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# Evaluation of the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro IPA CBC Programme 2014-2020



**Interreg - IPA CBC**  
Italy - Albania - Montenegro



Thematic report on thematic projects

01/02/2022 (final version)

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# I Acronyms

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CP – Cooperation Programme

CPR – Common Provisions Regulation

ETC – European Territorial Cooperation

EU – European Union

IPA – Instrument for Pre-Accession

JMC – Joint Monitoring Committee

JS – Joint Secretariat

LP – Lead Partner

MA – Managing Authority

NIP – National Info Point

PA – Priority Axis

PP – Project Partner

SO – Specific Objective

TO – Technical Offer

## 2 Executive summary

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According to the methodology, this thematic report on thematic projects answers evaluation questions from 34 to 64 of the Technical Offer. The objective of the report is firstly to verify how thematic projects are contributing to the achievements of the Programme objectives and secondly to verify the added value of these projects, if compared to standard projects.

This first chapter summarises key findings and recommendations emerged from the assessment of the thematic projects funded under the Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme 2014-2020.

**Eight are the thematic projects selected by the Programme in 2018.** Each project refers to a specific topic, previously identified by the JMC, on the basis of a National Authority consultation and the proposal of common priorities from the JS. The selected topics are:

- Telemedicine for SMEs;
- Internationalisation/governance for SMEs;
- Agro-food for SMEs;
- Tourism;
- Culture;
- Risk management and civil protection;
- Water management;
- Transport.

Projects have been funded under all SOs, except from SO 3.2, for which the JMC has not considered strategic the approval of thematic projects. **The total budget allocated to thematic project is about 39.2 million Euro** (approximately the 40% of the Programme budget).

The eight selected projects involve a total of 51 partners (including the eight LPs). More than 43% of beneficiaries come from Italy. Partners from Albania and Montenegro represent 29% and 28% of the total, respectively.

Looking at the types of beneficiaries, public authorities represent 94% of the partners and these are national (43%), regional (31%) and local public authorities (20%).

If we compare the categories of partners involved in thematic projects with those involved in the projects of the 1<sup>st</sup> Call, thematic projects are characterised by a **strong involvement of national** (e.g. Ministries, especially in Albania and Montenegro) **and regional public bodies** (e.g. Puglia and Molise Regions) while the participation of local public authorities is higher in case of 1<sup>st</sup> call standard projects.

The considerable presence of public authorities (especially national and regional ones, 74%) in the partnerships of thematic projects is in line with the purpose of these projects, that is to affect and impact on the governance of the area, also favouring the overcoming of possible obstacles of legal or administrative nature as well as a the top-down development methodology (i.e. only authorities legally competent for the topic, including their subsidiaries, were eligible). **However, if we look at the results achieved by these projects to date, they seem only limitedly effective in producing better governance in the programme area and in providing more effective public services.**

As for the localisation, the strong and almost exclusive concentration in the regional capitals confirms the **significant presence of regional and national administrations** (beneficiaries are concentrated in the main cities of Bari, Campobasso, Podgorica and Tirana).

In some cases, difficulties for thematic projects started from the project development phase. Indeed, over 60% of approved projects needed more than 50 person-days to prepare the Application Form; 37.5% of which reported that preparation phase lasted more than 100 days.

Some beneficiaries started writing their project proposals with delays. In some cases, project proposals were on hold for months and only after several reminders from the JS, beneficiaries resumed the project formulation phase. Some of them, due to difficulties in writing the proposal or simply due to a lack of staff dedicated to writing, hired external consultants.

The outcome of the survey indicates that the work plan and project budget sections of the Application Form are perceived as the most difficult to complete. Furthermore, also the AF section related to partners is perceived as very difficult. This could probably be due to the fact that the partnerships of each project have been established by the JMC and are not the result of partners networking or previous collaboration.

Financial progress is a very crucial aspect for thematic projects. The projects started between May and June 2019 and they were in the early phases of their implementation when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out.

**The impact of Covid-19 was tremendous for the implementation of the project activities and led to changes in the project workplans and/or reformulation of project activities. As of November 2021, the expenditure approved by the Certifying Authority is about 17% of the total budget assigned to thematic projects.**

These numbers clearly show the difficulties that these projects are facing in implementing their project activities and reporting the related expenditures. **No major difference is reported in the performance of the three subcategories of public authority (national, regional and local)**, while significant discrepancies are shown if we look at the country of origin of those authorities. Indeed, considering the thematic project total budget allocated to each country, the worst performance is registered in Albania, with less than 6% of the expenditure approved by CA. A slightly better performance is reported by the Italian beneficiaries, with almost 10% of total budget approved by CA. Montenegrin beneficiaries registered the best performance with 28% of expenditure certified and approved by CA.

Considering the difficulties that these projects were facing, JS has guaranteed support and collaboration. A first year review meeting, a mid-term review meeting and a decommitment issue meeting have been organised to discuss with partners and check the progress of activities, address bottlenecks, delays, and mitigate the risk of de-commitment. In this regard, **it is worth mentioning that all interviewed project partners have declared that their projects activities have been developing faster in recent months and they are optimistic to be able to report an important amount of their budget in the future months.**

As regards the physical implementation, outputs and results achieved by the Programme by the end of 2020 entirely depend on what was achieved by the standard projects financed under the first call. Thematic projects, also considering their delayed implementation if compared to the 1st call projects, did not report any achievement in 2020.

The preliminary analysis of the impact generated by thematic projects in the cooperation area shows that thematic projects contribute to **increasing and enhancing the exchange of knowledge and skills** among project partners but, despite what was expected, **they seem to contribute only to a limited extent to improving the governance of the territories.** This is particularly challenging if we consider that these projects have been selected *ad hoc* to produce a change in the cooperation area, also in light of the strong political commitment behind them (indeed, these projects have been selected by the JMC with an explicit political will). This is a crucial aspect if compared to the capacity of standard projects to affect and impact on the governance.

Additionally, what is worth noting is that **thematic projects do not seem able to capitalise the results of the standard projects.** Clearly, when thematic projects have been selected, standard projects of the first call were not completed. However, **given the financial resources available for these projects and the**

**strong political commitment they should have, one expects a greater ability to capitalise on the results that standard projects were achieving, especially on relevant cross-border issues**, such as transport, pollution, etc., where the cross-border dimension is fundamental to generate a change in the cooperation area.

The analysis performed and the information collected by the evaluators allow to formulate some remarks on the quality of thematic projects.

Despite the strong political commitment behind these projects, they seem **limitedly able to make a real impact on the governance** of the cooperation area (which is expected, due to the massive presence of public authorities in the partnership). This is especially true if compared to some of the 1<sup>st</sup> call standard projects that have been able, with a lower budget, to achieve results beyond those included in the application forms. Despite the difficulties and slowdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic, **what seems to be lacking in these projects is a strong will of the partners to carry out the project activities**. Additionally, the analysis showed that some project partners are **unfamiliar with Interreg rules, and unaware of the bureaucratic and administrative procedures related to project implementation**.

This all allows to rethink or at least improve the selection process of these projects in the future Programme 21-27. From the evaluator's perspective, we recommend considering:

- during the programming phase, to allocate a lower portion of the total Programme budget to thematic projects. The actual programme dedicated 39.2 million Euro to thematic projects, out of a total budget of 92 million Euro, that is more than the 40% of the budget.
- during the selection phase, to:
  - verify the ability and the willingness of selected project partners (especially in the case of LPs) to perform the project activities. The actual selection procedure of thematic projects verifies the partners competencies on the selected topic but does not focus on the actual ability of that partner to implement the project activities. And this is a crucial aspect if we consider that some partners are particularly competent on a specific topic but totally new to the management of such big projects;
  - support the selected project partners in the project development phase, especially when dealing with the workplan and the division of activities, that should be weighted according to the competences, the ability and the budget dedicated to the partner;
  - when selecting the strategic topics for 21-27, to consider how to capitalise the results of the standard projects.
- during the project development and implementation phase, to encourage a stronger commitment of National Authorities in stimulating and supporting the projects partners. Additionally, in order to face the lack of human resources of certain big organisations, external assistance should be provided to the partners. During the early stage of project development, the actual need and back-up from the organisations nominated by the JMC should be re-confirmed with a formal commitment. Indeed, looking at the bottlenecks encountered by partner organisations in 2014-20, these should be openly discussed and addressed in the early stages of partnership building (e.g., an external expert, led by the JS, could also assess the partner's capacity to engage in project development, with objective data, which might be provided to the JMC for a decision on possible partners changes). At the end of project development, and with the support of an external expert led by the JS, each project partner should have an established team of persons engaged and working in the project, as well as, in case of externalisation, contracting procedures ready to be launched (ToRs, calls, etc.)

## 3 Introduction

The Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme involves two Italian regions (Puglia and Molise) and all the territories of two candidate countries in the EU pre-accession process (Albania and Montenegro). The Programme budget for 2014-2020 is of EUR 92.7 million.

Figure 1 Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro - Cooperation area



In January 2021, t33 was commissioned by ARTI, *Agenzia Regionale per la Tecnologia e l'Innovazione* of the Puglia Region, to perform the ongoing evaluation of the Programme. In coherence with the Technical Offer (TO), the evaluators submitted 6 evaluation reports in May 2021:

- First report on the Programme efficiency and effectiveness
- Thematic report on the results of the projects financed under the first call
- First report on the Programme communication strategy
- Report on the inputs for the 2021-2027 Programme
- Report on the environmental evaluation
- Contribution to the Annual Implementation Report

The present report provides an analysis of the **results of the thematic projects funded under the Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro programme** and is one of the three deliverables to be submitted by November 2021 according to the evaluation working plan. The other reports are:

- Thematic report about the impacts of the Programme at the level of each SO;
- Report on the Programme contribution to EUSAIR.

