. 25% were of the opinion that it could have maybe be possible.

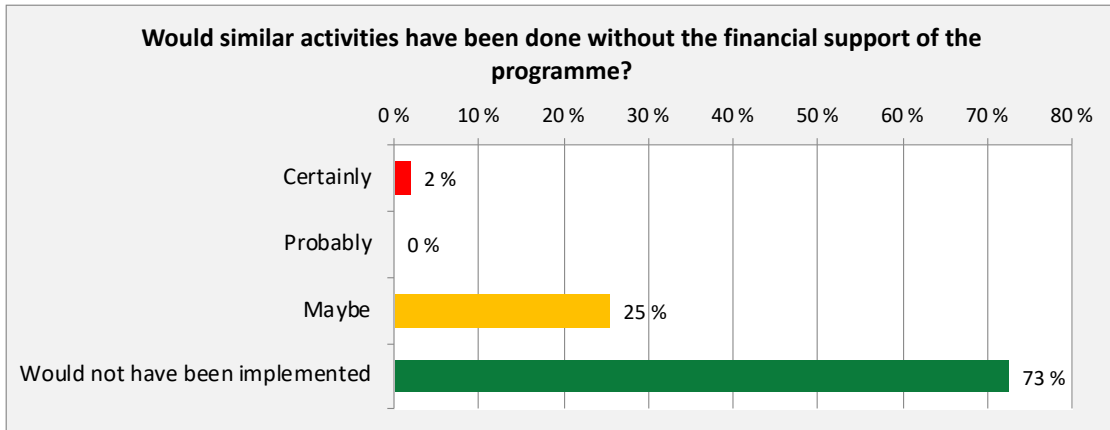


Figure 12. Answers to the question: Would similar activities have been done without the financial support of the Programme? (Project questionnaire).

3.1.3. Case studies perspective

The project level aspect was further examined in the evaluation by having a closer look at selected projects. The evaluators selected the case projects, a total number of 16. The chosen case study projects are presented in the following table.

Table 4. The projects chosen for the case study.

Priority and Projects	Lead partner	Budget
Priority 1: Growing cross-border business co-operation		
1) Advanced forest nursery (KA4011)	University of Eastern Finland	889 390 €
2) Boosting Forest Cluster SME Business in two Karelias (KA4002)	Natural Resources Institute Finland	650 000 €
3) Tourism co-operation between SMEs (KA8016)	University of Oulu	349 778 €
4) Tools for enhancing access to forest resources in crossborder bioeconomy (KA8041)	Business Joensuu Ltd.	418 174 €
5) Preparatory Project for Network of Ethnocentres as Marketing Objective (KA1018)	Juminkeko Foundation	47 396 €
Priority 2: Attractive cultural environment		
6) Cultural Training and Activation Initiative (KA3004)	Oulu University of Applied Sciences	497 880 €
7) InterActive History (KA3022)	Creative industries and cultural tourism development fund	766 486 €
8) Karelian Art-Residency Network and Art Tourism (KA3002)	Tourist Information Centre of the Republic of Karelia	240 000 €
9) Ordinary Man in a Great War (KA9036)	Naturpolis Ltd.	607 440 €
10) Museums in focus: development of cultural services for Chinese tourists (KA9021)	Budgetary institution "The Museum of fine arts of the Republic of Karelia"	401 194 €
Priority 3: Clean and comfortable region to live		
11) Renewal of sludge management concepts in regional towns (KA11000)	Kajaani University of Applied Sciences	2 359 979 €

12) Development of forest fire risk assessment capacity and collaboration in the context of climate change (KA2013)	Arbonaut Ltd	50 000 €
13) Cross-border tools for biodiversity hotspots preservation via monitoring and prevention of forest fires along Russian-Finnish border (KA5051)	Natural Resources Institute Finland	550 473 €
14) URBAN PARKS – Urban Parks and Benefits in Kajaani and Kostamus (KA5000)	Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland	805 717 €
15) Collaborative Data and Information Exchange Network for Managing Invasive Alien Species (KA5046)	Finnish Environment Institute	645 535 €
Priority 4: Well-functioning border crossings		
16) Vartius border crossing point development (KA6004)	Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency	8 148 534 €

A short case study was made of all the above projects. These case studies can be found in the appendix of this evaluation report. Case studies are discussed in this chapter per priority. The case studies were therefore compiled into priority-specific compilations and the findings were examined by priorities.

Priority 1: Growing cross-border business co-operation

Priority 1 is dedicated on activities which improve the preconditions for the businesses and SME’s to operate cross the border. Objective is to create new working possibilities with cross-border co-operation for those already living in the region and also for people willing to move to the region, special focus being on young people.

A total of 25 projects have been financed from the priority. The program funding received by the projects has been 324 400 € on average, with total costs rising to almost 365 800 €/project. Five projects were selected in case study. Beneficiary interviews were carried out first with lead partners and then with other beneficiaries on these selected projects (where beneficiaries were available). On a general level, it can be seen from the case projects that they have well achieved the target values set for them. All case projects of the priority have mainly achieved and in some cases exceeded the set values in the light of the indicators. This is somewhat confusing considering that almost all projects have faced vast challenges due to the COVID-19 and termination of co-operation with Russia. These challenges have been met by adjusting the work plans and by finding new ways of co-operation mainly because of the COVID situation. On the other hand, this brings up something interesting about numerical target (indicator) setting. When the targets of the projects have now been pursued separately on both sides of the border due to these challenges, have the targets/set values actually lacked real numerical targets that describe precisely cross-border co-operation? Now target values mainly include the values that has been counted together from both side of the border.

The following can also be considered as general observations about case projects of the priority: the current geopolitical situation has made it difficult for beneficiaries to utilize the results of the project. For example, there have been some business expectations regarding Russian markets. In some cases, the protectionism of Russian Federation during the project, and in all the cases the war started by Russia in Ukraine at the latest watered down these business intentions of the Finnish project beneficiaries. Another general observation can be made regarding to the availability of results and impacts from the Russian side. When this was asked from Finnish parties, the information was mostly limited to the last information that was available at the cut off time or at the end of the project (if this was before that). There is not much information what has happened after that.

The results identified by the respondents/beneficiaries were actually more of output-nature than results of the project implementation. These “results” and commonly identified issues mainly included things like the promotion of business opportunities, exchange of experience, raised awareness of the particular theme, new knowledge etc. The nature of these results was rather qualitative. However, quantitative outputs emerged as well. Below is a summary of what the respondent brought up as the main results (incl. benefit or added value) of the project from their organisation:

1) Developed and piloted “things”. In several case projects, something new was developed and tested in practice. For example, tests included a new software for planning construction of forest roads (Access2Forest project), demo forest nursery including new technology (Advanced forest nursery project) and developed and piloted 8 services/travel packages (TourSME project). What have these tests led to? The software tested within the Access2Forest project has resulted experience and the further utilization of this knowledge is elsewhere. The software cannot be utilized e.g. in entering Russian markets, but the experience can be utilized in Finnish markets and entering other markets. Anyhow, it was mentioned that the experience within the project has led to wider development work and to new project by large research and company consortium. For example, Take me home, country road project (operating only in Finland) was mentioned as utilizing the groundwork that was done in Access2Forest. In addition, the region's research institutes in Finland have gone deeper into the theme and developed their expertise.

Regarding the demo forest nursery of the Advanced forest nursery project, the most significant benefits of the project were registered for Russian side relating to the construction and operation of the demo nursery. According to the project reporting, the annual target has exceeded by nearly two folds and during the three growing years some 1,9 million container seedlings have been produced to Russian markets. From the Finnish perspective the project has been beneficial in increasing competence and awareness of the market situation. This information has been gathered in the guidebook made by project. Based on interviews with some Finnish beneficiary companies, participation in the project did not bring any significant benefit for companies. There were expectations to enter the Russian market and do business, but the geopolitical situation (including protectionism) totally scrapped these intentions. Mainly the benefit achieved was the increase in knowledge and connections, which in best case could be useful someday in the future. The biggest benefit from participating in the project was perhaps, the connections and particularly university co-operation (in Finland) that started during the project. Co-operation with university has opened possibilities to get foreign trade (other than Russia). The project has acted as a catalyst for the birth of this kind of collaboration.

2) New or increased knowledge. In all case projects of this priority, it was presented in some form that the new or increased knowledge belongs to the one of the main results of the project. This can be seen in outputs like made guidebooks, manuals, work models, publications, published articles, thesis topics etc. It was mentioned e.g. that the know-how accumulated in the project has been mentioned to be useful in teaching. As for organisational perspective, it was acknowledged that the Karelia Programme (via project) also provided important funding for researching the different themes.

The material produced in the projects is said to have been useful. For example, produced Russian-language training materials for forest workers was highlighted in Bofori project. The

material was in use in the case of the client company receiving employees from Ukraine. In addition, one of the beneficiaries of Access2Forest highlighted the forest work model, that was created in the project. That model utilized organisation's previously accumulated know-how. The result was a guide that is available to both employees and work supervisors. But even more useful than this was the reflection of development work for teaching. Through participating in the project, organisation has learned to further develop own expertise systematically. It has given the resources to analyze and develop one's own work, so that it also serves students and teachers.

3) **Exchange of information and experience. Co-operation and contacts.** These issues were presented in all case projects of this priority. It was mentioned that because of partnerships and relations established between the project participants there has been a lot of mutual exchange of experience. People have been exchanging business ideas and views, which has increased the understanding in the theme. It was also presented that the creation of co-operation between the companies has been somewhat useful. Companies got to know each other, and mutual trust was created between them. In the best cases, actual co-operation also emerged between the companies and there are more preconditions for serving international travellers/customers (TourSME). In overall COVID-19 situation significantly made it difficult to achieve the project's goals. Travel packages could be created, but not in their cross-border forms. Based on interviews with three Finnish beneficiary companies of above-mentioned project, it can be stated that travel packages made have not brought these companies any special benefit so far. Travel packages have not been actively used and therefore this activity has not brought, for example, more customers or sales. The companies pointed out that the most important benefit was that the Finnish companies became known to each other and thus the conditions for possible co-operation in the future exist. Two out of three companies have co-operated with the companies they met in the project after the project. However, this co-operation has not brought more concrete results so far. In overall, the companies have expanded their networks, and these partners may prove to be important in the future co-operation.

Other: Some of the outputs or results can be recognised in a quantitative form. These are for example, equipment purchased, production of high-quality seedlings, the sale of machines and equipment to the Russian partner in order to get the operation started there etc. Unfortunately, there was no such information where this has led to in forms of real results or impacts. For example, the demo forest nursery was said to be still in operation after the end of project, but the impacts it has produced are not available. In order to go deeper into the concrete results, beneficiaries were asked whether the results or effects that have been created for their organisation included an increase of sales, led to extra investments, purchases decisions or cost savings etc., and, in case such results have been created, what their monetary value is. None of the interviewed beneficiaries in this priority stated that there has been an increase in sales in their organisation due to the participation in the project. In addition, the participation in the project has not led to extra investments or purchase decisions. This kind of impacts seem to have not happened in the case projects. That is a quite clear message. Only one beneficiary was expecting that the Finnish connections formed during the project may produce sales for them later (but naturally in this situation, not with Russian parties).

Continuation of the co-operation was also one important indicator in the partner/beneficiary interviews to show sustainability. Every Finnish respondent interviewed said that they have not continued co-operation with Russians. Instead, almost all case project respondents mentioned that they have continued co-operation somehow with the projects' Finnish partners. In three out of five case projects, the activities created in the project have been

continued in such a way that a new joint project has been planned. In two of these cases, it has led to actual follow-up projects in Finland. One of these cases has led to wider development work and new project by large research and company consortium. One of the planned follow-up projects has not received funding. In one of the case projects there are some plans regarding follow-up projects (in Finland) and in the other case project, project partners have maintained contacts with each other (on the Finnish side), but no concrete co-operation has emerged so far.

In connection with the examination of these case projects, information was also obtained about different challenges faced or failures in the operation. These things, “which did not realize as expected”, were the following:

- Trainings did not realize as planned in the project.
- Recruiting Russian-speaking labor did not realize in the project due COVID-19 situation and finally due to the termination of co-operation with Russia.
- Co-operation has not yielded any benefit from the business perspective.
- The activities took place separately on both sides of the border (COVID-19)
- Difficult to get funded if you are a small operator.

Priority 2. Attractive cultural environment

The objective of the priority 2 is to facilitate the development of sustainable, diverse, and versatile cultural services. With the efforts put to reach the set objective, the Programme tries to attract people to stay or move to the region. At the same time people are also persuaded to visit the region. A total of 13 projects have been financed from the priority 2. The program funding received by the projects has been 433 500 € on average, with total costs rising to almost 492 000 €/project.

Five projects were selected in case study. Beneficiary interviews were carried out with Finnish lead partners and partners. Originally, of all priority 2 projects, only one had a Finnish lead partner, while there were 12 Russian lead partners. After the Russians were excluded from the program, a Finnish lead partner was chosen for the ongoing projects. One such project was among the selected priority 2 case projects. The other four case projects had ended before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Of the selected case projects, two focused on the development of museum services, one on the marketing of military historical sites in the target area, one on the development of planning readiness for cultural services of cultural operators, and one on the development of contemporary culture services and products with the help of an art residency network and cross-sectoral resources.

COVID-19 did not particularly affect the results of the case projects. On a general level, the case projects have well achieved the set target values. All of them have mainly achieved and in some cases exceeded the set values in the light of the indicators. In one case project, the nature of the activity changed to such an extent that some of the originally defined quantitative goals were no longer in line with the project's activities. In this project, Russia's attack on Ukraine changed the operation of the project in such a way that all its remaining measures were directed to the Finnish side.

Although the selected case projects are from the same priority, it is quite hard to recognize common themes from their achievements. However, the one factor that unites the projects can be seen as the development of expertise: the projects have improved the competence of the participants and their stakeholders, e.g. through capacity building activities, trainings,

accumulating and sharing expertise and best practices and contributing to increased experience and updated knowledge.

Another factor that unites several case projects is the involvement of local communities in the development work. One project enabled local communities to be more involved in the development and modernization of museal exhibits. Another project organised military history evenings in the municipalities of the region, the purpose of which was to convey information, especially to younger generations, about the region's military history sites. In one project, local residents were involved in the processes of contemporary culture by participating in artist discussions, workshops and performances.

Otherwise, the results of the case projects have created expert networks, various cultural services and products (physical and digital, e.g. mobile guides and websites) and their marketing, strengthened the entrepreneurship of individual participants, ensured the functionality of educational units and built new art residency facilities. Several projects have improved the availability of services and thus increased the diversity of users and brought new audiences to the services.

The Russian attack on Ukraine has had some effects on the case projects. It ended all collaboration with Russian partners and Russia. Something positive has also happened in the projects with the exclusion of the Russians from the program. In the project, which is still running until the end of 2023, the Finnish partners have considered the changes made to the implementation of the project to be good, because with them the measures of the project have better benefited the project implementation area on the Finnish side. Co-operation between Finnish partner municipalities has also strengthened after the removal of the CBC element.

According to museum representatives, there is a lack of access to project funding for cultural sector, and therefore, the CBC Programme priority on culture environment brought added value to both national and EU funding programmes and gave museums an exceptional opportunity to boost their development through service development, innovation, and piloting.

