

Summary of the workshop

Why Interreg? Interreg achievements, during the ***Art of Cooperation 2024 Conference***

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Moderator: Márton SZŰCS Dr. – Head of JS, Interreg VI-A Hungary-Croatia Programme

Speakers:

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Contrary to the often-repeated perception that Interreg results do not gain sufficient recognition and visibility, in fact the programmes are in many cases 'visible'. The question instead should be **how to make the visibility even stronger**. The participants of the workshop set out to identify and analyse some key aspects that could strengthen the perception of Interreg and its results 'on the ground'.

Firstly, **the role of communication is critical** in fostering trust and generating innovative ideas, therefore it is paramount to maintain and enhance the visibility of Interreg programmes at the European level, which hinges on the solid legal framework that only a dedicated EU regulation can provide. To ensure the continued growth of the Interreg brand post-2027 it is vital to preserve the uniqueness and independence of these programmes, thus any reorganisation poses a threat to the hard-won visibility of the programmes.

Another important part is **the tangibility of project outputs and results**. In the optimal case, the results seamlessly integrate into the daily lives of the target groups, making them both practical and enduring. At the same time tangibility can be interpreted in multiple ways, depending on regional needs and contexts as well, therefore there is no one-size-fits-all solution here.

In the context of **infrastructure development projects**, the group debated their role and financial implications. Predefined infrastructure projects on one hand, when properly integrated into a programme during its planning phase, could reduce risks and improve outcomes. On the other hand it can be argued that funding infrastructure might be better aligned with mainstream EU programmes in the affected regions, allowing Interreg to concentrate on connecting key players to enhance coordination.

Regarding project selection, the Monitoring Committee plays a crucial role in identifying those with the potential to deliver tangible results. It is always beneficial to prioritize project quality and relevance to the broader programme area over narrow, more localised interests; at the same time Interreg is fundamentally about people, with some programmes being deeply rooted in people-to-people connections. (Which can be hard to measure within a performance-based framework, due to the smaller-scale projects' mostly softer outcomes.)

Looking ahead on the policy front, Interreg was described by the panellists as a unique cooperation programme rooted in territorial collaboration, **setting it apart from other EU initiatives**. They advocated for retaining shared management, reducing administrative burdens via simplification efforts, and adopting a more ambitious approach. Of course this would entail the securing of a proper amount of funding to sustain the programmes' impact.

One of the answers to the original question that the participants agreed on was that **the projects as the ambassadors of the programmes** can – and also should – provide help with the overall visibility, while the JS-es and MA-s should assist the projects to become more visible themselves. It once again boils down to the essence of Interreg: cooperation.