This report, together with the report on the results of the 1<sup>st</sup> Call projects (delivered in May 2021) lay the foundation for the development of the thematic report about the impacts of the Programme at the level of each SO. It is organised in the following sections:

- 1) Analysis of the progress in the selection and implementation of projects;
- 2) Analysis of impacts;
- 3) Annexes which present the case study reports.

Different tools have been used by the evaluators to answer the relevant evaluation questions (desk analysis, interviews with programme authorities, web-survey, case studies with the eight thematic projects, etc.). The following chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used by the evaluators.

## 4 Methodological approach

The main objective of this evaluation is to assess the performance and the results of the thematic projects financed under the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro 2014-2020 Programme. The table below summarizes the elements evaluated in this report.

Table 1 – Elements evaluated

Elements evaluated	Sub-elements
<b>Analysis of the selection and performance of the projects</b>	Selection procedures
	Available resources
	Types of beneficiaries
	Financial progress
	Output indicators
	Result indicators
<b>Analysis of impacts</b>	Project outputs
	“Direct results”
	Cross-border added value

The evaluation of the elements presented above stems from the analysis of both primary and secondary data. The analysis of Programme documents as well as of the administrative data retrieved from the Programme monitoring and reporting system (December 2020 and September 2021) represented the key starting points for the evaluation. Additionally, the analysis has been fine-tuned thanks to the information collected through interviews with programme bodies (JS, in particular), case studies and web surveys.

Furthermore, between September and November 2021, the evaluators conducted 8 case studies (for a total of 15 interviews with project lead partners and project partners). All thematic projects have been selected as case studies. Beneficiaries to be interviewed have been selected with the aim of guaranteeing a well-balanced coverage among programme countries.

In addition, the web survey launched by the evaluators in Spring 2021 was opened again to collect information from those thematic projects LP that hadn't replied to the survey in its first run. The web survey supports the collection of information on the progress made by the projects in terms of outputs and results, their cross-border added value and the contribution to EUSAIR (a specific evaluation report will be dedicated to this aspect).

The table below provides an overview of the methodological tools and data sources.

Table 2 - Data sources

<p><b>Desk analysis</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme documents</li> <li>• Programme web site and projects portals</li> <li>• Application forms and progress reports</li> <li>• Available literature on policy and programme</li> </ul> <p>Available databases (e.g. <i>cohesiondata</i>)</p> <p>Data retrieved from the monitoring and reporting system</p>
<p><b>Interviews</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme bodies involved: MA/CA, JS, JMC</li> <li>• 8 case studies, for a total of 15 interviews with project Lead partners and Project partners.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Web surveys</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web survey addressed to the Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme beneficiaries of thematic projects</li> </ul>

# 5 Analysis of thematic project selection and progress

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## 5.1 Methodology for project selection



The general methodology for selection of the thematic projects has been approved during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Monitoring Committee meeting of the 4-5 July 2017 in Tirana (Albania). The methodology was then modified and updated during the 5<sup>th</sup> Joint Monitoring Committee meeting of 17 and 18 April 2018, in Podgorica (Montenegro).

According to Annex\_01\_Methodology for Thematic Project development, the main steps identified for the selection of thematic projects are the following:

**Step 1 - National Authority consultation**, in order to collect ideas from the territories and to identify key institutions responsible for a specific topic. The national consultation involved relevant stakeholders through meetings, online or e-mail consultation, desk consultation. Each NA used the most effective methodology, taking the national context into account.

In compliance with the Programme document, the criteria guiding the selection by the NAs were:

- the cross-border relevance of the project idea,
- the relevance of the topic for the territories,
- the coherence with the programme strategy,
- the relevance of the partnership,
- the relevance of the results and the impacts,
- the sustainability of the project ideas.

**Step 2 - Joint secretariat analysis of common priorities.** National Authorities submitted the projects idea for the analysis of the JS, which analysed the proposals according to the financial dimension and the available resource. Finally, the JS submitted a list of common project ideas to the JMC.

**Step 3 - Joint Monitoring Committee approval of the ideas and public notice.** The JMC, through a written procedure, approved a list of top project ideas according to their cross-border and territorial relevance, their coherence with the Programme strategy, the relevance of expected results and impacts, the relevance of the partners and the physical and financial sustainability. The JMC also selected the partner organisations which should have the competence on the topic according to a national legislative or regulatory provision, as well as financial and managerial capacity to be project partners. With the aim of informing the relevant stakeholders, the JMC approved a public notice including information on the selected list of project ideas, including the partnership compositions. The public notice is published in the official website of the national authorities.

**Step 4 - Partner project development.** The identified lead partners, in agreement with their related project partners, developed the project ideas into completed projects. In this phase, specific support to beneficiaries is provided by the JS, especially regarding the eligibility rules and the budget compliance.

**Step 5 - Joint Monitoring Committee approval.** The last step is the formal approval of the JMC. In particular, on the basis of the analysis performed by the Joint Secretariat, the Joint Monitoring Committee with its decision shall confirm that the Thematic Projects fully comply with the strategic criteria set for the project ideas, i.e.:

- Cross-border and territorial relevance,

- Coherence with Programme strategy,
- Relevance of expected impact,
- Relevance of partners,
- Sustainability.

With the approval, the Joint Monitoring Committee gave the mandate to the Managing Authority to sign the subsidy contract with each Lead Partner. After that, each LP received a standard subsidy contract by the MA for the start of activities.

The Programme fixed the deadline for the submission of thematic projects proposal on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018. The approval of the project proposal received took place approximately one month after the submission.

The official document with the expenses committed and the approval of the contractual scheme of the Subsidy Contract was signed by the Program Management Authority in July 2019.

## 5.2 AVAILABLE RESOURCES



On the basis of the approved methodology, the JMC approved eight different topics for thematic projects, allocating a total amount of about EUR 39.2 million (of which EUR 33 million of EU contribution).

Key rules for thematic projects are:

**Project size:** Total budget of up to maximum of EUR 7 million, including 85% IPA Contribution and 15% National co-financing.

**Project duration:** Maximum 48 months, with possible justified extension at the end of the project.

**Project partnership:** necessarily one partner per participating country (three), maximum three partners per country (six) and maximum one associated partner per country (three), being public bodies and bodies governed by public law in charge of the identified topic, according to national legislation.

**Project preparation costs:** Real cost expenditures are eligible starting from the date of approval of ideas by JMC and up to EUR 40 000.

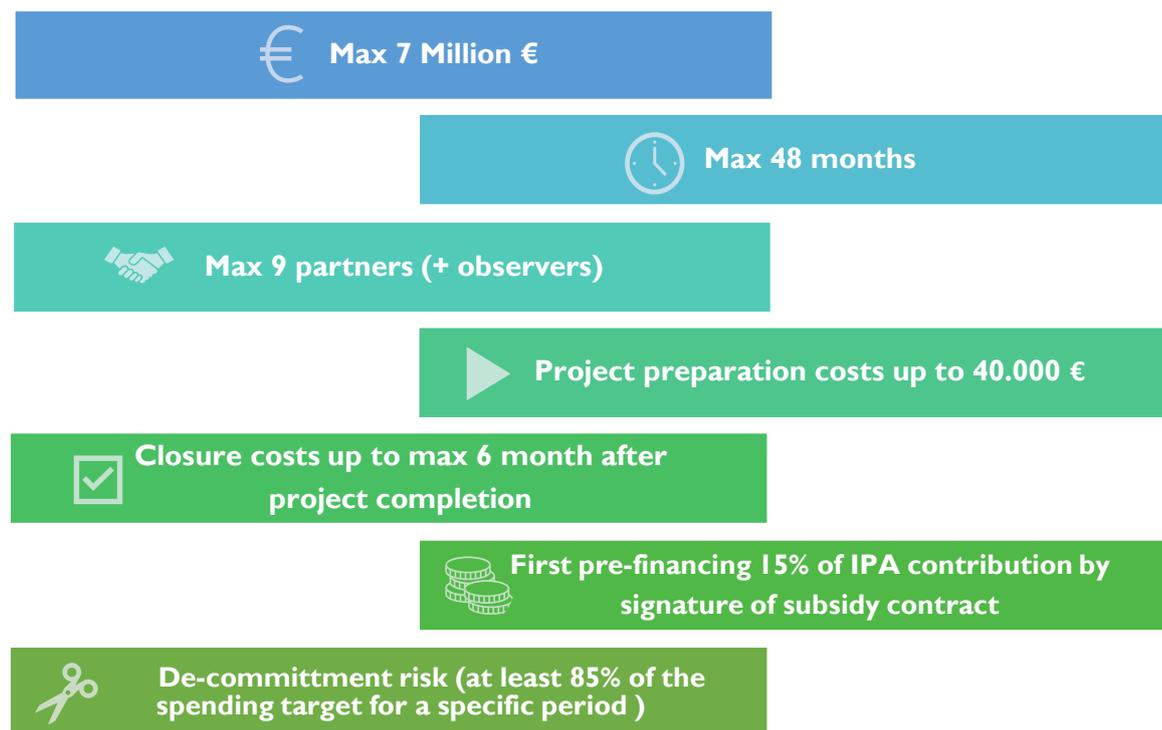
**Project closure costs:** Real costs expenditures related to audit and reporting activities are eligible for 6 months from the date of project end (incl. final reporting and audits of project partners and the LP).

**Pre-financing:** First pre-financing 15% of IPA contribution by signature of subsidy contract, second pre-financing 15% of IPA contribution once the lead partner has reported 10% of IPA contribution. Offset of pre-financing in equal shares in the last 3 reporting periods. Rules on eligibility and their interpretation are the same specified in the first call for standard projects, as well as in the programme manual.

**De-commitment targets:** If a project partner does not reach at least 85% of the spending target for a specific period which was fixed in the approved application form, and if this is due to the partner's failures, the Managing Authority may de-commit the difference between the target and the certified amount, which will become available for the specific Priority Axis.