Priority 3. Clean and comfortable region to live

Priority 3 is dedicated to the improvement of people's physical living and working environment in the programming area. The underlying reasoning is that a clean and comfortable environment helps to attract and retain residents and makes it more likely for tourists to visit the area. The support project activities are diverse and include the improvement of sustainability of the built environment in the area, the improvement of basic infrastructure as well as the raising of environmental awareness.

A total of 22 projects have been financed from the priority. Five projects funded under this priority were selected for closer inspection. The program funding received by the projects has been 751 400 € on average, with total costs being about 861 600 € per project. Interviews were made with lead partners, partners and some selected final beneficiaries of the projects.

The case study selection included projects on environmental management and education (forest fire mitigation, biodiversity, sludge management), renewable energy and urban development. General activities included the creation of stakeholder and expert networks around given topics, online tools and data services, forecasting tools, informational and

educational materials, study trips and events, exchange and transfer of good practices as well as physical investments in basic or innovative infrastructures. Some of the projects placed significant emphasis on outreaching to local communities, organising events and seminars (although this was being hampered to some extent by the COVID-19 pandemic).

In this priority, collaboration with municipalities, regional councils and other public organisations, such as the Finnish Rescue Services, was emphasised as important for longer-term impact of the project activities. Municipalities were especially important as the implementers of investment-heavy types of projects, or as final beneficiaries/end-users of the project outputs. Municipalities are also often guarantors for the sustainability of investments and improvements (maintenance and upkeep) that have been done with project resources. Regional Councils were seen as important for the integration of the projects in wider policy and development contexts, for example supporting projects within this priority as part of their wider policy goal of 'green transition'.

Another positive sign for the impacts of projects within this priority is that respondents from at least two out of the five projects stated that their project activities, specifically the production of both academic and practical knowledge and expertise, kick-started further research and development work in specific topics. For example, it was stated that a project was instrumental in kick-starting drone research and the development of their practical applications in Joensuu.

Priority 4. Well-functioning border crossings

The Priority 4 had a specific focus on border management and security by ensuring well-functioning border crossing. The total amount of funding provided was 6.4 M€, all of which was allocated to a single project, and representing 17% of the total programme funding. This project, Vartius border crossing point development (KA6004), aimed at investments to improve the border-crossings infrastructure for road traffic and rail transport at Vartius in Kuhmo, Kainuu. The project consortium consisted of 8 partners, including the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation from the Russian side, and led by the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency (Väylävirasto).

The Vartius project fell into the category of Large Infrastructure Projects (LIP). The selection was made through a LIP-specific direct award process, including a lengthy identification, selection and contracting process beginning already at the early programming phase.

The lead partner representative highlighted two negative factors of the LIP selection process. The first one concerns the geographical setting of the CBC Programme, where Finland is divided into three programme areas. However, as the management of transport infrastructure is institutionalized at the state level, effective utilization of the CBC Programme resources requires involvement in all three CBC Programmes. As the thematic objectives and management practices are programme-specific and the LIP selection process complicated, the CBC context is very labour-intensive and time-consuming from the project administration point of view. The second reservation concerns delay in programme start up and limited timeframe for LIP project planning. This led to a busy project planning process, exacerbated by the fact that the project budget had to be revised following a reduction in the funding rate originally announced.

Based on the information available at the time of our evaluation, we consider that the Vartius project achieved its intended outputs and outcomes. The project-specific indicators (i.e. decreased throughput times, increased maximum capacities) are meaningful and understandable, and they give a good picture of the results. By investing in border-crossing infrastructure, the project has a natural, strong, and long-lasting cross-border impact. This positive impact is reduced by two factors. Firstly, the planned investments did not take place at the Russian border crossing point. This creates a bottleneck in border crossing and reduces the benefits of investments made on the Finnish side. Secondly, travel restrictions have reduced the need for border crossings and increased capacity is not fully utilized.

3.1.4 Programme's contribution to the European level overall objectives

The document 'Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - 2014-2020' outlines the strategic direction for EU support for cross-border co-operation on the external borders of the European Union, under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), for the period 2014 – 2020. The document is based on the core objectives set by the European Commission for cross-border co-operation, which aim to support sustainable development across the EU's external borders. The document emphasizes the need to support¹:

- the economic and social development of regions on both sides of common borders
- the common challenges in environment, public health, safety, and security
- the better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods, and capital.

Each programme will contribute to at least one of these strategic objectives. Moreover, each programme will focus on a maximum of 4 thematic objectives that are broadly aligned to the European Territorial Co-operation goal, to increase the impact and efficiency of the programme. The programme partners, at the local, regional, and national level, will be responsible for the detailed programming within these thematic objectives, taking into account the specific circumstances and requirements of their particular area. The joint operational programme will include a specific set of thematic objectives and priorities, which will reflect the strategic objectives, but also the national ENP Action Plans that have to be coherent and complementary with the ENI CBC programmes. The coherence and complementarity will be ensured through the programming process.

The Document also defines further expected results (chapter 6.4). Given the decentralised nature of the programming and implementation process for ENI CBC, it will be the responsibility of the programme partners to specify in detail the expected results of the specific programme which they will propose. The expected results should be defined and measured in the following areas (not exhaustive):

- the efficient and timely implementation of joint CBC programmes;
- addressing effectively the general objectives set out here, meeting the specific priorities of local partners in each border region and allowing for increased ownership by the local stakeholders;
- providing means for improved co-ordination between local, regional and national level development plans;

¹ Programming document for EU support to ENI Cross-border Co-operation (2014-2020).

- providing for the implementation of relevant and effective CBC projects of benefit to both sides of the EU's external borders;
- contributing in the medium and long-term to enhanced prosperity, stability and security along the external borders of the Union through strengthened co-operation and contacts across borders.

The Karelia ENI CBC Programme followed all the strategic objectives presented in the ENI Strategy Paper. The Programme developed four priorities. As such, the Programme embraced economic and social development, common challenges and mobility objectives that have been set out in the ENI Strategy Paper. The first priority of the Programme focuses on economic development, and the social dimension is covered by the second priority, in which promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage objective is also included. The third priority of the Programme focuses on environmental protection and climate change adaptation, in which the common challenge's objective is included. The fourth priority focuses on removing the bottlenecks and improving the safety of the Programme area's international border crossing points and this way to lower the barriers to people travel and goods transport across the border and hence improve the better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods, and capital.

The Karelia ENI CBC Programme has been striving towards the above mentioned expected results (results in the exhaustive areas). Some of these expected result areas have been strongly influenced by COVID-19 and of the termination of cross-border co-operation because of Russian attack on Ukraine. For example, in the area of "contributing in the medium and long-term to enhanced prosperity, stability and security along the external borders of the Union through strengthened co-operation and contacts across borders", progress is no longer seen, but the opposite. In the other areas defined there has been at least some progress through the project activity.

3.2 Programme's co-operation aspect

A key underlying aim of the Karelia CBC Programme is to strengthen co-operation between Finnish and Russian regions and the actors and organisations therein. Regarding co-operation, the Karelia CBC 2014-2020 Programme could build on a strong foundation for its activities and project implementation. This foundation has been created over the course of several CBC programmes that have been implemented for 30 years already, starting already in 1992, shortly after the collapse of the Iron Curtain, with the Finnish-Russian Neighbouring Area Co-operation Programme. A succession of EU co-funded CBC programmes started with a combination of Interreg A (Finnish side) and TACIS (Russian side). Over several programming periods, CBC was increasingly integrated (joint selection of projects for both sides of the border and pooling of financial resources) and mainstreamed into a dedicated CBC Programme for the external borders of the EU (ENPI, ENP). Starting with the Karelia ENPI CBC Programme 2007-2013, Russia also provided funding to the CBC activities. A specific feature of the Karelia CBC Programme is the existence of the Euregio Karelia, which was established in 2000 to strengthen the strategic and long-term guidance to cross-border co-operation in the region. Overall, CBC has over the years become an institutionalized and integral element of cross-border relations between Finland and Russia. The following sections gauge the impact of the Karelia CBC Programme and its projects on co-operation between Russia and Finland in general and the cross-border dimension of implemented projects.

3.2.1 Impact of Programme on Finnish-Russian co-operation, cross-border dimension of implemented projects and complementarity

The Joint Operational Programme states that the

“Karelia CBC Programme shall contribute to regional development with activities that have a clear cross-border dimension and co-operation nature. Activities shall benefit regions and stakeholders on both sides of the border.”

Achieving a collaborative environment, genuine cross-border integration and cohesion of project activities with mutual and even benefits, is therefore of utmost importance for the success of the Karelia CBC Programme. The need for a basic collaborative environment for CBC activities appears to be shared by the people who have implemented the projects, as 74% of the respondents to the project questionnaire were of the opinion that cross-border co-operation was either very important or important for achieving the results of the project. Only 4% stated that cross-border co-operation made achieving the results more difficult (see figure below). Available funding plays a key role in achieving this cross-border dimension as 73% of the respondents also stated that that similar activities would not have been implemented without the financial support of the Programme. The added value of the Karelia CBC Programme, additional to the value that would have been provided by regional or national funding instruments, is thus clearly evident.

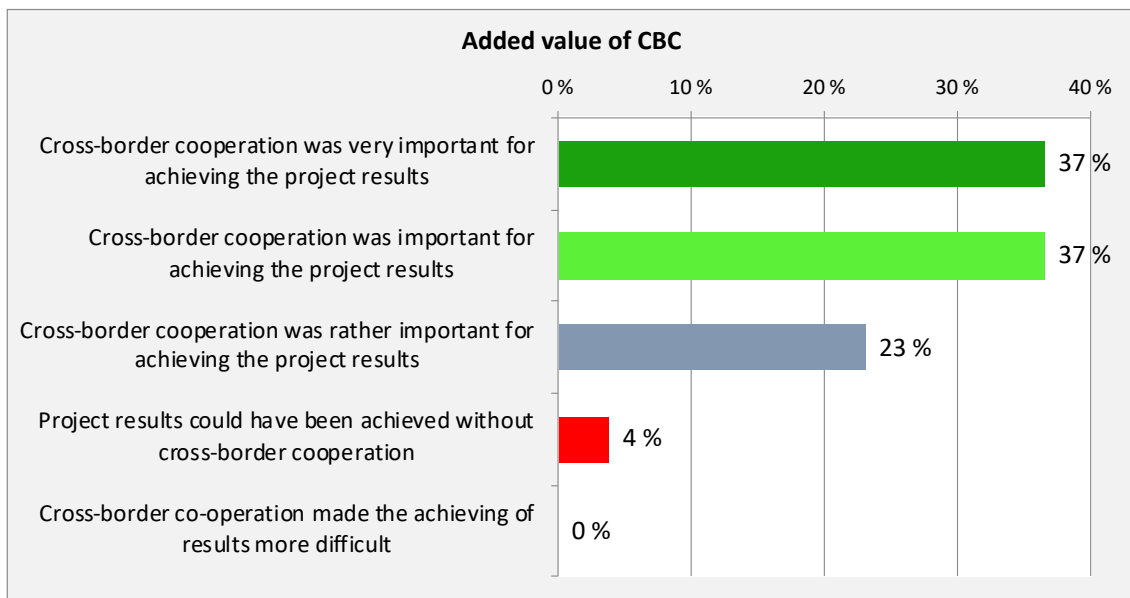


Figure 13. Answers to the question: How important was the cross-border dimension for achieving projects’ results (added value of CBC)? (Project questionnaire).

The project questionnaire revealed an overall positive perception of the cross-border nature of the implemented projects. 87% of the respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that their project produced benefits equally for both sides of the border (see figure below). The respondents were slightly more reserved about the stated that the project was genuinely cross-border in character (79% either strongly or somewhat agreed). Some more critical voices regarding the cross-border character of the projects, and particularly their initial conception, were raised during the interviews. Some of the (exclusively Finnish) interviewees stated that all too often projects departed from problems or lack of solutions on the Russian side of the border, rather than from genuine cross-border problems, resulting in a somewhat monodirectional nature of collaboration.



Figure 14. How do you see the following statements concerning your project/the overall Karelia ENI CBC Programme? (Project questionnaire).

In addition to the given and intrinsic value of cross-border dimension as a positive factor for good of regional development, a number of practical reasonings for addressing a cross-border dimension were given in the interviews and in the questionnaires. These included, for example, joint learning processes and finding solutions to challenges. Different activities and approaches on different sides of the border, as long as the aims of objectives were shared, were generally not seen as problematic as added value was derived from the learning from differences terms of socio-economic, legislative or cultural aspects in the two countries. Another underlying driver was the perceived need to address current phenomena and challenges that do not adhere to borders, for example with regard to forest fires or invasive species. It was also stated that enterprises involved in the projects benefitted from getting to know the Russian operating environment, opening up new business opportunities for Finnish companies. A somewhat traditional transfer of technological solutions or socio-administrative practices from Finland to Russia also appears to remain relatively high on the agenda. Regarding this, the still existing different levels of development in the two countries create a tendency for interventions to be monodirectional. This results in a traditional diffusion of innovations effect, where impact in terms of investments, technology transfer and adoption of good practices can be expected to be skewed towards the Russian side of the border.

The concept of complementarity is fundamental to EU financial instruments in two ways. Firstly, it refers to minimizing the risk of funding duplication. Secondly, it emphasizes the opportunities to synergies between EU programmes. Both aspects were examined in the audit report on the EU support to cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries prepared by the European Court of Auditors in 2022. The report highlights the greater need for more coordination and complementarity between the EU cross-border cooperation and other EU instruments. This is not supported by the evidence found in this evaluation context. Almost 88% of the respondents to the JMC/JSC questionnaire stated that they disagree partly or fully with the statement “The Programme did not manage to complement other funding instruments in use”. Some respondents clarified their opinion by emphasizing the “good division of labour” between EU programmes at the regional level. This is due to a collective learning process where both organisations, as project promoters, and secretariats, as

programme representatives, have learned to allocate border-related development initiatives to the CBC programme instead of other EU programmes.

Among the case projects, the most positive findings on complementarity were related to the consequences or side effects of projects, which can lead to the triggering of long-lasting chains of development. These cases, where initial development or experimentation in a CBC project has been continued in other EU programmes (e.g. ERDF, Horizon), can be highlighted as good examples of complementarity and cooperation with EU policy instruments.

3.2.2 Cross-border co-operation networks

The long history of cross-border co-operation, its strong foundations and existing networks in the Karelia CBC area is well visible in the composition of the actors/organisations implementing the projects. From the total respondents to the project questionnaire, only one (out of 50) stated that his/her organisation participated in EU-funded territorial co-operation for the first time. The resulting experience and general awareness of the functioning of cross-border collaboration can be deemed to have had a positive effect on the nature of co-operation.

In addition to the previous knowledge of territorial co-operation principles and practice, programme actors also appear to have widely benefitted from previous knowledge of their project partners. As can be seen from Figures below, 67% of the (Finnish) respondents to the questionnaire knew all partners from the Finnish side of the project consortium before implementation, and 31% of the Russian partners. Assuming that knowledge between partners was similarly widespread on the Russian side of the border, it can be stated that the project consortia were based on strong, pre-existing partnerships, which in turn reduced the risk for project failure. This, coupled with the lack of newcomers, indicates that the Programme was heavily built on established contacts and collaborations rather than boosted its appeal to new entrants.