The figure below summarises the main features of thematic projects.

Figure 2 Rules for thematic projects



Source: t33 own elaboration

The topics approved by the meeting of the JMC of 9 February 2018 are:

- Telemedicine for SMEs;
- Internationalisation/governance for SMEs;
- Agro-food for SMEs;
- Tourism;
- Culture;
- Risk management and civil protection;
- Water management;
- Transport.

The table below shows the selected public partners competent for each topic according to the national legislation who received the mandate to develop thematic projects.

Table 3 - Selected topics and eligible partners

SO	Topic	Selected partners
I.1	Telemedicine for SMEs	Lead: Polyclinic of Bari (Puglia, IT) Partners: Polyclinic of Foggia (Puglia), Puglia Region – Health Department (Associated partner), Molise Region (Actual partner TBC) Ministry of Health of Albania, Ministry of Health of Montenegro.

SO	Topic	Selected partners
1.1	Internationalisation/governance for SMEs	Lead: Ministry of Economy of Montenegro Partners: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Regione Puglia (International Policies Coordination), Regione Molise (competent Dept.), Office for European Integration of Montenegro.
1.1	Agro-food for SMEs	Lead: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – Albania Partners: Agricultural Technology Transfer Center of Korca, Agricultural Technology Transfer Center of Vlora, International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, Puglia Region - General Secretariat of the Presidency “Health Market Place”, Molise Region, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Montenegro.
2.1	Tourism	Lead: Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment Partners: Montenegrin Ministry for Tourism and Sustainable Development, Regione Puglia (Tourism, Economy of Culture and Territorial valorisation Department), Regione Molise.
2.2	Culture	Lead: Montenegrin Ministry of Culture Partners: Ministry of Culture of Albania, Institute of Monuments of Culture of Albania, National Centre of Cinematography, “Alba Film Studio”, Regione Puglia (Tourism, Economy of Culture and Territorial valorisation Department), Puglian Public Theatre, Regione Molise (competent Dept.)
3.1	Risk management and civil protection	Lead: Regione Molise (Civil Protection Dept.) Partners: Ministry of Defence of Albania/Civil Emergencies Department, Montenegrin Ministry of Interior, Head of Division for Emergency Situation, Regione Puglia (Civil Protection Unit)
3.1	Water management	Lead: Regione Puglia (Agriculture Department, Water Resources Unit) Partners: Municipality of Tirana, Water Supply and Sewerage Enterprise of Tirana (UKT), Montenegrin Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Puglian Public Aqueduct, Regione Molise (competent Dept.)
4.1	Transport	Lead: Albanian Development Fund Partners: Montenegrin Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs, Puglia Region (Mobility, Urban quality, public works, ecology and landscape), Regione Molise (competent Dept.)

In total, eight projects were selected, one per each topic. The table below illustrates the project distribution and the total budget allocated across SOs. For SO 3.2, the JMC has not considered strategical the approval of thematic projects.

Table 4 Thematic project: selected project and total budget allocated per SO

OS	N. projects	Budget MEUR
1.1 - Enhance the framework conditions for the development of SMEs cross border market	3	11.3
2.1 - Boost attractiveness of natural and cultural assets to improve a smart and sustainable economic development	1	5.2
2.2 - Increase the cooperation of the key actors of the area for the delivery of innovative cultural and creative products	1	4.3

3.1 - Increase cross border cooperation strategies on water landscapes	2	11.4
4.1 - Increase coordination among relevant stakeholders to promote sustainable cross border connections in the cooperation area	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>39.2</b>

Source: DB list of operations approved + eMs

### 5.3 TYPES OF BENEFICIARIES



The eight selected projects involve a total of 51 partners (including the eight LPs). As illustrated by the table below, more than 43% of beneficiaries come from Italy. Partners from Albania and Montenegro represent 29% and 28% of the total, respectively. Looking at lead partners, Italy and Albania lead the same number of projects (three each) while Montenegro leads two projects.

For what concerns the distribution of the allocated budget across the countries, the 44% of the budget is allocated to Italian beneficiaries, followed by Albania (32%) and Montenegro (25%).

Table 5 Distribution of partners, LP and budget across countries

Country	N. partners	N. LP	Budget MEUR
ALB	12	3	12, 4
ITA	19	3	17, 1
MNE	12	2	9, 7
<b>Tot</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>39,2</b>

Source: DB list of operations approved + eMs

Table 6 Distribution of thematic project budget per partner

Project name	Partner	Budget MEUR
<b>3C</b>	<b>Ministry of Culture of Montenegro (LP)</b>	1.27
	Ministry of Economy of Montenegro	0.09
	Ministry of Culture of Albania	1
	Institute of Cultural Monuments “Gani Strazimiri” - Albania	0.07
	Puglia Region – Department of Tourism, Economy of Culture and Valorization of Territory	1.1
	Molise Region	0.35
	Molise Culture Foundation	0.34
<b>ALMONIT - MTC</b>	<b>Albanian Development Fund (LP)</b>	2.9
	Puglia Region- Mobility Department, Urban quality, Public works, Ecology and Landscape	0.87
	Ministry of Capital Investments - Montenegro	2.4
	Molise Region	0.75
<b>CrossWater</b>	<b>Puglia Region, Department of Budget, General Affairs and Infrastructure - Water Resources Section (LP)</b>	1
	Apulian Public Aqueduct	0.86
	Molise Region	1
	Municipality of Tirana	0.7
	Tirana Water and Wastewater Utility	0.87
	PE “Regional waterworks for Montenegrin cost”– Budva (RWMC)	1
<b>DUE MARI</b>	<b>Ministry of Tourism and Environment (LP) - Albania</b>	2

Project name	Partner	Budget MEUR
	Puglia Region – Dept. Of Tourism, Economy and Territorial and cultural valorisation	0.44
	Molise Region	0.77
	INNOVAPUGLIA S.p.A.	1.00
	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	0.70
	National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro	0.31
<b>FOOD4HEALTH</b>	<b>Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (LP) - Albania</b>	0.36
	Agricultural Technology Transfer Center of Korca (ATTC)	0.60
	Agricultural Technology Transfer Centre of Vlora (ATTC)	0.60
	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari	1.38
	Puglia Region, Presidency - Administrative Direction of the Cabinet	0.43
	Molise Region	0.75
	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management - Montenegro	0.25
	University of Montenegro, Institute of Marine Biology	0.57
<b>PHASE</b>	<b>University Hospital Consortium Corporation Polyclinic of Bari (LP)</b>	1.27
	University Hospital Ospedali Riuniti di Foggia	0.36
	Molise Region	0.43
	Ministry of Health and Social Protection - Albania	0.46
	University Hospital Centre “Mother Theresa” Tirana	0.37
	Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania	0.36
	Clinical Centre of Montenegro	0.38
	Ministry of Health of Montenegro	0.36
Chamber of Economy of Montenegro	0.26	
<b>SMART ADRIA Blue Growth</b>	<b>Ministry of Economic Development (LP) - Montenegro</b>	0.62
	Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania	0.52
	Puglia Region	0.19
	Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs - Albania	0.07
	Molise Region	0.38
	Government of Montenegro Prime Minister’s Office European Integration Office	0.09
	UnionCamere Puglia (Regional Union of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Craft and Agriculture of Puglia)	0.24
<b>TO BE READY</b>	<b>Molise Region (LP)</b>	2.00
	Puglia Region – Civil Protection Department	1.18
	Ministry of Interior, Directorate for Emergency Management of Montenegro	1.20
	Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Albania	1.47

Source: JS data (File: Avanzamento finanziario 08/10/2021)

Looking at the types of beneficiaries, public authorities represent 94% of the partners and these are national (43%), regional (31%) and local public authorities (20%). Two are the infrastructures and public services providers involved and one business support organisation. 39% of the total budget is allocated to national public authorities, while regional authorities and local authorities count, respectively, about EUR 12.3 million (31% of the budget) and EUR 7.4 million (19% of the budget).

Table 7 Type of partners: number and budget

Type of partners	N. partners	Budget MEUR
National public authority	22	15.5
Local public authority	10	7,4
Regional public authority	16	12,3
Infrastructure and (public) service provider	2	3,8
Business support organisation	1	0.2

Source: DB list of operations approved + eMs

As regards the categories of partners involved and the difference compared to projects of the 1<sup>st</sup> Call, thematic projects are characterised by a strong involvement of national (e.g. Ministries, especially in Albania and Montenegro) and regional public bodies (e.g. Puglia and Molise Regions) while the participation of local public authorities is higher in case of 1<sup>st</sup> Call standard projects.

Table 8 Type of partners: comparison with 1<sup>st</sup> call standard projects

Type of partners	% Thematic projects	% 1 <sup>st</sup> call projects
National public authority	<b>43%</b>	16%
Local public authority	20%	<b>29%</b>
Regional public authority	31%	7%
Infrastructure and (public) service provider	4%	1%
Business support organisation	2%	4%

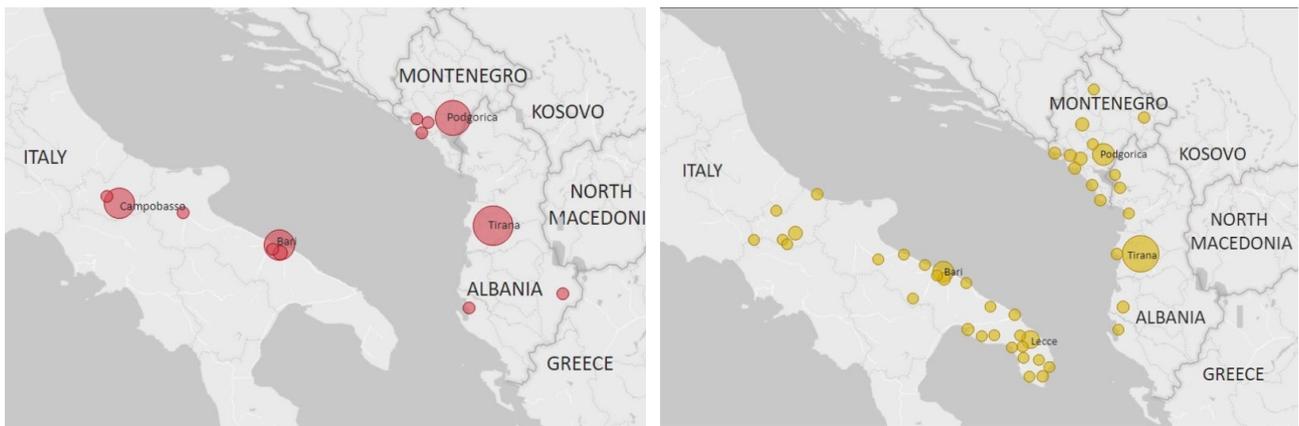
Source: DB list of operations approved + eMs

The considerable presence of public authorities (especially national and regional ones, 74%) in the partnerships of thematic projects is in line with the purpose of these projects to affect and impact on the governance of the area, also favouring the overcoming of possible obstacles of legal or administrative nature. However, if we look at the results achieved by these projects to date, these seems not to be particularly effective in producing better governance in the programme area and providing more effective public services. Chapter 5.5 will provide more details on this point.

The localisation of the beneficiaries confirms what has already been pointed out regarding their type. The strong and almost exclusive concentration in the regional capitals confirms the significant presence of regional and national administrations (beneficiaries are concentrated in the main cities of Bari, Campobasso, Podgorica and Tirana). The comparison with the localisation of standard projects confirms the specificity of the thematic projects.

The two maps below illustrate the geographical distribution of the beneficiaries across the cooperation area.

Map 1 Geographical distribution of thematic project partners (left panel) and standard project partners (right panel)



Source: DB list of operations approved + eMs

## 5.4 Project development

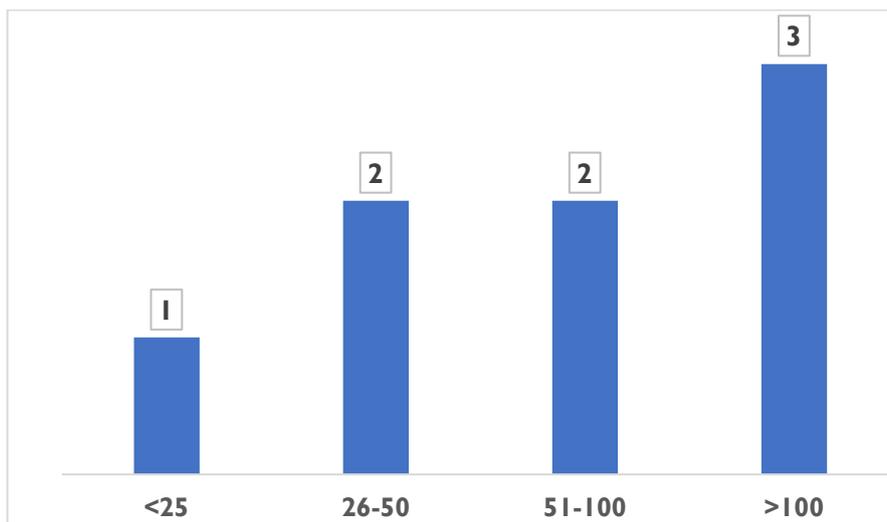


The support by the Italy-Albania-Montenegro programme bodies to beneficiaries during project preparation is provided both at programme and national level. As established in Annex\_01\_Methodology for Thematic Project development, “the identified LPs shall develop the project idea into a complete project, under the advice and support of the NAs, the JS and NIPs for the technical and programme requirements, on the standard application form”.



According to the information collected through the web survey, as concerns the preparation of AF from conception to submission, only one project indicates this took less than 25 person-days. Two projects declared between 26-50 person-days were needed to complete the AF. What is worth noting is that for 5 projects out of 8, the time needed to prepare the AF was higher than 50 person-days, with a 37.5% (3 projects) for which the preparation phase lasted more than 100 days.

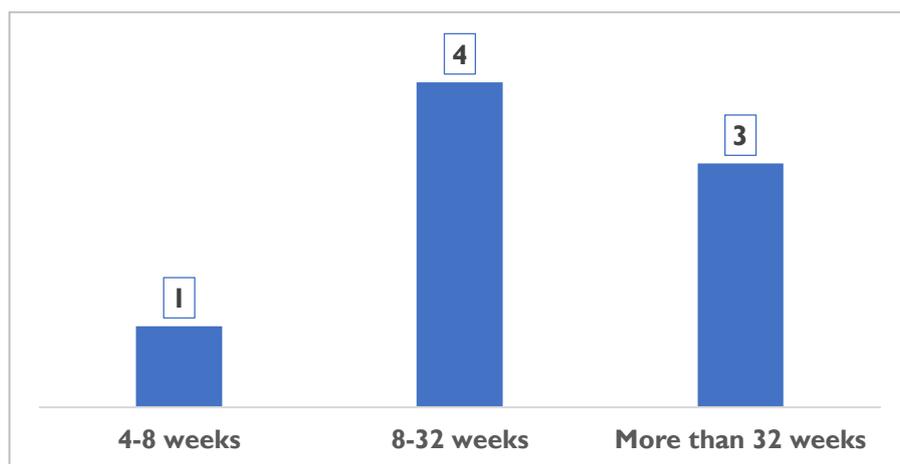
Figure 3 - Number of person-days for the preparation of the Application Form from conception to submission



Source: web survey to beneficiaries (2021)

In terms of project development, including partnership meetings, drafting of the project idea and submission of the AF, 4 projects declared to have needed between 8-32 weeks, while it took between 4-8 weeks for only one project. 3 projects affirmed they needed more than 32 weeks.

Figure 4 Time needed for project development (including partnership meetings, drafting project ideas, submission)



Source: web survey to beneficiaries (2021)

 These findings, gathered from the web-survey, have been confirmed also by the interviews with the programme authorities. Indeed, several delays have been registered from the very beginning of the preparation of the project proposals.

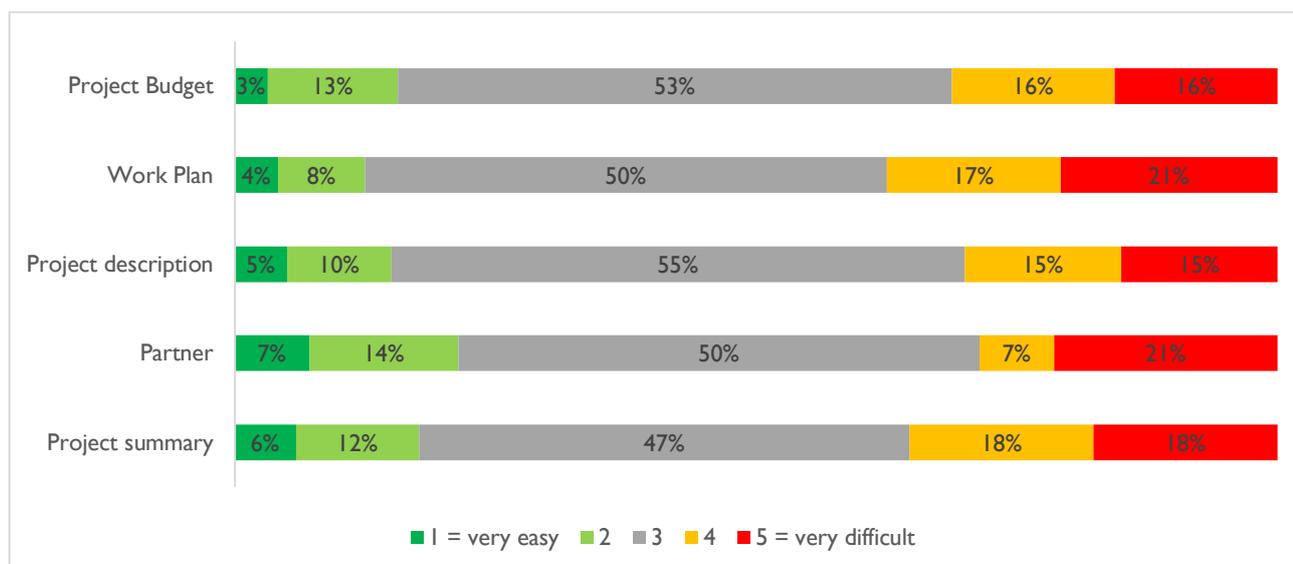
Some beneficiaries started writing their project proposals with delays. In some cases, project proposals were on hold for months. Only after several reminders from the JS, beneficiaries took back the project documentation and started writing the proposals. Some of them, due to difficulties in writing the proposal or simply due to a lack of staff dedicated to writing, hired external consultants.

During this phase, the JS provided ongoing support to beneficiaries, especially for what concerns the financial aspects of the project implementation. As also reported in Annex\_01\_Methodology for Thematic Project development, “during project development the JS shall advise the LP to have a work plan and a budget complying with the Programme rules. In particular, the JS shall advise on the rules of eligibility, through specific FAQs made available to project partners”.

 As shown in the graph below, when asked to evaluate the difficulty of filling the different sections of the AF on a scale from 1 to 5, the outcome of the survey indicates that the work plan and project summary sections are perceived as the most difficult to complete. 32% of the respondents also perceived as difficult or very difficult the section dedicated to project budget.

Furthermore, the survey showed that a significant number of respondents perceived as very difficult also the section related to partners. This could probably be due to the fact that the partnerships of each project have been established by the JMC and are not the results of partners networking or previous collaboration.