Figure 15. Did you know your project partners before the start of the project? On the Russian side: (Project questionnaire).

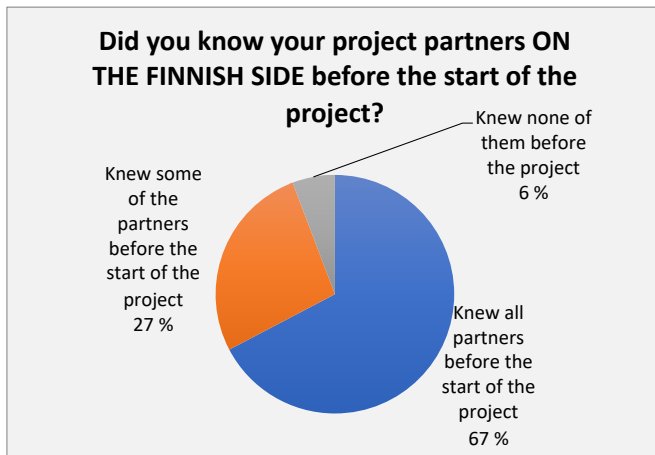


Figure 16. Did you know your project partners before the start of the project? On the Finnish side: (Project questionnaire).

These findings are supported by the interviews that were carried out as part of the evaluation. Several interviewees stated that they had been involved in previous rounds of the Karelia CBC Programme and that the partners were chosen on the basis of previous collaborative relations or on known expertise in a certain field relevant to the project focus and objectives. The results of the questionnaire also indicate that the respondents were generally happy with the composition of their project consortia as around 60% of respondents stated that they would not have needed other actors/organisations in order to reach the project goals or to implement the project more effectively. Organisations that were most frequently identified as potentially having been useful for the project implementation were local authorities.

The aspect of ‘trust’ was also mentioned on several occasions, having been fostered among project participants through involvement in several programming periods of the CBC programmes and contributing to stable co-operation structures across the borders. Personal relationships that have been built over years are viewed as crucial in strengthening the actual cross-border dimension of CBC. With the Russian attack on Ukraine and the subsequent suspension of the Programme, collaborative links that have been built over years have been cut. It remains to be seen, whether these relationships of trust can be revived in the event of a geopolitical and, in some cases also personal, thaw in relations between the EU and Russia.

Returning to a pre-suspension situation, the ability to build partnerships on the basis of previous knowledge of partners does not only imply a higher likelihood of unproblematic project implementation, but also that the ‘right’ things are done. Several interviewees stated that as a result of their long-term engagement in CBC and their resultant knowledge of cross-border state of affairs and established collaborative networks, they knew exactly “what was missing” and “useful for both sides”. Linked to this, several interviewees stated they would not have been able to fund their project activities from other funding sources. All of the above provides an indication that a certain regional development and funding ‘niche’ has been found and carved out for the cross-border co-operation programmes, facilitated by the of several CBC programming periods. Again, the suspension of the Programme forces the established beneficiaries of the Programme on the Finnish side to look for other opportunities. Several interviewees pondered that the end of Finnish-Russian cross-border co-operation will result in a re-orientation towards the Nordic Countries (Interreg Aurora) as well as, building on the Russian-language experience, towards Central Asia and Ukraine.

An aspect that emerged from both the questionnaires as well as the interviews was that the cultural sector benefitted to a significant extent from the Karelia CBC Programme, not only

from a cross-border perspective but also from cultural sector perspective in general. Having a priority dedicated to an “attractive cultural environment” played an important role in this as it provided an access channel to EU-funding for cultural actors. The common Karelian heritage in this programming area provided an additional driver for active cross-border co-operation and relations in this field.

3.2.3 Co-operation within the Programme structures

In the questionnaire and the interviews, the evaluation team also assessed the co-operation between the project partners and the Managing Authority. In the project questionnaire it was asked how the project beneficiaries perceived the support they received from the MA during the planning and the implementation of the project. The results did not vary significantly regarding the phases (planning/implementation) of the projects. The vast majority of the respondents (close to 80%) were entirely satisfied with the support they received from the MA during the implementation of the project. About 20% of the respondents were partly satisfied. Dissatisfaction with the MA support was at a negligible level.

Respondents to the questionnaire commented that responsiveness to questions was excellent and that they felt that they were supported in their work by the Managing Authority, particularly with regard to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of the programme as a result of the Russian attack on Ukraine, and their effects on project work, which required some flexibility.

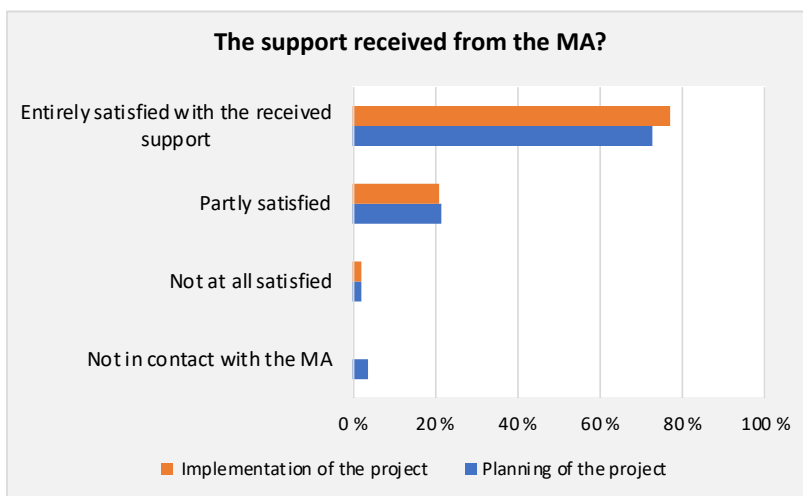


Figure 17. How would you rate the support received from the Managing Authority during the following phases of the project? (Project questionnaire).

A stronger cross-border dimension in specific topics and improved impact can also be expected from collaboration between projects, particularly if they work on similar topics. As can be seen from figure below, almost 40% of the respondents to the project questionnaire stated that their project co-operated with other projects at least to some extent. Regarding the types or forms of collaboration, the responses can be grouped into the following four groups:

- exchange of data and research findings
- joint seminars and study trips
- peer support regarding project administration
- some joint dissemination/communication activities

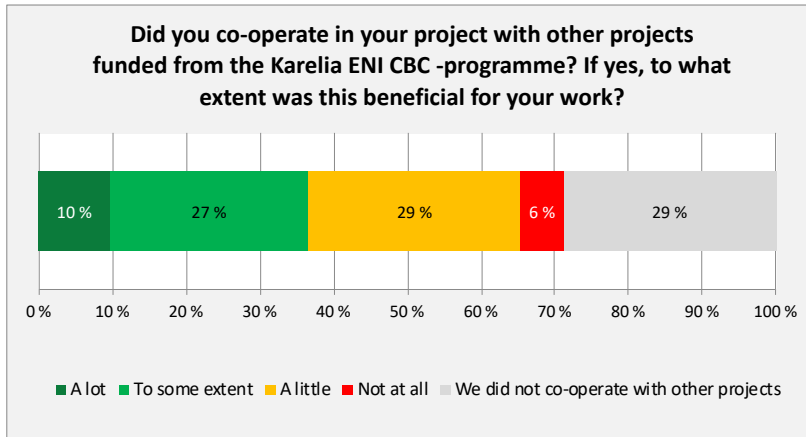


Figure 18. Did you co-operate in your project with other projects funded from the Karelia ENI CBC Programme? If yes, to what extent was this beneficial for your work? (Project questionnaire).

3.3 The Broader circumstances

The COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020 posed a challenge to collaborative work within the projects with much of the interaction moving online. The COVID-19 pandemic forced people home from work and school, which naturally also had a big impact on project activities. The pandemic also led to modification of the ENI CBC implementing rules.

Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Commission decided to suspend co-operation with Russia and Belarus in March 2022, although EU beneficiaries were able to continue project work as long as activities and financial flows on the Russian and Belarusian were ceased. Suspension of the financing agreements and cessation of CBC activities changed the overall situation dramatically. In the evaluation questions, special focus is therefore drawn on programme performance, but the perspective is adjusted to take into account the impact of these global crises on programme implementation. Two main evaluation questions in this perspective were 1) the impact of COVID-19 on programme implementation and 2) the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on programme implementation.

3.3.1 Impacts on the Programme implementation

The impact of COVID-19 on programme implementation and the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation are things that have come up many times already in the analysis of the evaluation data. These two challenges of the operational environment were also placed as questions in the project questionnaire (see next figure). The project respondents saw particularly COVID-19 making co-operation difficult. 88% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this view. About half of the respondent saw that the geopolitical situation had a negative impact on the project implementation. The comparisons were made between the projects that were still underway when Russia started the war against Ukraine and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the war. There were huge differences in the answers. Only 19% (vs. 90%) of the projects implemented before the start of the war saw that the geopolitical situation had a negative impact on the project

implementation. The observations are in the same direction regarding the influence of COVID-19. COVID-19 has been seen making co-operation more difficult among these projects, but the difference is not that remarkable than it is in the question of geopolitical situation.

There were also some other statements put under the project respondent assessment. Language skills have mainly not been a major obstacle for project implementers, because about a quarter of the respondents thought that lack of language skills has made co-operation difficult. Moreover, 16% of respondents thought that projects had a positive effect on regional development only on one side of the border. The project actors gave a clear view that cross-border co-operation was the right way to implement the project and there has not been lack of experience affecting on project work. When comparing these project actors point of views to the results of JMC and JSC questionnaire, the observations are in the same direction. Only major difference seen emerged in the question of language skills. The lack of language skills making co-operation difficult was seen only in the project level.

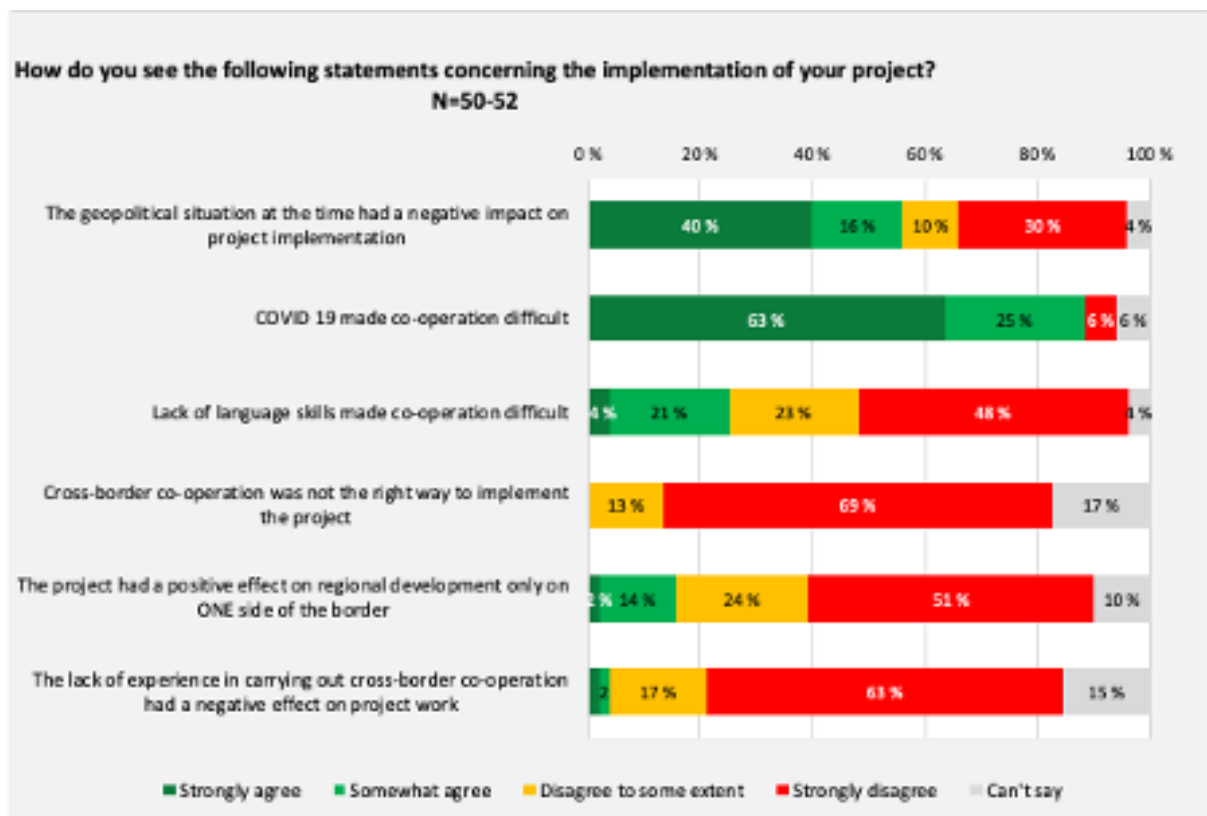


Figure 19. How do you see the following statements concerning the implementation of your project? (Project questionnaire).

The project implementers were asked how COVID-19 affected the project activities in a concrete way. The themes of the answers practically moved within two subject areas which were 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction and 2) slowing down of project activities and progress. These are strongly related. In the following there are some aspects raised regarding these two subject areas.

- 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction, which caused effects such as:
 - Did not get to know Russian partners in the same way as one would in face-to-face interactions. Interaction suffered.

- In the development of new networks, only a certain level is reached via the (virtual) network. Better results would have required interactive meetings in both countries.
- Meetings, field periods, etc. had to be changed to virtual ones.
- Company visits, events, etc. could not be carried out.
- Activities had to be cancelled (e.g. joint concerts could not be organised)
- Moving to remote courses
- Benchmarking to good targets did not take place.
- Co-operation with the educational institution became difficult because the students were not at school.

2) slowing down of project activities and progress.

- Postponed and cancelled many activities.
- Delays in delivery of the results.
- E.g. international component shortage slowed down operations.
- The closing of the border prevented the export of equipment to Russia, which had an effect on the delay in operations, e.g. the analysis of the materials was delayed.
- Prevented the implementation of the original project plan: the need to make changes slowed down also operations.
- Caused significant additional work for the lead partners and partners in the constant redesign of the project in order to achieve the project's goals.

Respondents were also asked to comment how were the negative effects of COVID-19 minimised in the project implementation. The themes of the answers followed the themes brought up above and intertwined with each other. We could say that the projects minimised the negative effects of COVID-19 by utilizing remote connections and developing remote solutions. In addition, minimising was done by making changes to plans and operations of the project. In the following there are some examples of the answers/details in these themes.

Utilizing remote connections and developing remote solutions:

- By organising remote meetings and searching for virtual alternatives for implementation
- Some online activities were possible, more on the Finnish side, less on the Russian side.
- By reorganising work, online working

Making changes to plans and operations:

- The project plan was modified, resources were directed to measures that did not require travel.
- By directing the project's goals differently. Resources released from canceled events were allocated to other work packages and measures.
- Alternative methods of operation were invented.
- Measures aimed at one's own area were added, which were simultaneously implemented on both sides of the border. The partners also did things in their own countries that were originally intended for the other partner.
- Travel and cross-border activities were postponed until after the pandemic. Plans were made further into the future.
- Using a lot of confident suppliers, and creative students.

The points of view presented above were further confirmed by the results of the project questionnaire (see next figure). The disruption to the Programme caused by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has made it impossible to reach the project goals for most of the Programme projects (ongoing projects at the time). Only 14% of respondents saw that it had no affection. It was also quite widely seen that the completion of the project on the Finnish side, without Russian partners, benefitted the Finnish partners in the project (67% of respondents). Still, just 21% of respondents saw that projects became more straightforward and easier to implement after the Russian partners’ departure from the project. The termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries according to 37% of respondents. In slightly more than half of the cases caused damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation were minimized successfully according to the project actors. When comparing these project actors point of views to the results of JMC and JSC questionnaire, the views are mostly the same. There’s some difference in the question of projects becoming more straightforward and easier to implement after the Russian partners’ departure from the project. The projects were more of that opinion. JMC and JSC members saw more strongly that the termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries.

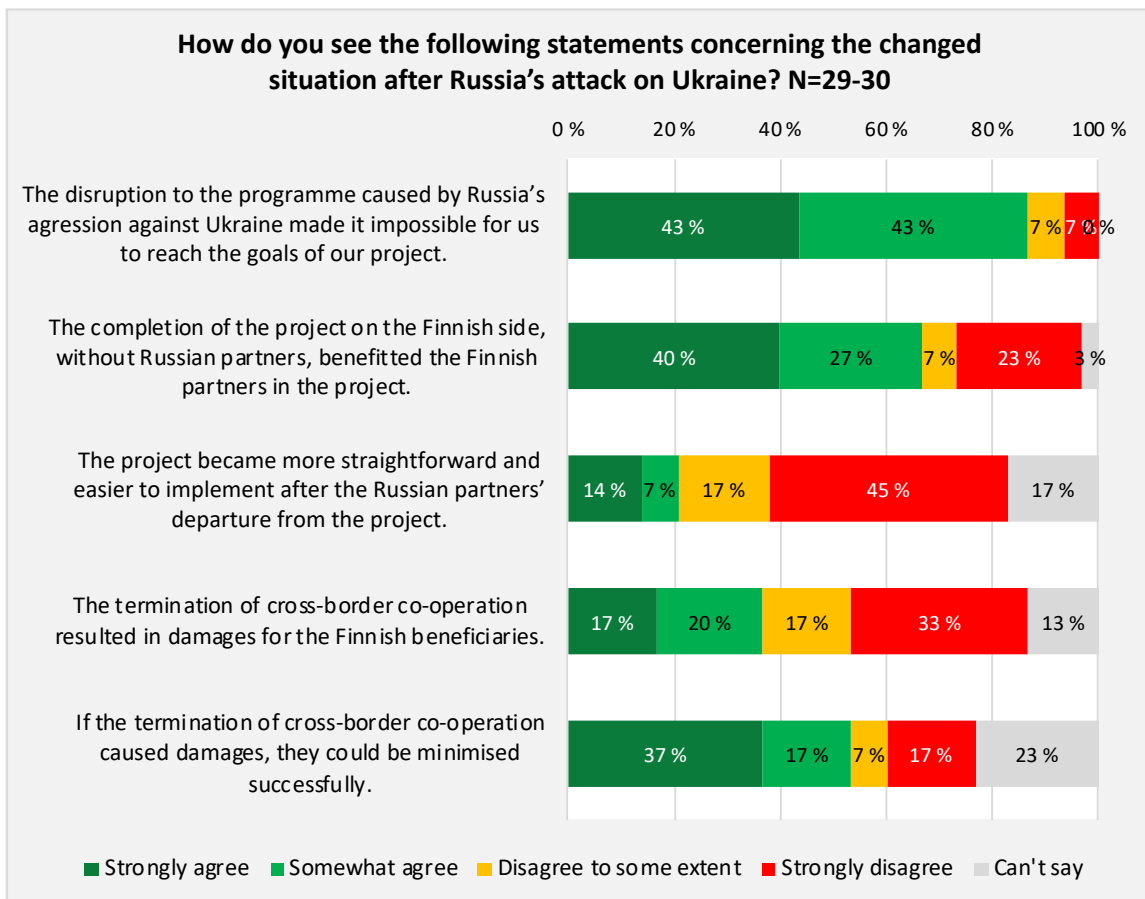


Figure 20. How do you see the following statements concerning the changed situation after Russia’s attack on Ukraine? (Project questionnaire).

Project actors were asked to motivate their answers regarding the changed situation. The following answers give good examples of the project actors opinions:

- *Without the war outcomes particularly in Russia would have been even stronger as some things couldn't be finished. No financial damages resulted for Finnish beneficiaries but mental ones.*
- *We had to change the entire content of the project.*
- *All participants understood the realities of the political environment and its impact on the Programme.*

- *The administrative authority has approved actions to achieve the project's goals. The Finnish partners were interested and focused on implementing the work plan on the Finnish side in accordance with the rules of the Programme.*
- *Not all damages could be minimized.*
- *The investments aimed at streamlining Kostamus' pellet transport are currently unused.*
- *Some of the Russian partners were completely disconnected.*
- *A lot of damage was done. The amount of work increased, time was spent on administrative clarification.*
- *It was possible to minimize the damage in terms of the project's implementation/functionality, but the success of minimizing the damage caused by reaching the project's goal can only be evaluated 10-50 years from now.*
- *The co-operation between the partners improved, and the implementation of measures became clearer and faster when the main partner's role was transferred to Finland.*
- *Export opportunities and know-how import opportunities were not realized. Otherwise things were done.*

Another interesting question to be examined in the evaluation is the disadvantages and damages that the termination of territorial and cross-border co-operation between EU and Russia has produced for the Programme area. This question was asked both from project actors and JMC/JSC members. The project actors raised several disadvantages:

- Regional mobility and co-operation has stopped.
- A natural connection for cross-border co-operation disappeared from the border regions.
- Communication has stopped. The desire to co-operate has ended.
- Less co-operation means less communication between the organisations and people on two sides of the border, and less understanding, which is bad in long-term perspective.
- Changed the layout. Requires Eastern Finland now to reorganise operations, for example in terms of tourism.
- Ending the import of Russian wood raw material can adjust the production of the forest sector permanently.
- The potential of the Programme area cannot be exploited. The economic and cultural development of this area is slowing down and becoming one-sided.
- The disconnection of biodiversity, an increase in cross-border fire frequency and heightened risks associated with climate change.
- The load on waters and the environment in Russia will be increasing.
- Now the resources must be directed elsewhere, for example to Nordic regional co-operation.

In the answers of JMC ja JSC members it was mostly highlighted that business, cultural, forest and environmental co-operation that had been built for long time (30 years) has fallen apart overnight. This results in ending of cross-border tourism and trade, which has an impact on the regional economy, employment and the profitability of companies. Also Karelian cultural co-operation ended. In addition, it has led to change of attitudes. Roughly speaking, in the past the border was seen as an opportunity for new openings and developments, and now it has become a challenge - and especially from the point of view of security. It was mentioned that a large market area and specifically the natural market area of Programme areas will be removed from the game. This makes already remote areas even more remote and less attractive investment and development targets. Getting financing for all kinds of activities was forecasted probably to become more difficult and the economic importance of the regions at the national and EU level shrinking. The safety perspective was forecasted to bring some significance to the areas in the big picture, but it was not seen enough for e.g. business development.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation are summarized in this chapter. The evaluation covers the Karelia ENI CBC 2014-2020 Programme and its implementation during the programming period. The following conclusions and recommendations are gathered under the given thematic frame of the evaluation and evaluation questions they include. The thematic frame of the evaluation is divided into three parts: 1) the effectiveness and impacts of the programme implementation, 2) the co-operation aspect and 3) the broader circumstances.

The effectiveness and impacts of the programme implementation

The relevance and consistency of the selected priorities compared to the Joint Operational Programme (JOP):

The relevance and consistency of the selected priorities compared to the JOP are very good largely due to programme logic (which JOP also follows) in which the priorities are derived from overarching objectives, overall objectives and from thematic objectives. In addition, thematic objectives are same as formed programme priorities. The implementation of the JOP is based on the implementation of these selected priorities and the projects fall well in these priorities. Actual programme activities have corresponded well to the objectives identified in the Programme document.

The priorities of the Programme and actual programme activities have responded mainly well to the regional needs of the areas. It can be interpreted that the Programme has succeeded in combining both broader regional needs and more detailed needs. Project entity takes into account the development needs of the area and the development needs of the different branches of the economy and individual organisations implementing the projects.

- The dimensions of the broader development needs of the area and the development needs of the organisations implementing the projects ought to be involved and coordinated in this type of development work in the future as well. There are not too many organisations in the area that have the real opportunity to act as project implementers. Therefore, it is essential to reconcile these needs.

The Programme has clearly resulted in positive development in the programme area. This can be seen from the feedback given by the actors in the evaluation. However, the Programme's role in the development of the Karelia ENI CBC programming area have weakened compared to earlier ENPI Programme external evaluation when considering the evaluation data gathered both times. The actors were aware that the Programme is not the main tool for the development of the region and feedback was founded much on that. But from the point of view of cross-border cooperation, the Programme's role has been considered significant.

The most important themes were covered in the Programme. There are some topics omitted by the Programme according to the project actors, but there is no common theme missing, and in this respect only individual themes would be needed in the Programme. Overall, the program managed to cover the themes considered important.

Results and impacts of each priority compared to the set objectives

Karelia programme has mainly achieved the set target values, and often exceeded the targets. Exceeding the goals by a fair amount is naturally a very positive thing. To a certain extent, the set goals seem rather modest, in which case, big exceeding of the targets can be seen. The biggest exceeding of the targets are seen in numbers of persons participating, particularly in priority two and three, as well as in number of enterprises involved in priority one.

The biggest shortfalls in reaching the targets are found in basically in all priorities, e.g. number of implemented projects striving to remove the identified and analysed trade barriers/obstacles (Priority 1), number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector (Priority 2), number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas (Priority 3) and number of concrete development activities improving the operating conditions of rail traffic (Priority 4). These targets are more difficult to achieve by nature.

In overall, the targets that include number of persons and organisations have been mostly met and exceeded with the exception of number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector. It can be noticed that the Programme has thus managed to reach the target group well compared to the set target values.

- The programme lacks real numerical indicators describing precisely cross-border co-operation. Now indicators are more of collection of separate outputs on both sides of the border.

Involvement of Finnish educational and research organisations has been very significant for the Programme operations. These organisations are often lead partners and partners in the projects. A reasonable large portion of the partners in Finland have also been private companies. Different public actors also play a rather important role in the operations of the Programme.

Concrete results were noticed particularly in priorities 2 and 3. In addition, Vartius border-crossing investment project was seen as a good concrete result, although the increase in border crossings has not realized. Priority 2 has succeeded the most in achieving concrete results in Finland according to the programme actors. Concrete results are e.g. development of cultural tourism and cultural services and development of theatre productions. A lot of concrete results were brought up also in relation to priority 3. These were e.g. raising schoolchildren's awareness of environmental and energy efficiency, in overall improving environmental awareness (waste management especially in Russian Karelia), development of forest fire risk mapping and improving the urban environment in order to create a comfortable living environment for residents.

Case study projects of priority one shows that the current geopolitical situation has made it difficult for beneficiaries to utilize the results of the project. There have been some business expectations regarding Russian markets, but these intentions are watered down now after the war started by Russia in Ukraine.

The results identified by the beneficiaries were actually more of output-nature than results of the project implementation. In priority one the case studies summed up the following main results: 1) Developed and piloted “things”. In several case projects, something new was developed and tested in practice. For example, tests included a new software for planning construction of forest roads, demo forest nursery including new technology and developed

and piloted 8 services/travel packages. This has resulted experience and the further utilisation of this knowledge is elsewhere. There are also signs that in some cases the experience within the project has led to wider development work and to new project.

2) New or increased knowledge. New or increased knowledge belongs to the one of the main results of the projects. This can be seen in outputs like made guidebooks, manuals, work models, publications, published articles, thesis topics etc. Know-how accumulated in the projects has been useful in teaching. As for organisational perspective, it was acknowledged that the Karelia Programme (via project) also provided important funding for researching the different themes. 3) Exchange of information and experience. Co-operation and contacts. These issues were presented in all case projects of priority one. Because of partnerships and relations established between the project participants there has been a lot of mutual exchange of experience. People have been exchanging business ideas and views, which has increased the understanding in the theme.

In the case study projects of priority 2 it was quite hard to recognize common themes from their achievements. However, the one factor that unites the projects can be seen as the development of expertise: the projects have improved the competence of the participants and their stakeholders. Another factor that unites several case projects is the involvement of local communities in the development work.

The Large Infrastructure Projects (LIP) highlight the vital role of transport infrastructure and logistics in stimulating cross-border linkages, cooperation and trade. The Vartius-project (Priority 4) is one of the six LIPs carried out by the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency in CBC 2014–2020 context and can be considered as a flagship example in addressing the need for investments to improve the border-crossings infrastructure for road traffic and particularly rail transport (i.e. importing pellet and wood for industrial use) at Vartius border-crossing point. Our findings confirm the positive results of earlier LIP-evaluations: The investments led to significant decrease in throughput times, increase in capacities, and improvements in working conditions. The impacts, however, are highly uncertain and dependent on travel restrictions and geopolitical factors.

When the results are viewed in the programme as a whole the following general result categories can be seen particularly from the Programme actors' side 1) the experience gained from cross-border co-operation and its further utilization possibilities elsewhere and 2) increasing environmental awareness and actions. Moreover, the project implementers highlighted the following results: the most common project result is the creation of new networks and modes of collaboration. The second often mentioned result is increased awareness regarding the operating environment. In addition, the project implementers highlighted the increasing environmental awareness and improvement of the operating environment for business.

The planned project results were achieved quite well during the project time. The comparisons were made between the projects that were still underway when Russia started the war against Ukraine and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the war. There were huge differences in the issue. The projects implemented before the start of the war achieved planned project results better.

The sustainability of the achieved results and impacts

Long-term benefits that the Programme projects produced are basically dropping into three groups. 1) increased knowledge and skills (incl. awareness-rising), 2) investments made through the projects and 3) the emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks. The first two are the most common ones among the projects.

Regarding the increased knowledge and skills, in this context, it is also essential to see the possibilities of utilizing accomplished knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills were related to concrete issues such as waste management, military history etc. or to general awareness of the needs of the operating environment. Prepared publications and guides have been acting as important tools for delivering knowledge and skills. Increased knowledge and skills include also benefits like promotion of scholarship, illustrative videos and communication/teaching materials, publications, guides, trainings etc.

Regarding the investments made through the projects, these were seen benefiting local residents, travellers, energy sector etc., also in the future. Investments that were brought up were for example different waste collection points, recycling facilities, investments aimed at the border facilities, investments that prevent nutrient load in waters, various developed and tested models etc. Investments also include investment that are now in use for example solar power systems, bio business investments, forecasting model, various infra improvements, better waste management, measuring station, smoother traffic and service, mobileapps, etc.