Figure 5 Difficulty in correctly filling the sections of the Application Form (1=very easy; 5=very difficult)



## 5.5 FINANCIAL PROGRESS



All thematic projects started between May and June 2019. According to the approved methodology, their duration should not exceed 48 months. Six projects last about 37 months while the remaining two last 36 months.

However, these projects were in the early phases of their implementation when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. The impact of Covid-19 was tremendous for the implementation of the projects activities and led to changes in the project workplans and reformulation of project activities.

With regards to the absorption of the available budget, the table below is based on data provided by the JS in November 2021. The expenditure approved by the Certifying Authority is about 17% of the total budget assigned to thematic projects.

A slightly better, but still worrying situation is shown if we look at the amount of expenditure included in the project finance reports by lead partners, that has not yet been approved by CA. Indeed, all projects are running faster to implement their activities and report their expenditures. In some cases, the CA has not yet approved expenditures that have already been reported by LPs in their financial progress reports. In this case, the percentage is almost 23% of the total budget assigned to thematic projects.

These numbers clearly show the **difficulties that these projects are facing in implementing their project activities and reporting the related expenditures.**

As illustrated in the table below, the financial performance of the projects differs a lot. Considering the expenditures approved by CA out of the total project budget, the most performing projects are FOOD4HEALTH (33%) and 3C (32%), followed by CrossWater (20%) and SMART ADRIA Blue Growth (20%). Worst performances are registered by ALMONIT-MTC (almost 7%), DUE MARI (7%) and PHASE (8%).

Table 9 Financial progress – Expenditure approved by CA

Project name	Budget (EUR)	Expenditure certified by FLC (EUR)	Approved by CA (EUR)	% approved by CA*
<b>FOOD4HEALTH</b>	4 964 651 €	1 900 136 €	1 621 733 €	33%

Project name	Budget (EUR)	Expenditure certified by FLC (EUR)	Approved by CA (EUR)	% approved by CA*
<b>3C</b>	4 281 675 €	1 466 494 €	1 373 476 €	32%
<b>CrossWater</b>	5 570 738 €	1 719 474 €	1 122 879 €	20%
<b>TO BE READY</b>	5 893 686 €	1 831 503 €	871 450 €	15%
<b>SMART ADRIA Blue Growth</b>	2 154 971 €	435 271 €	421 326 €	20%
<b>Due Mari</b>	5 206 934 €	728 653 €	388 546 €	7%
<b>PHASE</b>	4 254 313 €	401.537 €	324 481 €	8%
<b>ALMONIT - MTC</b>	6 843 360 €	627 576 €	500 733 €	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 170 328 €</b>	<b>9 110 644 €</b>	<b>6 624 622 €</b>	<b>17%</b>

\* % calculated out of the total project budget

Source: JS data (File: Global Projects Living Tables 25/11/2021)

As said, the risk of underspending for these projects is very high.



Considering the difficulties that these projects were facing, JS has guaranteed support and collaboration. A mid-term review meeting, a first year review meeting and a decommitment issue meeting have been organised to discuss with partners and check the progress of activities, address bottlenecks, delays, and mitigate the risk of de-commitment. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that all interviewed project partners have declared that their projects activities have been developing faster in recent months and they are optimistic to be able to report an important amount of their budget in the months.



As the evaluation of the first call standard projects showed, public authorities represent the category most significantly affected by delays in the certification flow. This assumption is confirmed also from the analysis of the thematic projects, for which almost the totality of beneficiaries are public authorities.

No major difference is reported in the performance of the three subcategories of public authority (national, regional and local). While significant discrepancies are shown if we look at the country of origin of those authorities. Indeed, considering the thematic project total budget allocated to each country, the worst performance is registered in Albania, with less than 6% of the expenditure approved by CA. A slightly better performance is reported by the Italian beneficiaries, with almost 10% of total budget approved by CA. Montenegrin beneficiaries registered the best performance with the 28% of expenditure certified and approved by CA.

The table below provides additional information on the financial progress per type of beneficiaries. Data consider the amount approved by CA.

Table 10 Financial progress per type of beneficiaries

Type of Partner	ALB	ITA	MNE
National public authority	5.8 %	-	26%
Local public authority	5.9%	13.6%	58%
Regional public authority	-	8.9%	-
Infrastructure and public service provider	6.1%	10.4%	-
Business Support Organisation	-	-	27.6%
<b>Total</b>		<b>13%</b>	

Source: DB list of operations approved + JS data (September 2021)

The analysis of the financial progress of thematic projects allows evaluators to elaborate some remarks. Firstly, the fact that these projects are not reporting as they should is emblematic of an important delay in the implementation of the project activities (for this purpose, see the next paragraph dedicated to project contribution to output and result indicators).

The reasons behind such bad performances cannot be merely linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, which certainly influenced the implementation of all the projects, but not to the point of generating such low levels of spending. See, for instance, the ability of many standard projects of the first call to overcome the difficulties generated by the pandemic by reorganising their activities.

According to the information gathered by the evaluators, what is missing in the implementation of these projects is a real interest of the partners in carrying out the project activities. The lack of interest, together with the absence of stable and continuous staff dedicated to the project, frequent staff turnover and internal reorganizations within the public administrations, hindered smooth project implementation.

In some cases, a real inability of projects partners emerged to implement project activities. Some of them seem unfamiliar with Interreg rules, not used to bureaucratic and administrative procedures related to project implementation and with very limited reporting skills.

To complete the analysis on this point, it is worth mentioning that these partners are used to managing and participating in other international cooperation projects, therefore Interreg does not represent their first experience of cooperation. However, Interreg project budgets are limited if compared to other donor projects, and this could somehow discourage the commitment in project activities.

## 5.6 CONTRIBUTION TO OUTPUT AND RESULT INDICATORS



As illustrated by the tables below, outputs and results achieved by the Programme by the end of 2020 entirely depend on what was achieved by the standard projects financed under the first call. Thematic projects, also considering their delayed implementation if compared to the 1st call projects, did not report any achievement in 2020.

However, the information gathered during the case study interviews and the web-survey allows the evaluators to collect updated information on the progress made by thematic projects in their implementation. The significant delay in the implementation of all these projects remains confirmed. Nonetheless, project activities have proceeded faster in recent months and some projects reported finalised outputs.

Column B below refers to data provided by projects in the web-survey (as of end 2020) and then updated and verified during the case study interviews in October 2021. Additional information on the achievements of thematic projects is reported in the Annex – Case study reports.

Table 11 – Thematic projects output achievements 2020 and expected 2023 (comparison with 1<sup>st</sup> call projects)

PA	ID	Name	CP target 2023	2020 (A)			2021 (B)	2023 (C)	
				Achieved	Achieved 1 <sup>st</sup> call projects	Achieved thematic projects	Achieved thematic projects	Expected	Expected thematic projects
I	I.1.2	Number of business and research institutions involved/offering non-financial support	11	10	10	0	7 (PHASE I (SMART ADRIA Blue Growth) 5 (F4H)	91	30

PA	ID	Name	CP target 2023	2020 (A)			2021 (B)	2023 (C)	
				Achieved	Achieved 1 <sup>st</sup> call projects	Achieved thematic projects	Achieved thematic projects	Expected	Expected thematic projects
	CO04	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	11	68	68	0	3 (PHASE) 400 (F4H)**	348	172
2	2.1.1	Number of new products, services and pilot or demonstration projects realized	4	6	6	0	0	76	4
	2.1.2	Number of valorised sites	4	6	6	0	0	34	4
	2.2.2	Number of cross-border creative platforms created	4	5	5	0	0	18	1
	CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	4	0	0	0	0	66	44
3	3.1	Number of new products and services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	15	21	21	0	15	139	13
	3.1.2	Number of users involved (in pilot or demonstration projects)	15	73	73	0	0	244	0
4	4.1.1	Number of new products, services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	4	2	2	0	-	36	0
	4.1.2	Number of new multimodal connections for the benefit of passengers and freight	4	0	0	0	0	15006*	5

\* These values should be considered carefully since the project ON CLOUD NINE has recently undergone a major change and these data should be updated accordingly.

\*\* Data provided in column B should be considered carefully and will be further verified during the next phases of the evaluation. Indeed, as regards the achievement of indicator CO04 Number of enterprises receiving non-financial

support, the FOOD4HEALTH project reported a value of 400 against a target of 1450 which, however, refers to target group (e.g in the AF, the project reported 1450 as target of SMEs to be involved).

Source: own elaboration based on AIR 2020, data provided by the JS, web-survey, case studies

A very similar situation to that of output indicator progress appears if we look at the results produced by thematic projects in 2020. Indeed, projects did not report any result achievement in 2020. As for output indicators, the last column of the table below reports the data provided by projects in the web-survey and during the case study interviews.

Table 12 – Thematic project results achievements 2020 (comparison with 1<sup>st</sup> call projects)

PA/OS	Type	Name	PF Baseline	Target 2023	2020 Achieved 1 <sup>st</sup> call projects	2020 Achieved thematic projects	2021 Achieved thematic projects
1/1.1	Result	Common interventions aimed to improve the cross-border framework	8	15	2	0	2 (FOOD4HEALTH)
2/2.1	Result	Common action Plans for the smart management of tourist destinations to be adopted by the public authorities of the Programme area	0	4	3	0	0
2/2.2	Result	Cross-border networks in the cultural and creative fields	2	2	2	0	0
2/2.2	Result	Cross-border agreements in the cultural and creative fields	1	3	1	0	0
3/3.1	Result	Common plans enhancing and safeguarding water landscapes (including marine ones)	3	7	2	0	1 (CrossWater)
4/4.1	Result	Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions	5	7	1	0	1 (ALMONIT)

Source: own elaboration based on AIR 2020 and on data provided by the JS

According to the table above, three projects are reporting results. Food4Health contributes to improving the cross-border framework for innovation by enhanced SME's cooperation and competitiveness and developing entrepreneurial mindset. CrossWater contributes by publishing a Cross Border Integrated Plan to enhance and safeguard marine water landscapes. The Cross Border Integrated Plan has been published on the project website, under the section Outputs (<https://crosswater.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/outputs>). Almonit-MTC, finalised an agreement between the Government of Albania and that of Montenegro.