Regarding the emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks, it can be noticed, this is something that can now be benefitted only partly due to current geopolitical situation, almost entirely only between Finnish partners. The emergence and strengthening of co-operation networks include issues like increased competence in the co-operation, getting to know the partners better which helps to co-operate better etc.

Important point of view in the sustainability of the achieved results and impacts is the changed geopolitical situation that significantly narrows the possibilities of utilising the results and impacts. To some extent though the accumulated experience can be utilised elsewhere in transnational co-operation and in applying for funding from other programs. In addition, new innovations and services are in use and can be exported elsewhere and research co-operation etc. can produce more follow-up measures and impacts.

Regional impacts (how the impacts of each priority are realized on different sides of the border)

General observation can be made regarding to the availability of results and impacts from the Russian side. When this was asked for example from Finnish project partners, the information was mostly limited to the last information that was available at the cut off time or at the end of the project (if this was before that). There is not much information what has happened after that in Russia with the projects.

One of the greatest regional impacts of projects were that the projects facilitated networking and the exchange of good practices. In addition, projects were seen generating new project ideas and initiatives and helped to develop good practices and expertise rather well. Instead, regional impacts have been rather modest regarding the influence on project results into development plans or strategies in the region.

Considering regional development aspect, the Programme's connection to the goals of the regional development programmes has not been very strong, but the Programme has supported the development of the region for its part. The biggest impact in this sense is on cross-border co-operation and what is achieved in it.

The programme's added value to the European level overall objectives

Achievement of co-operation goals set by the European Commission (Programming document for EU support to ENI Cross-Border co-operation 2014-2020)

The Programme has been the best (regarding EU's three overarching strategic objectives) at responding to promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common border. The Programme has also created added value to the second strategic objective (addressing common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security), but not as much as in the first objective. The added value to the third objective, promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital, is also seen, but the overall view in this objective is moderate.

When looking the added value at the operator level, the added value has been the most pronounced in advancing organisation's institutional knowledge and competence. The second most the projects were seen to have produced added value in terms of improved competences to operate in transnational development work.

The following perspective brings important information about the added value of the projects. The project actors were asked one fundamental question about the importance of the funding received from the programme: would similar activities (that now have been implemented in your project) have been done without the financial support of the Karelia ENI CBC 2014–2020 programme? Programme's funding has been crucial for about 73% of projects. In other words, this portion of projects would probably not have been carried out.

The Karelia ENI CBC Programme has been striving towards the expected results (results in the exhaustive areas) described in ENI Strategy Paper. Some of these expected result areas have been strongly influenced by COVID-19 and of the termination of cross-border co-operation because of Russian attack on Ukraine. For example, in the area of “contributing in the medium and long-term to enhanced prosperity, stability and security along the external borders of the Union through strengthened co-operation and contacts across borders”, progress is no longer seen, but the opposite development. The Programme could not and cannot affect on this. In the other areas defined as expected results of the Programme implementation there has been some progress through the Programme's project activity.

The co-operation aspect

Cross-border nature of implemented projects and the complementarity of the programme to other instruments

The Programme's impact on the co-operation between Finland and Russia in general

The results of the questionnaire and the interviews clearly indicate the Programme is perceived to be of added value to regional development as a result of its focus on cross-border aspects of development. The Programme appears important for a number of regional sectoral actors who find it difficult to fund their activities from other funding, for example the cultural sector. The cross-border dimension of work within the projects was also assessed to work quite well,

with important learning, technology/knowledge transfer and business collaboration processes taking place. However, also a somewhat monodirectional nature of co-operation (problems in Russia, solutions from Finland) was criticized.

The long history of co-operation across the border is reflected in the strong actor networks and partnerships that have emerged and implemented projects over several programming periods. This has also resulted in a strong 'body of knowledge' on what the 'missing parts' and important topics are for co-operation. High levels of trust among the actors involved have resulted in strong co-operation within the Programme structures (between partners and with the Managing Authority).

The principle of complementarity aims to prevent duplicate actions and encourage collaboration between EU programmes. The results do not provide any evidence of double funding, which refers to the use of different EU funds to finance the same measures. This is a result of learning and experience, and the effective division of labour between EU programmes. Regarding synergies, the most positive examples are related to cases where initial development or experimentation in a CBC project has been continued in other EU programmes.

The broader circumstances

The impact of COVID-19 on programme implementation and on cross-border co-operation

The impact of COVID-19 on programme implementation and the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation are things that have come up in several contexts in the analysis of the evaluation data. The projects saw particularly COVID-19 making co-operation difficult.

COVID-19 has affected the project activities in a concrete way. The main influence categories are 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction and 2) slowing down of project activities and progress. These are strongly related. The impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction caused effects such as changing meetings, courses, field periods, etc. to virtual ones, company visits, events, etc. could not be carried out, interaction between partners suffered, activities had to be cancelled, only a certain level was reached via the virtual networks etc. COVID-19 also remarkably slowed down project activities and progress. The effects like postponed and cancelled activities, prevention of equipment export to Russia, international component shortage, caused significant additional work, were seen. In addition, in many cases it prevented the implementation of the original project plan.

The projects minimised the negative effects of COVID-19 by utilizing remote connections and developing remote solutions. In addition, minimising was done by making changes to plans and operations of the project.

The impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on programme implementation

In overall, about half of the project Finnish implementers saw that the geopolitical situation had a negative impact on the project implementation. This negative impact hit the projects mostly after the Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Only 19% of the projects implemented before the start of the war saw that the geopolitical situation had a negative impact on the

project implementation. While among those projects that were still underway when Russia started the war against Ukraine the same value was 90%. Negative impact hit those projects the most.

The disruption to the Programme caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine has made it impossible to reach the project goals for most of the Programme projects (ongoing projects at the time). Only 14% of respondents saw that it had no affection.

It was also quite widely seen that the completion of the project on the Finnish side, without Russian partners, benefitted the Finnish partners in the project (67%). Still, just 21% of project Finnish implementers saw that projects became more straightforward and easier to implement after the Russian partners' departure from the project. The termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries according to 37% of Finnish project implementers. In slightly more than half of the cases caused damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation were minimised successfully according to the project actors. Hence, the termination of cross-border co-operation has not been exclusively a bad thing to Finnish project actors, although it narrowed the scope of the act of cross-border co-operation. For example, in some cases it has improved co-operation between partners and made the implementation of measures faster.

Damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation varied greatly depending on the actors and the nature of the projects. Mainly it was informed that no financial damage was done. The nature of the damage was mostly as follows: project content had to be changed, investments were unused, the amount of work increased, export opportunities did not realize etc. In addition, it is more likely now that development is going in a worse direction from an environmental point of view in the Republic of Karelia. It was strongly emphasized that the resources must be directed elsewhere, for example to Nordic regional co-operation. And utilize what has been learned in Karelia Programme elsewhere.

Annex 1. Case Studies by priorities

Priority 1

1. Tools for enhancing access to forest resources in cross border bioeconomy (Access2Forest, KA8041)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 20.1.2020 – 31.12.2021	Total cost / Program funding 418 174 € / 376 357 €	Priority 1: Growing cross-border business co-operation
Lead partner: Business Joensuu Ltd	Project partners: Forest Holding Company Karellesprom Arbonaut Ltd Finnish Forest Centre Lesnoe bureau Partner LLC Riveria – North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium	

Objectives and Key actions

The project focused on advanced planning technology development in the forest logistics and this technology was created in the form of the special software. The main goal of the project was to improve partnerships between organizations in Russia and Finland, mutual exchange of experience and knowledge. The project also included targets regarding the development of a program for the design of forest roads and training of excavator operators on forest road construction technologies used in Finland. This involved purchasing of necessary equipment and machinery and online trainings for road design and maintenance.

Results and Impacts

The results of the project can be divided into four groups:

- 1) The program developed, tested and applied the design of the construction of forest roads
- 2) New knowledge obtained in the field of design, construction and maintenance of forest roads
- 3) Partnerships and relations established between the project participants and mutual exchange of experience accomplished
- 4) The necessary equipment and equipment were purchased.

One of the main results of the project is the new software for planning construction of forest roads that has been developed and tested in nature. This method is utilizing forest inventory data for defining road quality and need for renovation, and in the project the master plan concept was created and tested. In addition, the network of partners has been formed and it worked on the software proceeding from practical needs. The results also included new Guidebook for road construction based on detailed task-level instruction.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
Demo programme for optimizing road network planning and maintenance is created:	1	1
Manual with recommendations for cost efficient approach for planning and Master Plan for maintenance is created and published	1	1

Task-level work models for excavator work are created; excavator pilots trained, evaluated and tutored at worksite	4	1
Decreased expenditures for forest road planning (%)	8,00	8,00

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of some selected partners of the project. Moreover, some documented results are used in topic. From the partner’s point of view, the pilot for utilizing forest LiDAR inventory data for optimizing the road maintenance and renovation works was considered successful. It has led to wider development work and new project by large research and company consortium. For example, Take me home, country road project (operating only in Finland) was mentioned as utilizing the groundwork that was done in Access2Forest. In addition, the region’s research institutes in Finland have gone deeper into the theme and developed their expertise. There are expectations that forest operators of the region will get more cost-effective solutions for road maintenance and improvement, when information provided by project is used in road renovation. Riveria educational institution (Finnish) that participated in the project highlighted the material that was produced in the project. The forest work model was created in the project that utilized organization’s previously accumulated know-how. The result was a guide that is available to both employees and work supervisors. But even more useful than this was the reflection of development work for teaching. Through participating in the project, organization has learned to further develop own expertise systematically. It has given the resources to analyze and develop one's own work, so that it also serves students and teachers and working life as well in its best.

There are reported expectations regarding the impacts on Russian side. There is no information if these expectations have been realized in Russia, but expectations were that forest logging companies in the Republic of Karelia can use this experience and the software in the future, as well as the result of the project would be used by employees of the Karellesprom. The Finnish software company that implemented the project's new software certainly had business expectations in Russia for the period after the project as well. This type of activity was already tightened by the Russian Federation during the project, and the war started by Russia in Ukraine at the latest watered down these business intentions. A western software company can practically no longer operate in the Russian market. Therefore, from the business point of view, the benefit gained is mainly the experience of testing the software within the project and the further utilization of this knowledge elsewhere.

2. Advanced forest nursery (KA4011)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.3.2019 – 30.6.2022	Total cost / Program funding 889 390 € / 791 562 €	Priority 1: Growing cross-border business cooperation
Lead partner: University of Eastern Finland	Project partners: Forest Research Institute of the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences Limited Liability Company “Lesnoe bureau” Pohjan Taimi Ltd. Taimitarha Timo Korhonen Ltd.	

Objectives and Key actions

The overall objective of the project was to increase cross-border economic interaction and trade, and the specific objective was to develop the innovative model of the forest nursery

business in Karelia and Finland based on the best Finnish practices. The project consisted of 3 work packages (WPs) with 3 different outputs, namely WP1 (Construction of the Demo nursery with the best Scandinavian technologies and practices in Karelia), WP2 (Guidebook for transboundary Forest Nursery business development) and WP3 (high quality seedlings have been grown for the Karelian market).

Results and Impacts

Construction of the Demo nursery in Karelia with use of the best Scandinavian technologies and practices has been completed in the project. Construction of a Demo container tree seedling nursery was established at Vidlitsa, of the Karelian Republic of Russia using the best Scandinavian greenhouse nursery technologies that are practiced in the North Karelia of Finland. Power and water supply facilities were already installed at the nursery. The nursery is successfully operating under the management of the Russian partner. The Demo nursery already produced container tree seedlings during the last three growing years (Autumn 2019-Summer 2022) and distributed the seedlings to its customers within the project timeframe. Job training of the Russian personnel and exchanging of tree nursery business ideas and views took place between the Finnish and Russian project personnel.

Guidebook for transboundary Forest Nursery development has also been completed. The guidebook is finalized but not published yet. The contents of the new planned guidebook consist of 8 chapters. In addition to that, production of high-quality seedlings for the Karelian market was reported to start well. High quality seedlings have been growing at the Demo nursery at Vidlitsa using genetically improved seeds. According to the project reporting, the annual target has exceeded by nearly two folds and during the three growing years (Autumn 2019 - Summer 2022) some 1 900 000 container seedlings have been produced to Russian markets. Moreover, the Limited Liability Company – Lesnoe bureau arranged twice ‘All-Russian Day for Tree Planting’ in Karelia that had a positive impact on the tree nursery business market for the Karelian Republic of Russia.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
Number of forest nurseries is registered as the private business enterprise	1	1
Number of printed guidebooks	30	30
Number of high-quality seedlings that have appeared in the Karelian market	350 000	1 900 000
Number of companies participating in project activities	15	15
Number of students participating in project activities	15	15
Number of companies willing to buy high quality seedlings from demo nursery	5	20
Number of visitors in a newly appeared forest nursery in Karelia	40	40

In overall, the current geopolitical situation has made it difficult to utilize the results of the project. Covid-19 situation made cooperation during the project difficult, but the project measures were still carried out according to the plan.

Results and impacts of the project were also discussed in the interviews of some selected partners and beneficiaries of the project. From the partner’s and beneficiary’s point of view, the most significant benefits of the project were registered for Russian side relating to the construction and operation of the Demo nursery. From the Finnish perspective the project has been beneficial

in increasing competence and awareness of the market situation. This information has been gathered in the guidebook made by project. From the university perspective the project also provided thesis topics and three theses were made. In addition, some publications were written. The project also provided important funding for researching the theme. In overall, because of the current geopolitical situation many of the project results cannot be fully utilized. There are some plans regarding follow-up projects (in Finland) related to this theme and the know-how accumulated in the project has been mentioned to be useful in teaching.

Based on interviews with two Finnish beneficiary companies, participation in the project did not bring any significant benefit for companies. There were expectations to enter the Russian market and do business, but the geopolitical situation (including protectionism) totally scrapped these intentions. Mainly the benefit achieved was the increase in knowledge and connections, which in best case could be useful someday in the future. The biggest benefit from participating in the project was perhaps, the connections and particularly university cooperation (in Finland) that started during the project. Cooperation with university has opened possibilities to get foreign trade (other than Russia). The project has acted as a catalyst for the birth of this kind of collaboration. One of the benefits during the project was the sale of machines and equipment to the Russian partner in order to get the operation started there (this was still allowed at the time).

3. Boosting Forest Cluster SME Business in two Karelias (Bofori, KA4002)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 8.10.2018 – 28.2.2023	Total cost / Program funding 650 000 € / 585 000 €	Priority 1: Growing cross-border business cooperation
Lead partner: Narural Resources Institute Finland (Luonnonvarakeskus)	Project partners: Finnish Forest Centre Riveria – North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium Forest Research Institute of Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences Joint Stock Company Zapkarelles Petrozavodsk State University	

Objectives and Key actions

General aim of the project was to support growing cross-border trade of SMEs. The specific objective is increased cross-border business activities and cooperation of SMEs in forest sector. The project aimed to produce results that would benefit Finnish forestry companies and entrepreneurs. It specifically addressed the theme of foreign forestry labor, which was identified as highly topical for business development in a survey of Finnish forest sector SMEs.