## 6 Analysis of impacts

This chapter is based on the information collected through the survey and the case studies. Section 6.1 presents the types of outputs realised by the projects, section 6.2 illustrates the types of 'direct results', while section 6.3 provides insights on the cross-border added value of thematic projects.

## 6.1 PROJECT OUTPUTS

Data collected from case studies and web survey confirm what has already been observed for the projects of the first call. Indeed, most of project outputs are ‘intangible’, meaning that they usually refer to elements such as the set-up of cross border networks, the carrying out of awareness-raising activities and/or the elaboration/implementation of policy instruments.



The table below is based on the web-survey and it shows, for each SO, the percentage of respondents considering the specific type of output relevant to their thematic project. As the table shows, ‘intangible’ outputs can be found across the different SOs. Beside the ‘intangibles’, it is also interesting to notice that under two SOs, projects have tested new tools and solutions.

Table 13 Types of outputs per SO (% of the approved projects under the SO which selected the specific output)

Types of outputs	TOT	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1
Set up of cross border networks	63%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies, actions plan, protocols	25%	0%	100%	0%	50%	0%
Implementation of joint monitoring activities	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Joint studies/research	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Awareness-raising and capacity building activities	50%	33%	0%	0%	100%	100%
Test of new tools and solutions	25%	0%	100%	0%	50%	0%
Small scale infrastructural interventions	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: web survey

The following sub-sections provide additional information on the main types of projects outputs by providing concrete examples from various SOs.

As the table above shows, most of the projects analysed are carrying out activities aimed at **setting up and consolidate cross border networks**. For instance:

- Under SO 1.1, all the three approved projects, **PHASE**, **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth** and **FOOD4HEALTH** create innovative networks between research and business actors. In the case of **PHASE**, the project creates models of eHealth addressed to healthcare professionals, physicians, nurses as well as to ICT and technology service providers or social and assistive service providers. **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth** creates one cross-border Blue Growth Cluster with 60 business and research registered, and one online capacity building platform in Blue Growth. Lastly, **FOOD4HEALTH** establishes agro- food and fisheries clusters and networks among universities and research centres specialized in agro-food and MSMEs.
- Under SO 2.2, **3C** creates networks of cultural and creative industries to jointly develop cultural heritage products and services area.
- Under SO 4.1, **ALMONIT - MTC** develops a cooperation platform/network to improve multi-modal connections and to facilitate and promote sustainable cross border cooperation in the project area.

Two thematic projects are contributing to the **elaboration and implementation of joint strategies, action plans, protocols**. Specific examples are:

- Under SO 2.1, **DUE MARI** develops a common strategy and action plan for sustainable and innovative management of tourist destinations in Montenegro, Albania, Molise and Puglia. Thanks to the Action Plan, the project will try to alleviate territorial fragmentation, improving the potential for development of diversified tourism products and sustainably valorise natural and cultural assets and lesser-known destinations.
- Under SO 3.1, **CrossWater** develops an Integrated Water Management System Plan, to improve the cross-border framework conditions for the management of water resources.

**Awareness-raising and capacity building activities** are carried out by 4 projects. Some examples:

- Under SO 1.1, **PHASE** tests capacity building and training schemes for SMEs.
- Under SO 3.1, **TO BE READY** organises capacity building/training schemes such exercises for AIB (Anti Incendio Boschivo) operators, AIB coordinators on how to avoid floods plus an in-depth training program for D.O.S. (Direttore Operazioni di Spegnimento). **CrossWater** implements awareness raising campaigns addressed to stakeholders to promote the sustainable use of water resources and avoid wastages.
- Under SO 4.1, **ALMONIT - MTC** organises exchange of practices in the field of sustainable transports.

Some of the projects analysed (2 projects) are **testing new tools, products and solutions**. Concretely:

- Under SO 2.1, **DUE MARI** develops the "Due Mari" Virtual Interactive 360D Platform, to enhance sustainable tourism growth, diminish seasonality, promote new technologies and innovative approaches and tools in tourism marketing.
- Under SO 3.1, **TO BE READY** carry out specific pilot actions for testing solutions of natural risk management and biodiversity protection.

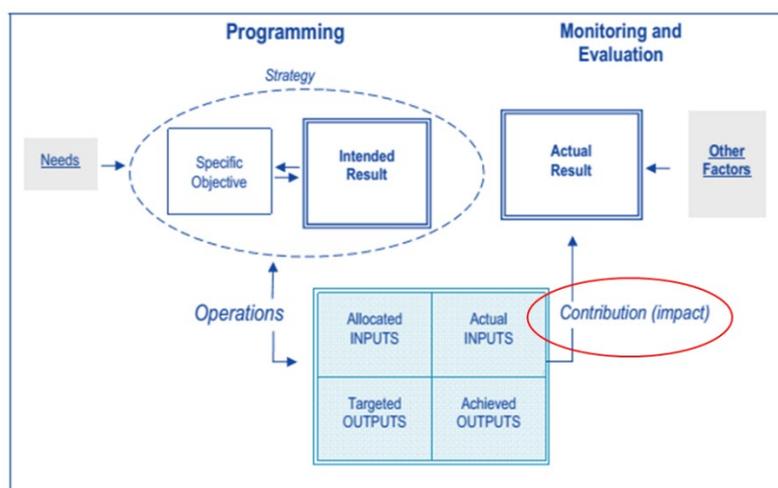
## 6.2 'DIRECT RESULTS'

With the term "direct results" the evaluators refer to the direct contribution/impact of the project actions and outputs in the cooperation area.

Desk analysis of the AFs showed that, when filling the section *Main project result* of the AFs, LPs tend to detail the project specific objective and related planned outputs, but not always clear information is provided on the project impacts (intended as project results).

This might be explained by the fact that the 2014-2020 logical framework of the EC for ERDF and CF programmes defined milestone in terms of output at project level and milestone in terms of results at programme level, while the direct results of the projects (i.e. the "impact" in the figure below) is not monitored by the indicators system.

Figure 6 Logical framework for the 2014-2020 period



In other terms, projects were not called to indicate the contribution of each action/output to the expected result and, as a consequence, detect the expected impacts in the AFs is often challenging in many ERDF programmes, as the logical framework for the 2014-2020 required measuring (through output indicators) only the project outputs and not their direct effects/impact. This is also evident when looking at the PRs submitted by LPs, which appear to be more focused on finalised outputs, with no details on the impact achieved (i.e. project results achieved).



Thus, as concerns benefits brought to the territories by the projects activities and outputs, data collected from case studies and web survey show that the 'direct results' (i.e. impacts) produced by the programme can be traced back to some macro-typologies (see table below).

Table 14 Types of 'direct results' per SO

Types of results	TOT	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1
Increased skills and competences of key actors	88%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%
Increased awareness and more engagement of local actors	75%	100%	0%	100%	50%	100%
Better governance	25%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Increased attractiveness of the cooperation area	38%	0%	100%	100%	0%	100%
More efficient/effective delivery of public services	63%	33%	100%	100%	50%	100%

Source: web survey

All SOs, with the exception of SO 4.1, shall contribute to **increase the skills and the competences of the key actors**. For example:

- Under SO 1.1, **PHASE** should increase capacity and extend experiences and skills on eHealth of involved operators (healthcare professionals, physicians, nurses). In particular, the project aims at increasing the skills of traditional MSMEs in entering and exploiting the new opportunities of the eHealth market, especially for Albanian and Montenegrin SMEs. **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth** should empower national and regional stakeholders, economic actors and research institutions' knowledges on Blue Growth and Smart Specialisation Strategy. **FOOD4HEALTH** paves the way to apply innovative production techniques and transfer EU quality standards for the processing and enhancement of typical and traditional products of the agri-food sector and fisheries.

- Under SO 2.1, **DUE MARI** aims at raising key actors' competencies and skills to support cultural heritage preservation, as it will give support to Regional Network of Cultural Tourism, investment in Virtual Platform and small-scale investment in cultural routes signalization.
- Under SO 2.2, **3C** should enhance synergies among culture and creative industry enterprises and related institutions, with the aim of sharing the creative potential of the Programme area.
- Under SO 3.1, **TO BE READY** should promote the coordination and improves the level of preparation of strategic key actors involved in the phase of prevention and management of the emergency in case of fires and floods hazards. **CrossWater** should implement workshops for staff and technicians from each partner country to improve upgrade their skills and competences through capacity building actions.

**The increase in the awareness and in the engagement of local actors** is another expected impact, in particular, for projects financed under all PAs, except PA 2. For instance:

- Under SO 1.1, **PHASE** should increase stakeholders attitude knowledge and awareness, but also empowers citizens about eHealth. **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth**, thanks to the elaboration of maps and case studies, should provide local actors with updated and detailed information on the state of art of the Blue Growth strategy in the area. Thanks to the implementation of the Food4Health Community Labs, **FOOD4HEALTH** transfers knowledges and favours a change in the entrepreneurial mind sets of the micro and SMEs agro-food and fisheries enterprises of the area.
- Under SO 3.1, **CrossWater** aims at improving stakeholders' awareness of water leakage, waste and high consumption levels. The project should also enhance citizens, families and students' awareness on water use and re-use.
- Under SO 4.1, with **ALMONIT - MTC** both local communities and local public authorities will benefit from increased skills and managerial expertise.

Both projects under SO 3.1 should contribute to the **improvement of the governance of the area**. **TO BE READY** should promote a shared model of flood prevention and intervention to be activated in the partner countries, while **CrossWater** aims at developing a cross-border integrated plan on Water Management System and a Common Policy paper, both contributing to a more coordinated and shared governance in the field of water supplies and regulations.

For what concerns other types of impacts, data collected show the contribution of **DUE MARI**, under SO 2.1, to **increase the attractiveness of the cooperation area**. Indeed, the project should increase the attractiveness and promote the beauty of landscapes and cultural assets in Montenegro, Albania, Molise and Puglia that are less or are not at all known to the tourists. Under O.S. 2.2, **3C** aims at enhancing the attractiveness of the project area by preserving and promoting its cultural and natural heritage and by increasing the range of cultural events. From a touristic point of view, the area will also benefit from a better connection, including MetroMare, established through **ALMONIT - MTC** project.

Lastly, as regards the capacity of the analysed projects to deliver **more efficient and effective public services**, all SO seems to directly contribute to this impact. Indeed:

- Under SO 1.1, **PHASE** will improve both the quality and efficiency of the healthcare services provided, thanks to eHealth and telemedicine, through better and quicker diagnostics tools, real-time systematic patients monitoring.
- Under SO 2.1, **DUE MARI** will improve the quality of touristic products and services by providing innovative IT solutions for cultural assets marketing, management and valorisation.
- Under SO 2.2, **3C** should enhance the quality and quantity of cultural products and services in priority cultural sectors.

- Under SO 3.1, **CrossWater** should enhance the provision of adequate responses and ensures the protection of water resource, its uses, and the balance of ecosystems.
- Under SO 4.1, **ALMONIT – MTC** should improve cross border transport connections by optimizing the existing ones and developing multimodal inland water and maritime transport connections in the Programme area, both for the transport of passengers and freight.

From the analysis emerges that thematic projects should contribute to increasing and enhancing the exchange of knowledge and skills among project partners but, despite what was expected, they seem to contribute only to a limited extent to improving the governance of the territories. And this is particularly challenging if we consider that these projects have been selected ad hoc to generate a change in the cooperation area, also in light of the strong political commitment behind them (indeed, these projects have been selected by the JMC with an explicit political will). This is a crucial aspect if compared to the capacity of standard projects to affect and impact on the governance.

Indeed, some projects of the 1<sup>st</sup> call for proposal have been able to impact on the governance of the territories on specific topics, such as transports, marine litter etc., although not initially foreseen by the projects. This capacity to generate results beyond those included in the application forms is particularly interesting: standard projects with limited budget seem to be more able to generate benefits for the territories if compared to thematic projects. Clearly, this assumption will be verified (and eventually, denied) once thematic projects will be completed.

However, what is worth noting is that even if still ongoing, thematic projects have seem not to be able to capitalise the results of the standard projects. If we consider the financial resources available for these projects and the strong political commitment they should have, one expects a greater ability to capitalise on the results that standard projects were achieving, especially on highly cross-border issues, such as transport, pollution, etc. in which the cross-border dimension is fundamental in order to generate a change in the cooperation area.

## 6.3 CROSS-BORDER ADDED VALUE

 Most of the project partners consider that cross border cooperation contributes to achieving common European objectives (88% of respondents) and the setting up of transnational networks (63%). Approximately half of the respondents consider that the added value relies on the promotion and transfer of good practices, and the promotion of a better governance. Around one-third of LP taking part to the survey perceive the cooperation as an opportunity to achieve economies of scale and to facilitate the movement of people and goods. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who perceive cross border cooperation as a mean to overcome common threats and obstacles is more limited.

Table 15 What is the added value of your project?

	TOT	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1
It contributes to achieve common European objectives	88%	100%	0%	100%	100%	100%
It allows to achieve economies of scale	38%	33%	0%	100%	0%	100%
It promotes and transfers good practices	50%	67%	100%	0%	50%	0%
It promotes a better governance	50%	33%	100%	0%	100%	0%
It allows to face common threats and obstacles	25%	33%	0%	0%	0%	100%

	<i>TOT</i>	<b>SO 1.1</b>	<b>SO 2.1</b>	<b>SO 2.2</b>	<b>SO 3.1</b>	<b>SO 4.1</b>
It facilitates the movement of people and goods	38%	33%	0%	100%	0%	100%
It promotes international networks	63%	67%	100%	100%	50%	0%

Source: web-survey

The comparison of the lead partners' perception of the cross-border cooperation added value among 1<sup>st</sup> call projects and thematic projects provides useful insights.

Indeed, while thematic projects lead partners perceived the strong contribution of cross-border cooperation to the achievement of common EU objectives, for 1<sup>st</sup> call standard projects interviewed LPs, the project contribution is very limited. Thematic and first call lead partners have similar perception as regards the contribution of cross-border cooperation to promote the transfer of good practices and improve transnational networks.

If we look at the governance dimension, that is supposed to be particularly tackled by thematic projects (see previous sub-chapter), only half of the thematic projects seems to address this aspect and contribute to better governance (41% of the respondents in case of 1<sup>st</sup> call projects).

## 7 Annexes – Case study reports

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This section contains the case study reports of the 8 thematic projects.

Detailed information per each project is reported below.



# Interreg - IPA CBC

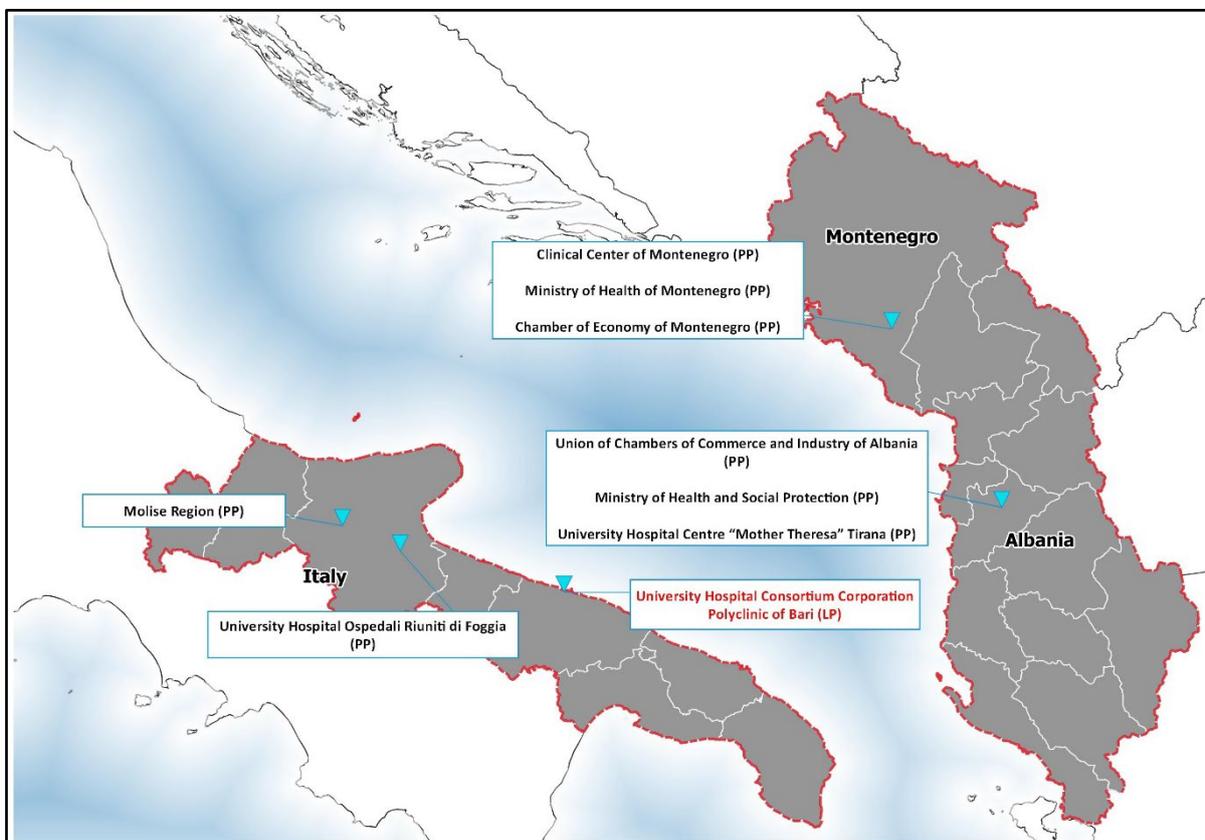
## Italy - Albania - Montenegro



## PHASE

Promoting eHealth  
in CB Area by Stimulating  
local Economies

## Case study report



## Executive Summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner University Hospital Consortium Corporation Polyclinic of Bari and project partner Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 01.06.2019

**Ending date:** 30.06.2022

**Duration:** 37 months

**Overall budget:** 4 254 312.52 Euro (AF)

**Expenditures approved by CA by September 2021:** 324 480.58 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021)
LP	University Hospital Consortium Corporation Polyclinic of Bari	ITALY	Bari	1 273 763.00	92 566.74
PP	University Hospital Ospedali Riuniti di Foggia	ITALY	Foggia	360 611.00	43 309.47
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	435 120.00	23 538,61
PP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection	ALBANIA	Tirana	460 883.00	0
PP	University Hospital Centre "Mother Theresa" Tirana	ALBANIA	Tirana	371 156.00	0
PP	Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania	ALBANIA	Tirana	357 277.52	0
PP	Clinical Center of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	413 126.00	37 721.40
PP	Ministry of Health of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	322 800.00	55 600.69
PP	Chamber of Economy of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	259 576.00	71 743.67

# Project preparation

## The project overall objective

PHASE is addressing the development of the eHealth sector in the cross-border area which lags behind the rest of EU countries in terms of innovative service organization, use of digital platforms and sharing services among citizens.