To promote the prerequisites for recruiting foreign forestry labor, the project focused on producing Russian-language training materials for forest workers. These materials aimed to orient Russian-speaking forest workforce to Finnish forest management principles and practices. The selection of topics for the materials was based on a needs assessment conducted in the early stages of the project. In terms of practical instructions and guides, the project developed printed and electronic training materials providing practical guidance to Finnish forestry companies in recruiting and integrating Russian-speaking forest workforce. Furthermore, the project explored the use of drones in forestry operations. It identified and analyzed potential use cases for drones and tested drone imaging for data collection. The most promising use cases, containing innovative approaches for future service development, were published as part of the project's results.

Results and Impacts

Training materials were produced to orient Russian-speaking forest workforce in Finnish forestry. The project created set of printed and electronic materials focusing on the knowledge and skills needed in silvicultural practices. Thus, prerequisites for recruiting foreign forestry labor were promoted by producing Russian-language training materials for forest workers. Actual recruiting of Russian-speaking forest labor did not realize in the project due to Covid-19 situation and finally due to the termination of cooperation with Russia. The material produced by the project have been utilized to a small extent with Ukrainian labor in Finland. The key results of the needs survey among Finnish forestry companies were published in a public final report.

The project also focused on identifying and analyzing the use of drones in forestry operations. The project identified 11 potential use cases, and the most promising innovative approaches for future service development were published in articles. In addition, intelligent data processing algorithms and techniques for deep learning were developed. Overall, the project faced challenges due to the termination of cooperation with Russia. However, adjustments were made to the work plan to produce materials and reports that benefit the Finnish forestry sector. Despite the obstacles, the project managed to generate good training materials and insights into the use of drones in forestry operations.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
The number of identified business models and calculated service potential across the border - An Analysis on the issue and estimation for business volume.	1	1
Number of training packages.	6	5
The feedback from the sector specific companies willing to participate in or to order courses.	20	25
Number of applications of the service.	10	11

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of some selected partners and beneficiaries of the project. From the partner’s point of view, the most significant benefits of the project were the created publications and increased understanding in the theme. The publications can be useful for Russian-speaking target groups coming from other countries than Russia (particularly Ukrainians staying/working in Finland). Publications can also be beneficial for the Finnish companies hiring foreign labor particularly in North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, and North Karelia. For the project partners themselves, it was seen as a possibility to benefit the material produced in the project for example in situations where cooperation opportunities open up in the Eastern Europe. It was also mentioned that before the limiting crises came, the activity was promoting the export of Finnish technology, but also in such way that it was enabling small entrepreneurship for Russians on the Finnish side if one can utilize these lessons learned in the project. In overall, because of the current geopolitical situation many of the project results cannot be fully utilized. Project partners have maintained contacts with each other on the Finnish side, but no concrete cooperation has emerged so far.

Based on interviews with three Finnish beneficiary organizations/companies, participation in the project did not bring any significant benefit for them, but some benefits are seen. Riveria educational institution that participated in the project highlighted the benefits of the material/guide the project produced. The material was in use in the case of the client company receiving employees from Ukraine. Russian-language material was used in this case. Finnish versions have been useful as additional material in basic education. In addition, some benefit has

been gained in teaching practices from the efficiency point of view. Therefore, It can be stated that the project have some kind of partial effect on development of competence and teaching. Two representatives of the potential beneficiary companies said that they did not achieve any actual benefits from the project. They have participated in the event organized by the project, but it has not yielded any benefit for them from the business perspective. The increase in knowledge was the only benefit recognized.

4. Preparatory Project for Network of Ethnocentres as Marketing Objective (KA1018)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 5.10.2018 – 31.5.2019	Total cost / Program funding 47 396 € / 42 656 €	Priority 1: Growing cross-border business cooperation
Lead partner: Juminkeko Foundation	Project partners: Karelika Ltd	

Objectives and Key actions

The project was aimed at examination and research of the situation in Kainuu and the Republic of Karelia in the field of cultural and ethno tourism. The overall objective of the project was to increase a cross-border interaction and trade.

The main activities included contacting all potential and possible partners in the field of cultural tourism in Kainuu and researching the situation of ethno tourism of the Republic of Karelia. Both studies have been carried out, strong sides in both territories have been determined, the problems and weaknesses have been detected, and recommendations and possible solutions have been given. Kainuu's main actors in the field of the cultural tourism were examined with the aim of clarifying the readiness and opportunities to develop the cultural tourism and a cross-border cooperation. Russian Karelian ethnocenters as the main instruments of the territorial ethno tourism were researched to clarify their preconditions, opportunities and interests for developing the tourism and readiness to be a part of the tourism business in Karelia. The side companies acting in both countries and working in the same territories were taken into research as well. The potential developers of cultural tourism willing to continue collaboration were determined. To be able to understand what activities, what partners and what circumstances are in both countries - in Finnish Kainuu and in Russian Karelia are, the preparatory project for network of ethnocenters was needed to be carried out and the analyze and groundwork to be made.

Results and Impacts

The main idea of the project was to collect all possible information on cross-border tourism, possible business partners for a possible project(s). The idea of a large project was to create, introduce and start exercising cross-border cultural tourism tour packages to Kainuu and to the Republic of Karelia and to have effective marketing of them in both participating countries and internationally; to create a business network to implement and exercise the cross-border cooperation in the field of cultural tourism to Kainuu and the Republic of Karelia by means of activities realized in the larger project. The research made in the project showed the changes in the situations, concerns and readiness to be committed by the parties of the project. The researches were made by both parties, in Kainuu by the Lead partner and by its partners in the Republic of Karelia "Karelika" travel agency. The document on the cultural and ethnocultural

actors in both territories, their analysis and recommendations has been made. The needed trips to the places were made and needed conversations and meetings were carried out by both sides.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
1) Information on the resources and capabilities of Karelian Ethnocultural centers to participate in the development of cultural tourism in Kainuu and Karelia;	1	1
2) Information on the resources and capabilities of Kainuu's festivals and other cultural events to participate in the development of cultural tourism in Kainuu and Karelia;	1	1
3) Information on participants willing to collaborate and information on their resources and capabilities;	1	1
4) Plan of following actions to develop cultural tourism between Karelia and Kainuu.	1	1

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of the lead partner of the project. Typically, when it is about a preparatory project, the most important results were related to obtaining information on the questions and theme as well as contacts. In this current geopolitical situation, the benefit from the project has gone more to the Russian side. Russian partner has received information and contacts during this preparatory project and possibly can utilize these in developing their travel packages. The information that has been collected on the Finnish side about the accommodation and dining options on the Finnish side is used and can be utilized also on Finnish side. Those on the Karelian side, cannot be utilized as long as this current geopolitical situation is on. The data however exist. No actual development project has followed from this preparatory project. It is because the project application was not approved. The preparatory projects' results have been utilized, e.g. in making the Kalevala package.

5. Tourism cooperation between SMEs (Tour SME, KA8016)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.2.2020 – 31.3.2022	Total cost / Program funding 349 778 € / 314 800 €	Priority 1: Growing cross-border business cooperation
Lead partner: University of Oulu	Project partners: Administration of urban town Kostomuksha Kainuun Etu Ltd KAMK University of Applied Sciences Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences Oulu University of Applied Sciences	

Objectives and Key actions

The objective of the project was to improve tourism SMEs' capability to create border-crossing services for international tourists. The main goal of the project was to create cross-border tourism products together with entrepreneurs from Northern Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, and the Republic of Karelia for the international tourists. Key actions were to activate and train initiative for SMEs in the regions of Russian Karelia, Kainuu, and Oulu region. The project contributed by activities increasing the capacity of enterprises to start cross-border economic cooperation by improving the capability of tourism industry enterprises enhancing the development of cross-border tourism services in the program areas. The activation of SMEs took place in three progressive levels: 1)

Information sharing and networking events, 2) Training sessions focused to SMEs and 3) Supporting cross-border piloting SMEs.

Results and Impacts

The target of the project, SMEs' improved development capability, is shown on cross-border tourism services and products for international tourists. In the project there were developed and piloted eight services/travel packages titled Spirit of Tar - Tervan Henki; Everyday life in Northern Ostro-Bothnia, Kainuu and Russian Karelia; Fishing trip from Bay of Bothnia to the White Sea; Kainuu-Karelia round trip; Live like a local; Festival of vendace and local traditions of Karelia; Travel portal and mobile app for travelers; and Maaseudun matkailuhelmet. For example, the product Maaseudun matkailuhelmet was informed in separate tourism annex of Helsingin Sanomat with circulation of 400 000 readers. However, in overall Covid-19 situation significantly made it difficult to achieve the project's goals. Travel packages could be created, but not in their cross-border forms. The measures of the project were carried out on both sides of the border quite independently and in different ways.

One of the most important results reported was the creation of cooperation between the companies involved in the project. The project helped to establish contacts with other companies/entrepreneurs (in Finnish side), which is expected to help in the development of the tourism business. The project has been reported to offer knowledge and tools to local tourism entrepreneurs to develop their businesses and products in cross border tourism field and between Kainuu and Northern Ostrobothnia tourism areas. Project has been reported to raise Finnish SMEs' awareness about tourism potential on both sides of border and give them knowledge about Finnish and Russian Karelian tourism actors and their existing services, destinations pulling factors and core attractions. SMEs' capability, skills, and competence of creating attractive cross-border tourism services for international tourists are improved and can be used directly to productized new tourism services.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
Number of SME representatives who have participated in information/networking events.	200	586
Percentage of participants with increased knowledge level after the events.	80	95
Number of SME representatives who have participated in training events	80	405
Percentage of participants with increased capacity to serve international tourists and to create tourism services/products after the events.	70	82
Number of SME representatives who have participated in piloting activities.	40	102
Number of presentations of tourism service cards.	6	8
Percentage of participants with increased ability after the piloting activities.	75	88
Number of media notices, blogs, news, and academic writings.	50	341
Number of enterprises/stakeholders reached with project activities	500	2315

The current geopolitical situation has made it difficult to utilize the results of the project. Covid-19 situation has calmed down, and people have started to travel indicating a growing tourism interest. Although there is increased interest in travelling business, the tourism business is very

vulnerable for any kind of crises, and the geopolitical situation may restrain cross-border and international travelling for many years.

Results and impacts of the project were also discussed in the interviews of some available selected partners and beneficiaries of the project. From the partner’s point of view, the most significant benefits of the project were registered for tourism companies in the region (in Finland). These companies got to know each other, and mutual trust was created between them. In the best cases, actual cooperation also emerged between the companies and there is more preconditions for serving international travelers/customers. The partners themselves have also benefited, which can be seen in the increase in know-how and understanding. The project has also increased the development of confidential relationships with the target companies. Thus, the project has been beneficial from the development and research perspective. It has been reported, that the tourism developers have gained perspectives from the project and have since also launched a new development project.

Based on interviews with three Finnish beneficiary companies, it can be stated that travel packages made have not brought these companies any special benefit so far. Travel packages have not been actively used and therefore this activity has not brought, for example, more customers or sales. The companies pointed out that the most important benefit was that the Finnish companies became known to each other and thus the conditions for possible cooperation in the future exist. Two out of three companies have cooperated with the companies they met in the project after the project. However, this cooperation has not brought more concrete results so far. In overall, the companies have expanded their networks, and these partners may prove to be important in the future cooperation.

Priority 2

6. Ordinary Man in a Great War (KA9036)

Basic information

<p><u>Implementation period of the project</u> 1.1.2020 – 31.12.2023</p>	<p><u>Total cost / Program funding</u> 607 440 € / 546 696 € (original) 278 097 € / 250 287 € (after relaunch)</p>	<p>Priority 2: Attractive cultural environment</p>
<p><u>Lead partner:</u> Naturpolis Ltd. (The project’s lead partner was changed after Russian’s military aggression towards Ukraine in February 2022. Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences was changed to Naturpolis.)</p>	<p><u>Project partners:</u> City of Kuhmo Euroregion ry Municipality of Suomussalmi (Before the war also: Municipal budgetary institution Ethnocultural center Kalevalatalo, Urban town administration of Kostomuksha, State Owned Public institution of the Republic of Karelia “Republican Centre for State Protection of Objects of Cultural Heritage” and Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Karelia)</p>	

Objectives and Key actions

According to the original project plan, the overall objective of the project was that project area's cultural services are easily reached and their quality is good. The specific objective of the project was to increase skills and capacities to utilize and market cultural and historical destinations as tourist attractions. This means that information about cultural history of the most important historical destinations is available, easy to find and to use, infrastructure of war historical destinations is developed and regular cross-border cooperation between Finland and Russia in

cultural historical issues and tourism marketing has started. After updating the project plan, the whole focus of the project has been on the area of Kuusamo, Suomussalmi, Taivalkoski and Kuhmo. The core of the project is tourism, and its task is to increase the area's vitality. This is done by creating opportunities for tourists to find the military history sites more easily in the region. In connection with that, the project highlights where there is accommodation, restaurant services and other attractions. Keywords are military history, storytelling, and tourist route. The term "Great War" refers to the First World War. However, the question here is World War II and the years 1939–45.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators (according to the 3rd interim report):

	Target value	Realised value
Number of participants taking part in the project activities (tourist companies - managers, guides; experts, specialists, educational and research sectors, authorities, local actors)	1300	950
Number of new tourism products and services, including the circular route	5	4
Number of stories found and taken into use	30	50
Number of new material produced for marketing (for example, audio, videos, brochures, maps)	7	6
Number of targets (objects) renovated, constructed / established	5	3
Number of target (objects) with improved ratings on public platforms	5	0
Number of cultural stakeholders reached with project activities	10	12

The most visible result of the project is the website: <https://www.tarinoitasotavuosilta.fi>. The site is made for those who are interested in military history, but especially for those who are not interested in military history at all. On the website, the military history of the target area is presented through people's experiences. Of course, there are combat situations, but especially descriptions from, for example, the home front, the evacuation trip, and the field hospital. Touching wartime narratives have also been brought to light with the help of field mail. In the project, the traditional way of presenting wartime events has been modified and the narration has been brought to this day. In this way, an effort has been made to generate tourists' interest in the area and get them to visit the area and at the same time use the area's various services. Due to the absence of the Russian project partners, efforts have been made to build the content of the project's website more for a German-speaking target group. At the end of the project, the website will be translated into English and German and these different language versions will be placed in their own web addresses. In addition, the language versions will include their own articles aimed at English and German readers. After the end of the project, the municipality of Suomussalmi will take over the management of the websites created in the project.

The project has also organized military history evenings in the municipalities of the region. Their purpose is to convey information, especially to the younger generations, about the military history sites in the region. In this way, opportunities have been offered to plan business related to these military history sites, e.g. organizing military history tours for tourists. So far, however, there is no information that any company has seized this opportunity.

The Finnish partners have considered the changes made to the implementation of the project due to the war started by Russia to be good, because previously the measures of the project were so strongly aimed at the Russian side. In the original plan, for example, there were various

investments behind the border: in museums, exhibitions, and infrastructure. Of these, added value for the Finnish side was difficult to obtain. Also, the cooperation between the Finnish partner municipalities has been strengthened after removal of the CBC element. The results of the project can be seen now more tangible.

7. Karelian Art-Residency Network and Art Tourism (KA3002)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 9.10.2018 – 30.9.2020	Total cost / Program funding 240 000 € / 214 271 €	Priority 2: Attractive cultural environment
Lead partner: Tourist Information Centre of the Republic of Karelia	Project partners: Kostomukshsky State Nature Reserve Social and Cultural Youth Centre in Sortavala Karelia Expert Matkailupalvelu Oy	

Objectives and Key actions

Improving contemporary culture services and products through the resources of art-residency network and cross-sectoral approach.

Main activities

- Opening of 3 new art-apartments and a media studio for artist work.
- Establishment a coordinative body of the network and launching a joint residential program.
- Experience and knowledge exchange between cultural and tourism professionals as well as strengthening competences and direct contacts on both sides of the border.
- Creation of new cross-sectoral initiatives and increase accessibility of the services.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
Number of equipped art-residencies (living and working spaces) in cross-border region	3	3
Number of participants of the masterclasses, courses, and exhibition visitors	1200	771
Number of artists-in-residence in 2019-2020	30	9
Number of professionals in the field of culture and tourism - participants of the seminars	70	161
Number of new cultural services, provided by artists-in-residence to local communities in 2019-2020	20	38
Number of new cultural products, based on cross-sectoral approach (art-tours)	4	4
Number of experts of project seminars	12	12
Percentage of increase of culture professionals' knowledge and skills from baseline data	20	22
Satisfaction consumer index of new cultural services and products (masterclasses, courses, art-tours)	75	87
Percentage of increase of the readiness of the professionals in culture and tourism fields on both sides of the border to further cross-border cooperation from baseline data	20	20

Number of participants of art-tours in cross-border region in 2019-2020	300	50
Number of cultural organisations using programme support for cross-sectoral cooperation	4	4

The project improved the system of production of contemporary culture services and products in cross-border region through the resources of art-residency network and cross-sectoral approach. As project result, new art-residency premises were created in Republic of Karelia (Petrozavodsk, Sortavala and Kostomuksha). The renovation of premises was carried out based on the developed design projects. Equipment and furniture were purchased and installed.

The Karelian art residency network Coordinative council was established, new cross-sectoral initiatives were created, and accessibility of the services was increased. Council was responsible for launching open call for residents, selection of artists and developing concepts of art residencies. The experience of holding open call for residents from over the world was successfully tested. The creative projects of visiting artist and their work were presented to local communities and artists. The local residents were involved to contemporary culture processes participating in artist-talks, workshops, and performances.

Culture professionals and professional artists got acquainted with best residency practice of Finland and Russia, received new knowledge for residency work, established professional cross-border residency networks and contacts. Artists learned about new professional opportunities. Professionals in the tourism field from both sides of the border received knowledge on the creative and art-tourism necessary for development of art-tours.

The project developed a new cross-border tourism concept "Two countries - one Karelia", which is based on the interpretation of common historical and cultural heritage, traditions, gastronomy, and natural landscapes. Within its framework, four art-tours were developed, offering to combine in one trip visiting both Finnish Karelia and Russian Karelia and options for tourists to create their own creative projects with professional art curator. Routes were successfully presented to European travel companies at the international tourist exhibition "Matka" in January 2020 in Helsinki. They received expert evaluation from European tour operators working in the German-speaking tourist market. New tourist products were included in tourist packages of two tour operators in Finland and in Russian.

8. Cultural Training and Activation Initiative (KA3004)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 10.10.2018 – 30.9.2021	Total cost / Program funding 497 880 € / 448 092 €	Priority 2: Attractive cultural environment
Lead partner: Oulu University of Applied Sciences	Project partners: Karelian College of Culture and Arts Karelian regional institute of Management, Economics and Law at Petrozavodsk State University South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences Ltd	

Objectives and Key actions

Improved capacity of cultural stakeholders to provide high quality, versatile and sustainable cultural services based on co-creation models and cross-sectoral approach.

Mission of the project: To strengthen competence and connections for businesses in creative industries between Finland and Russia. The target groups included especially higher education students, cultural professionals, and enterprises in the field of creative industries.

The project focused on developing the program area's cultural service concepts produced by and for start-ups, businesses, and other relevant actors. As a result, it was planned that high-quality cultural services will be more available to both local inhabitants as well as tourists. To secure sustainability of the project's results, it was also supposed to promote the development of support services (including mediator, management, and production skills) as well as a positive development of the operating environment through raising awareness of the challenges and possibilities of cultural CBC.

Activities:

- Improvement of skills, capacities and knowledge sharing of cultural stakeholders
- Acceleration of creative industries start-up businesses for better services and products
- Strengthening mediator's skills
- Co-learning and cross-border teamwork are in central role in all the activities.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
Cultural actors capacity increased and met with EU-standards	1	1
Number of high quality innovative service concepts created with the support of the project	4	11
New cross-border cultural services are launched	4	4
People living in the CBC areas are satisfied with cultural services (baseline assumption is 3 in the scale from 1 to 5)	4	3
Number of cultural organisations using programme support for cross sectoral cooperation	10	25
Number of professionals and students trained	200	937
Number of co-creative cross-border teams with entrepreneurial mindset emerged on cultural sector	20	17
Number of creative start-ups participating in the pitching and other investor related events and applying for venture funding	6	42
Number of cultural stakeholders reached with project activities	14	25

The project focused especially on building capacity of university level students, cultural professionals, and businesses in the creative industries to innovate, build and develop the program area's cultural service concepts. With trainings, workshops, and webinars, the CULTA aimed to build connections between cultural stakeholders and encouraged them to the cross-border cooperation between Finland and Russia. During the project over 900 cultural stakeholders were trained, and 17 cross-border teams worked for building new cultural services. Several of the teams launched their services or products. Many of the teams were guided to apply funding for further developments and implementation. Also, CULTA provided possibilities to get funding by organizing pitching competitions, for example together with Oulu2026 organization.

In trainings, workshops and other activities participants managed to get new ideas and resources on how to develop their ideas and businesses further. The project especially strengthened individual participants' entrepreneurial skills. The benefit from them has also remained at the individual level, from where it can be transferred to practice. The project had also an importance as an example of cross-border cooperation when Oulu bid for the European Capital of Culture.

The lead partner of the project benefited from the project in that it was possible to test different remote trainings and events and at the same time verify their functionality. In this way, clear models were obtained that can be carried forward to other international and national projects. In the project it was obtained also experience in general about how international entrepreneurship education is done.

The restrictions caused by Covid 19 did not greatly hinder the project. The implementation of the project was cleverly moved online, and the project was quite innovative in doing training with a new operating model.

The final publication of the project is available online: https://kareliacbc.fi/sites/default/files/assets/files/66/Enabling_book_FINAL_Light.pdf

9. InterActive History (KA3022)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 8.10.2018 – 31.5.2021	Total cost / Program funding 766 486 € / 689 837 €	Priority 2. Attractive cultural environment
Lead partner: Creative industries and cultural tourism development fund	Project partners: Ilomantsi Museum foundation Joensuu Museums Ministry of culture of the Republic of Karelia National museum of Republic of Karelia Outokumpu Mining Museum	

Objectives and Key actions

KA3022 was carried out by the Creative Industries and Cultural Tourism Development Fund from Petrozavodsk, three museums from North Karelia, one museum from the Republic of Karelia and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Karelia. Against the background of a multifaceted and shared cultural history of Karelia, the overall objective of the project was to create and introduce new museum services based on research and interpretation of cultural and historical heritage objects by using modern technologies. Digital tools were used to make visible (wall-less museum) cultural heritage in several locations in Finnish and Russian Karelia. The work was divided into the following components:

- Developing new museum programs for the visitors
- Creating new or re-designing present exhibition sections and improved outdoor museums areas
- Research and creation of visitors' infrastructure for cultural heritage objects
- Involvement of local community and promotion of new services

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

Thematic indicator	Target value	Realised value
Number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector	0	0
Number of young persons/members of special target groups reached with activities aiming at increased integration	0	0
Project specific indicators		
A number of cultural stakeholders using programme support	6	6

Increased number of participating real and virtual museum visitors by the 1st year after the project period (2021 - in relation with the pre-project year 2016 – 5860 real visitors, 5% at least, and 5% virtual visitors total at least).	5	10
A number of new program for museum visitors by the end of the project	6	6
A number of new information printed materials - booklets about new museum services	4000	4300
A number of installed information signs on the cultural heritage objects places	8	11
A number of museum mobile applications in which the heritage objects are interpreted	6	6
A number of new or updated exhibitions and quest room based on project principles	5	7
A number of renovated premises and improved museums areas	2	2
A number of the project volunteers by the end of the project at least	30	73
A number of the public events for local residents	6	67

The project met all the original key objectives, and its outputs include

- five new exhibitions and one updated exhibition on local history and industrial heritage
- improved access and signage to three open-air historic sites or heritage landmarks
- developments in mobile access and digital applications, such as mobile guides, in eight historic contexts.

With the exception of one temporary exhibition, the developed new museum services are tangible and long-lasting – even though the product life cycle of museum digital applications is measured in years rather than decades. Multilingual digital services allow both local residents and tourists to get acquainted with objects of cultural and historical heritage on their own, without a guide, making these services more accessible, increasing the diversity of users and opening up new audiences. The services are accessible to wide public, often without a fee, in all project locations.

The project organized over 60 events for local people and professional communities, including seminars, museum studies, joint exhibitions, online discussions, quizzes and quests. As part of interactions with the local communities, new museum educational programs for children, teenagers and youth were also created, motivated by the project’s educational aim to help children and young people to increase historical knowledge and understanding through interactive activities and digital applications. Schools and other educational institutions are benefitting to a significant extent from the outputs of the project.

Overall, the project contributed to increased experience and updated knowledge among museum staff and enabled local communities to be more involved in the development and modernization of museal exhibits. Through its activities and investments in new museum services, the project helped local communities to look at the location where they live in a new way and through modern (digital) means. The interviewed museum executives stressed the difficulty in obtaining funding for these purposes, and therefore, emphasized the added value of CBC instrument to raise awareness and improve access to cultural heritage.

The project has during its lifetime already received positive feedback on the new and updated exhibits, including interactive services, that were implemented through the project. This is

evidenced by the award for museum pedagogical act of the year 2020, given to Joensuu Museums for activities of InterActive History -project at Ultra industrial heritage site.

The project also strived to use the services of local providers for technical solutions.

10. Museums in focus: development of cultural services for Chinese tourists (KA9021)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.1.2020 – 31.12.2021	Total cost / Program funding 401 194 € / 361 074 €	Priority 2. Attractive cultural environment
Lead partner: Budgetary institution "The Museum of fine arts of the Republic of Karelia"	Project partners: Joensuu Museums	

Objectives and Key actions

KA9021 has been carried out by two museum organisations, one of them being located in the Republic of Karelia and the other one being located in North Karelia.

Against the background of strong increases in the number of Chinese tourists, the main objective of the project was to develop and improve museum services and products for Chinese tourists at the regional level in both Finland and Russia. In broad terms, the project activities consisted of four key components

- an examination of the needs and expectations of Chinese tourists
- learning from the experiences of other museums that have already applied China-friendly solutions
- services and product design on the basis of the lessons learned from earlier activities
- promotion of created tourist services and products.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

Thematic indicator	Target value	Realised value
Number of established new enterprises in the cultural sector	0	0
Number of young persons/members of special target groups reached with activities aiming at increased integration	0	0
Project specific indicators		
Number of people trained	60	247
Number of museum tourist products established	1	1
Number of museum tourist services developed	5	6
Number of professional contacts established	50	106
Number of promotional events	5	10
Number of cultural organisations using programme support for cross-sectoral cooperation	20	23
Number of representatives of relevant target groups actively participating in events	120	314
Increased level of competences and knowledge	50	72

Overall, the project was deemed to have had a positive impact on the promotion of tourist facilities for international tourists as well as promoting accessibility of cultural services in three respects:

- by improving the competence of project participants and stakeholders (through capacity building activities, trainings, accumulating and sharing expertise and best practices) regarding the creation of a China-friendly environment in museums,
- by elaborating and creating services and products for Chinese tourists in two pilot territories to increase the supply of high-quality services and products that corresponds to the expectations of customers from China,
- and by marketing and raising awareness of the created (and existing) museum tourist services.

A network and database of professional contacts around the topic has been established. The key outputs of promotional work package are still in use, and further progress has been made on their development (i.e. the Chinese web-page of the Russian partner’s website, the geolocation on Baidu mobile mapping app in Chinese language). In Joensuu Museums, the audio guide services were established in four languages, and user experience and accessibility were upgraded by improving wayfinding signage and visitor services.

The pandemic resulted in a sharp drop in the number of Chinese tourists, and recovery has been sluggish. However, the knowledge and expertise gained and some of the services established through the project will enable the partners and beneficiaries react quickly to potentially rising numbers of Chinese tourists in the future.

The Russian attack on Ukraine ended all collaboration with Russian partners and Russia. However, the museum representatives emphasised that some of the Russian-language materials and outputs of project can now be targeted at new collaboration partners in Central Asia and Ukraine, for example.

According to the museum’s representatives, there is a lack of access to project funding for cultural sector, and therefore, the CBC programme priority on culture environment brought added value to both national and EU funding programmes, and gave museums an exceptional opportunity to boost their development through service development, innovation, and piloting.

Priority 3

11. Development of forest fire risk assessment capacity and collaboration in the context of climate change (KA2013)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.10.2018 – 31.3.2019	Total cost / Program funding 50 000 € / 45 000 €	Priority 3. Clean and comfortable region to live
Lead partner: Arbonaut Ltd	Project partners: The State Government-financed Institution “National park “Vodlozerskiy“	

Objectives and Key actions

KA2013 is a micro project that has been carried out by a technology company Arbonaut Oy from Joensuu (North Karelia) and by the administration of Vodlozero National Park from the Republic

of Karelia between October 2018 and March 2019. Against the background that knowledge and collaboration across the border on effective prevention and mitigation is still lacking, the basic objective of the project was to improve collaboration and knowledge in the field of forest fire risk assessment through more effective capacity building planning in order to protect communities and the environment.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

Thematic indicator	Target value	Realised value
Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities	0	0
Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas	1	1
Number of persons actively participating in projects using nature as a tool to improve the health and wellbeing	0	0
Project specific indicators		
Number of analysed entities	20	23
Number of interviewed stakeholders	12	12
Number of reviewed open source tools and codes for the plan	5	7
Number of information packages delivered to stakeholders	10	10

The micro project included work on four major activities and resulting outputs. First, a stock-taking and analysis of the various stakeholders and organizations working on or somehow being affected by forest fire risk assessment and management was implemented. This included an examination of their roles in the field of forest fires management and risk assessment. Second, an analysis of the different expectations, challenges, capacities, and resources among some of the identified organizations was carried out. Third, various tools and data available for fire risk assessment and management were researched and the capabilities among the organizations utilizing the tools were assessed. Fourth, an information package containing all findings was produced and made available for any entity interested in the subject (available on a website sent directly to the stakeholder organizations).

On a general level, the project resulted in raised awareness of the need for more cross-border cooperation around the subject of forest fire risk assessment and, by making more information available, improved the capacities of organizations working with fire risk management. The final beneficiaries that should experience a longer-term positive impact are, for example, officials who are managing fires or land and need to plan how to prepare for fires. This micro project was conducted to get an overview of the topic, and, based on the observed needs and interests, the work was continued in the Karelia CBC project KA5051 in which the tools for monitoring and forecasting the occurrence of forest fires were developed.

The interviewees mentioned the problematic programme schedule regarding micro projects and their goal to provide the basis for larger CBC projects. Due to the late start of the Programme, the application for a larger project on the topic was impossible, although some aspects were taken on in the BLOKARELIA project.

12. URBAN PARKS – Urban Parks and Benefits in Kajaani and Kostamus (KA5000)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.1.2019 – 31.3.2021	Total cost / Program funding 805 717 € / 725 145 €	Priority 3. Clean and comfortable region to live
Lead partner: Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland	Project partners: Kostamus State Nature Reserve Kulttuuriosuuskunta G-Voima	

Objectives and Key actions

KA5000 is a project that has been carried out by the public Metsähallitus, a local co-operative from Kajaani (G-voima) and the administration of the Kostamus State Nature Reserve in Russia from January 2019 to March 2021. The main objective of the project was to make Kajaani and Kostomuksha known and valued as sources of health and well-being environment for individuals and communities, as well as promoters of socio-economic growth for residents and tourists through the development and marketing of urban parks (sites in close proximity to the cities of Kajaani and Kostamus). The project was implemented in close cooperation and partnership with the City of Kajaani. The events implemented as a part of the project were carried out in cooperation with various associations and organizations in the region of Kainuu, Finland.

The main activities included

- the establishment of a site managers network in Kajaani region
- the improvement of selected pilot sites in Urban Parks to ensure a well-functioning customer path and enhanced visitor experience
- the planning and development of Urban Parks concepts and brands
- the activation of locals to actively use Urban parks sites for recreation and events
- utilization of service design approach on pilot sites and involve locals and NGO's in planning
- the integration of health benefits and connect business products in communications of Urban Parks concept

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

Thematic indicator	Target value	Realised value
Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities	0	0
Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas	0	0
Number of persons actively participating in projects using nature as a tool to improve the health and wellbeing	600	4780
Project specific indicators		
Visitation in monitored Urban Parks sites during project, increase in %	10	2
Number of organizations participating Urban Parks network operation	10	5
Number of actual Urban Parks network meetings during project	5	20
Website visits in main brand communication channels (i.e. kajaani.fi, visitkajaani.fi, luuntoon.fi) during project, increase in %	10	93
Number of sites offering Urban Parks communication materials	5	6
Number of improvement plans	3	3
Amount of accidents in the parks during project, decrease in %	15	0
Number of youth and special target group organizations involved in the project activities	10	6

Number of products connected with Urban Parks communication and marketing	15	22
Number of events per year on Urban Parks sites	5	3
Number of persons reached with project activities	10000	60400

The outputs of the project included four different events that were organized at the network's nearby nature, six articles describing nearby nature sites were published in the local free distribution magazine (circulation 36,400), map of nature attractions in Kajaani, access control was initiated at Ruin Castle, all the signs of the Ruin Castle were renewed, safety of the Ruin Castle was improved, lighting of Ruin Castle, Rantapuisto and Kynnäspäänniemi was renewed (in total 127 lighting points), an event power centre was installed in Kynnäspäänniemi, a tear-off brochure about Ruin Castle was produced in four languages: Finnish, English, Russian and Swedish. The procurement process for selecting the lighting infrastructure provider for the Ruin Castle was carried out as a joint operation by the project and the City of Kajaani, resulting in efficient integration of Ruin Castle development into city's street lighting investments in larger Rantapuisto area. This model of cooperation was also applied to similar lightning infrastructure improvements in Kostamuksha urban parks.

The final beneficiaries of the project are the citizens and tourists in the project cities who are benefiting from the improvements made within the scope of the project on the pilot sites. Developments in infrastructure and mapping of nature attractions have been utilized in tourist marketing. The sustainability of the improvements and investments is ensured by the site owners and their maintenance plans in Kajaani and Kostomuksha.

13. Collaborative Data and Information Exchange Network for Managing Invasive Alien Species (KA5046)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.11.2018 – 30.9.2021	Total cost / Program funding 645 535 € / 581 881 €	Priority 3. Clean and comfortable region to live
Lead partner: Finnish Environment Institute	Project partners: Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (KarRC RAS) Natural Resources Institute Finland - Luke	

Objectives and Key actions

KA5046 has been carried out by the Finnish Environment Institute in collaboration with the Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE) and a Russian academic partner in form of the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (KarRC RAS). The project was implemented between January 2018 and September 2021.

Against the background that nature, including invasive species, knows no borders, the aim of the project was to create a sustainable, interoperable, and open data and knowledge exchange network between Finnish and Karelian government officials, researchers, and citizen (NGOs) to tackle threats posed by invasive alien species (IAS) and to gather, exchange and produce information on best practices for the management of alien species on the Finnish and Russian sides.

The key actions of the project focussed on the setting up of a data-sharing infrastructure between Finland and Russia and the development of an IAS-portal in Karelian Research Centre, the setting up of a cross-border network of IAS experts, finally, the implementation of a knowledge exchange process, inclusion the sharing of best practices.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

Thematic indicator	Target value	Realised value
Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities	0	28
Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas	1	76
Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas	0	0
Project specific indicators		
Number of people using data	50	713
Number of publications citing to data sources	10	11
Number of invasive alien species covered by Best Practise documentation	25	42
Number of volunteers or students participating eradication activites	40	199
Number of participants in collaborative workshops	100	134
Number of new datasets of invasive alien species at Karelian portal	15	15
Hits and shares in social media of relevant information that project has disseminated	50	205
Media coverage about prevention of invasive alien species that project has promoted	10	18

The IAS-portal at the Karelian Research Centre was successfully established and linked with the Finnish IAS portal through a data-sharing server purchased and installed with project funds. The Karelian portal currently contains information on 42 invasive alien species (animals – 9 species, plants – 10, fishes and aquatic invertebrates – 5, ixodid ticks – 2, nematodes - 3, insects – 12, clam - 1). Both the Russian and Finnish portals continue to be updated.

As a first of its kind, an IAS Expert Network has been established between Russian Karelian and Finnish experts through the organisations of a number of seminars and meetings during the project’s lifetime. Communication can be conducted through a general e-mail address.

The knowledge exchange process resulted in a number of outputs, including, for example, eradication events and eradication videos, a book, flyers, websites, information cards, translations, preparation of best practice documents, testing of IAS control practices. Here, it was pointed out the positive impact of the MA on activating researchers to popularize the results of their research and present them to different audiences. The pandemic had a significant impact on the planned eradication events, which could not be organised as planned in 2020. The project, however, adapted by organising online and ‘solo’ eradication events. An interviewee pointed out that especially municipalities can benefit from the procedures established by and disseminated through the project.

The establishment of the Karelian IAS portal and the further development of the Finnish one, as well as the other outputs produced by the project, can be deemed to

- make information on invasive species more accessible, particularly in the Karelian Republic,

- increase awareness of them among state and regional authorities, NGOs, pupils and students, experts as well as volunteers and the general public, and subsequently
- prevent the entry of new invasive alien species and reduce their negative impacts on biodiversity and society.

14. Cross-border tools for biodiversity hotspots preservation via monitoring and prevention of forest fires along Russian-Finnish border (KA5051)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.5.2019 – 31.10.2022	Total cost / Program funding 550 473 € / 491 973 €	Priority 3. Clean and comfortable region to live
Lead partner: Natural Resources Institute Finland	Project partners: Arbonaut Oy Buro Partner Ltd Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment Directorate for regional protected territories for the Republic of Karelia Forest Research Institute of Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Kostamuksha Strict Nature Reserve and Kalevala National Park Natural Resources Institute Finland	

Objectives and Key actions

KA5051 has been implemented by the Natural Resources Institute Finland in collaboration with six business and public organization partners from May 2019 until November 2022. Against the background that forest fires and biodiversity corridors do not adhere to border demarcations, the overall aim of the project was to improve the preservation of cross-border forest biodiversity against the hazard of forest fires through the prediction of the exact location and time of possible forest fires occurrence. The activities carried out by the project included:

- the development of a cross-border forest fire forecasting model and online tools
- the testing of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for fuel load mapping and biodiversity monitoring
- the development of an online map application for cross-border forest biodiversity sites
- the setting up of a cross-border network of actors, including cross-border seminars, involved in the field biodiversity preservation.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
Thematic indicator		
Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities	0	150
Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas	1	1
Number of persons actively participating in projects using nature as a tool to improve the health and wellbeing	0	75
Project specific indicators		
Reduction the area of forest fires in Russia and Finland in 2018	30	0

comparing with 2017, %		
Area of lost forest biodiversity sites in 2018 comparing with 2017	0	0
Number of visits to online map of cross-border forest biodiversity sites	1000	1243
Number of sessions (number of visits) to online geoserver and webserver with forecasts	1000	1243
Number of guidelines downloads from project website	300	75
Number of people participated in the seminars	1000	5561
Number of visits to online platform for actors involved into crossborder forest biodiversity preservation	0	0

According to the interviewees, the project resulted in a significant amount of, both academic and practical, knowledge and expertise regarding the preservation of biodiversity hotspots against forest fire. Tools that were developed as part of the project included a cross-border forest fire forecasting model and online map application for biodiversity sites. Practical knowledge was also developed in the use of UAVs for the mapping of biodiversity hotspots. Regarding longer-term impact, it was stated that the project was instrumental in kick-starting drone research and the development of their practical applications in Joensuu. The communication platform established between stakeholders around the project's topic, mostly under the lead of the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, contributed to the dissemination of the results and their longer-term application after the end of the project.

The idea for the project was based on the results achieved in previously implemented Karelia CBC funded micro-project on forest fire risk assessment carried out by one of the project partner Arbonaut Oy. The plan had contributions from the representatives of the Finnish Rescue Services (Pelastuslaitos), which was slated to be a partner in the project during initial planning of the project, but in the end became a key beneficiary of the project. In addition to the Forest Fire Protection Center in the Republic of Karelia and the forest administrations in Finland and Russia are key beneficiaries. Also, forestry companies and NGOs can benefit from the output produced by the project. In the EU-context, the results of the project have been utilized in Horizon 2020 project FirEUrisk, which aims at improving wildfire management strategies in Europe.

The project results in the longer term are deemed to make a positive contribution to

- the mitigation of cross-border forest fire risks, particularly with regard to its effects on biodiversity
- forest preservation and utilisation
- opening up new avenues for both business and R&D in the field of forest monitoring by remote sensing

15. Renewal of sludge management concepts in regional towns (KA11000)

Basic information

Implementation period of the project 1.10.2020 – 30.10.2023	Total cost / Program funding 2 359 979 € / 2 782 543 €	Priority 3: Clean and comfortable region to live
Lead partner: Kajaani University of Applied Sciences	Project partners: Kostomuksha town administration Mikko Ahokas Consulting Oy Municipal public enterprise "Gorvodokanal of the Kostomuksha town district" Puolangan kunta Regional company Water and Ecology LLC	

Objectives and Key actions

KA11000 was carried out between October 2020 and November 2023 by six partners. The Lead Partner was Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and the consortium included two municipalities and three enterprises. Against the background that using waste water sludge from small towns and more remote areas in the production of biogas often involves long distance transportation with lorries, the main objective of the project was to create new concepts for waste water sludge management in regional towns.

The key actions included an investment in a new and innovative treatment facility for municipal waste water sludges in Puolanka (Finland), development and enhancing the performance of an existing sludge treatment facility in Kostomuksha (Russia), supporting of further investments in existing infrastructure without big investments in Kondopoga (Russia) and the dissemination information and knowledge on the topic in the programme area.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

	Target value	Realised value
*/ not available by 16.11.2023		

The project resulted in a number of investments and technical pilots regarding innovative sludge management. As an investment-heavy type of project, the most substantial result of the project was the realization of dry digestion biogas facility investment in the municipality of Puolanka, Kainuu. The biogas facility is in operation and maintained by Puolanka municipality, leading to greater self-sufficiency in energy production by producing gas that is used in the local district heating plant. The plant is a concrete and long-term manifestation of the project's work. It can also be used as a testbed for other technological solutions. It was stated by an interviewee that in addition to the impact on sludge management and energy production, this project activity also served as model for innovation public procurement.

According to the interviews, investment plans that were developed on the Russian side during the course of the project were not realised before the shutdown of the programme. An interviewee also stated that the project resulted in expertise, experience and created new collaborative contacts and networks around the topic. Initially, it also opened up new business opportunities for the enterprises involved in the project. Overall, the project provided a kick-start to wider developments in the field of sludge management and renewable energy. Co-operation

with and support from the Regional Council of Kainuu, as part of their aim to promote green transition, was instrumental in this.

The project has also provided the foundational basis for new international collaborative projects and networks with Southern Europe, the Nordic region and Central Asia. For the latter, the Russian-language material produced as part of the project can be utilized further.

Priority 4

16. Vartius border crossing point development (KA6004)

Basic information

<p>Implementation period of the project 1.1.2019 – 30.6.2023</p>	<p>Total cost / Program funding 8 148 534 € / 6 410 682 €</p>	<p>Priority 4. Well-functioning border crossings</p>
<p>Lead partner: Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency</p>	<p>Project partners: Finnish Border Guard Finnish Customs Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority Finrail Oy Intelligent Traffic Management Finland Oy Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation North Ostrobothnia Center for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment Senate Properties</p>	

Objectives and Key actions

The Vartius-project was one of the six Large Infrastructure Projects (LIP) carried out by the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency in CBC 2014–2020 Programme context. The LIPs were selected through a specific communicative process. From the perspective of the lead partner, this collaborative approach is seen as good in principle, but is time consuming and can easily lead to delays. It is also difficult for a national agency to operate in an environment where there are three CBC Programmes with different priorities and practices.

The main objective of the project was to ensure the smooth functioning of the border crossing and provide a better working environment for the staff at the Vartius Border Crossing Point. The key activities were investments in road and rail infrastructure, including the necessary preparations, such as the finalization of investment plans and the organization of tendering process.

Results and Impacts

The project in the light of the indicators:

Project specific indicators	Target value	Realised value
Decreased throughput time for cars (minutes)	2	2
Decreased throughput time for the trucks (minutes)	5	5
Decreased throughput time for trains (minutes)	10	15
The estimated theoretical maximum 24 h capacity of Private cars increases (now 300)	500	500

The estimated theoretical maximum 24 h capacity of trucks increases (now 150)	300	300
The estimated theoretical maximum 24 h capacity of trains increases (now 50)	75	75

Based on the indicators, the Vartius project has fully achieved its intended outputs and results. The investments have led to a clear reduction in throughput times, and a significant increase in capacity. The reconstructed customs/border control building also provides a better customer experience and safe working conditions for staff.

Through investments in border crossing infrastructure, the results have a natural and long-lasting cross border impact with significant spillover effects on regional development, competitiveness of industries, and social well-being. These positive long-term effects are weakened by two factors. Firstly, the planned investments of the project did not take place on the Russian side of the border crossing point. Secondly, travel restrictions have reduced border crossings, and the increased capacity will not be able to be fully utilized in the seen future.