As regards eHealth, Puglia and Molise Regions are among the least developed regions in Italy, while IPA countries are making very limited efforts to align with EU standards. In this perspective, the project aims at establishing a set of common policies, practices, and tools to efficiently address three main illnesses: heart-attacks, neurodegenerative and chronic illnesses.

In addition, the project aims at boosting the creation and the development of eHealth digital MSMEs by providing non-financial services and increasing their competences and competitiveness. At the same time, the project works towards raising citizens' and public authorities' awareness about eHealth, in general.

As per Application Form, project specific objectives are to:

- *Increase experience, competencies, and skills among public and private stakeholders of eHealth sector, as essential condition to establish efficient coordination among players of the eHealth services.*
- *Create tools and services for the development of SMEs in eHealth sector.* In this regards, Phase provides tools and services useful to MSMEs aiming at creating and delivering new eHealth services and enter in the eHealth market at cross-border level. The aim is to identify, create and develop a community of MSMEs (technological and social services companies) operating or willing to operate in the market of eHealth. To this aim, business partners (Chamber of Commerce), implement specific actions also to create interests among their associates and promote partnership both at local and CB level.
- *Support traditional SMEs in the transition towards the digital market of eHealth.* eHealth business sector involves not only technological companies. Indeed, technological MSMEs are useful only in the design and implementation of the platforms and in its maintenance, while the effective eHealth service is offered and provided by traditional social and personal assistive services companies (cooperatives of nurses and doctors). These latter often lack of internal digital competencies and the project tries to support such traditional MSMEs in entering and exploiting the new opportunities of eHealth market.

## The project partnership

The project partnership is composed of nine partners.

Four partners are hospitals or clinical centers. Among these, two are from Italy (the University Hospital Consortium Corporation Polyclinic of Bari – the lead partner – and the University Hospital Ospedali Riuniti

di Foggia). One clinical center is from Montenegro (the Clinical Center of Montenegro) and one from Albania (the University Hospital Center “Mother Theresa” of Tirana).

Three are the political public administrations involved, the Molise Region, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Albania and the Ministry of Health of Montenegro.

According to the project objectives, SMSEs are one of the main targets of the project. That’s the reason why the partnership also includes the Chambers of Commerce and Economy of Albania and Montenegro.

As evidenced above, almost the half of the project partners are hospitals and this has been a very critical issue for project implementation. Indeed, these organisations have been dramatically hidden by the pandemic.

In addition, the Albanian University Hospital Centre “Mother Theresa” had a change of director during project implementation, and this increased the difficulty of communication and coordination.

Moreover, at the very beginning of the development of the project proposal, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Albania was intended to be an associated project partner, since the Albanian Centre for Emergency was supposed to be a project partner. These initial uncertainties led to delay in the project set up. As also reported during the case study interviews, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection was not able to define its internal project working group before summer 2020 and also the project manager within the Ministry (hired as external consultant) was nominated only in June 2020. These implies that for almost one year, no specific project reference person within the Ministry was established.

## Project implementation

### **What are the main project activities?**

Apart from WP Management and WP Communication, the project displays 6 WPs:

WPT1, *Analysis of healthcare territorial services*. WPT1, under the coordination of the Ministry of health of Montenegro, provides a preliminary analysis of the cross-border territories focused on specific aspects: (i) epidemiology of local population to understand which are the most urgent needs from public healthcare perspective, (ii) map of existing eHealth MSMEs on local territories and (iii) map of the existing healthcare territorial services.

WPT2, *Pilot 1: Infarct.NET in cross-border territories*, regarding the realization of an infarct network in the cross-border territories. The Infarct.net model aims at supervising and optimizing the preliminary emergency process on the territory in order to reduce time of intervention, that is a major factor for reducing complications. Concretely, the network should coordinate the arrival of the closest ambulance or territorial first care unit, allowing the transmission in real-time of ECG signals and other biometric data to control room with cardiologists, remotely supporting the decisions of local nurse or operator.

WPT3, *Pilot 2: Platform for Integrated Care Pathways (ICP) in Neurodegenerative diseases (NDDs)*. Pilot 2 develops and implements a digital model of Integrated Care Pathway (ICP). This represents a map of the process involved in managing a clinical condition which require access to multiple healthcare services with the involvement of many stakeholders (clinical centers, hospital, specialists, nurses, etc.). It provides information on what to do, when to do it, by whom the action should be undertaken and where the task should be performed. The goal of ICP is to simplify access to care for patients, to coordinate the diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitative actions and increase the efficacy and the efficiency of the overall healthcare service.

WPT4, *Pilot 3: Remote monitoring of chronic patients*. Pilot 3 implements and tests a eHealth digital platform for the remote monitoring of chronic patients. Since patients with chronic conditions need frequent reassessments for the prevention of complication or the treatment of exacerbations, the platform aims at improving the patients' empowerment for self-management of care allows a better and more efficient use of healthcare services, reducing the burden on the available resources lowering, for example, the number of visits to primary health centres, emergency units or hospital admissions due to worsening or exacerbation of the disease.

WPT5, *eHealth CBC Network and capacity building*. WPT5 is dedicated to assuring the transferability and sustainability of PHASE project, also after the end of the project. The aim is to make PHASE a best practice, as a recognized healthcare and economic model that can support the creation of innovative business model with the participation of MSMEs and with PHASE cluster itself.

WPT6, *Investments*. The WP is divided into three tasks, one for each pilot. The activities foreseen in the current WP include only the implementation activities which are all externalized, since the partner consortium has no competences in ICT and software development. In T6 all interested clinical partners are involved by issuing appropriate public procurements towards external local MSMEs. Concretely, the three main output under these WP are the Infarct .NET digital platform, the Integrated Care Pathway platform for Neurodegenerative diseases, and the digital platform for management of chronic patient.

### What output indicator does your project contribute to?

By the time data were collected (October 2021), all programme output indicators selected by the project have not reached their target value, as shown in the table below.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support (common indicator – reference to the Annex of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013);	B2B events and startup competitions	15	3
	International conferences	20	

Number of business and research institutions involved/offering nonfinancial support	Validation of the Infarct.NET pilot	5	7
	Validation of pilot 2	2	
	Validation of pilot 3	3	
	CB network	5	
	Infarct .NET digital platform	1	
	ICP platform for NDDs	1	
	Digital platform for management of chronic patient	1	

### Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?

Starting from the elaboration of the project proposal, one of the main issues during project formulation was related to the necessity of addressing the need identified by the programme in Specific Objective I.1 (in particular, the competitiveness of the businesses and the need of innovation) and the sanitary aspects related to the project. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the majority of project partners belongs to the clinical and sanitary areas and this has represented a challenge since for most of them the link of their activities with the MSMEs addressed by the project was not so clear.

In this regard, the SMEs definition provided by the European Commission<sup>1</sup> helps a lot the project formulation. Indeed, the definition includes also pharmacies, health professionals, healthcare assistance residences, etc. which are the main target of the project.

Despite these initial difficulties, project formulation was straightforward and the coordination and collaboration among project partners was good. Nonetheless, according to the information gathered with the case study interview, the project partnership probably lacks a commercial partner from the Italian side (while, for what concerns Albania and Montenegro, the two Chamber of Commerce and Economy are included). Indeed, Unioncamere Puglia was initially involved in project formulation, and it also provided very useful insights into the project proposal. However, they were not included in the partnership and did not participate to project implementation.

As already anticipated in the previous section, the project set up phase for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Albania was long and complicated. The dedicated bank account was opened only in 2020 (one year after project start) and the project working group (composed of 5 different experts, with different competences – doctors, researchers, expert in public procurement rules, expert in project monitoring, etc...)

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/conferences/state-aid/sme/smedefinitionguide\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/state-aid/sme/smedefinitionguide_en.pdf)

was established in the first half of 2020. Additionally, the internal administrative procedures of the Ministry are too long and composed of several steps (request, validation, signature, etc.). This implies that to request a signature, several time-consuming steps are required. In the last few months, these procedures have been partially speeded up thanks to the Ministry staff who are gradually getting used to Interreg procedures.

Greater difficulties have been faced by the other non-commercial Albanian partner, the University Hospital Centre “Mother Theresa” of Tirana. Indeed, the Hospital opened the dedicated bank account only in 2021 (two years after project start). The Ministry of Health supported the Hospital and provided staff trainings on the use of the eMS, the project implementation procedures, etc.

As regards project implementation, apart from the external factors that deeply affected the development of the project activities – e.g. Covid-19 - other difficulties have hindered project implementation.

First of all, while performing the preliminary mapping of existing eHealth MSMEs on the three cross-border territories (WPTI), it emerged that no e-Health business is established in Montenegro. Indeed, in the country, there were not businesses belonging to the biomedical sector, nor telemedicine, nor digital health. This has represented a critical point since one of the main goals of the project is to facilitate the competitiveness of MSMEs in healthcare sector and e-health. The challenge was to define strategies to develop local business activities in eHealth.

Additionally, while implementing the preliminary analysis of the cross-border territories focused on the (i) epidemiology of local population, (ii) the map of existing eHealth MSMEs on local territories and (iii) the map of the existing healthcare territorial services, preparatory to the development of the eHealth digital platform, it emerged a problem related to GDPR Regulation<sup>2</sup>. No GDPR Regulation is foreseen in Albania and Montenegro, and this represented a crucial aspect when dealing with patients' data and personal information. For this reason, project partner finally agreed to establish the servers containing these data in Italy.

All of the above has certainly represented a difficulty and a challenge for the formulation of the project proposal and the implementation of the project activities. But the aspect that really affected project development was the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid has of course deeply affected the implementation of all Programme approved projects, especially for thematic projects that, at the time the pandemic broke out, were in the early stages of developing project activities. But, especially for the PHASE project, the pandemic represented a tsunami that completely and irreversibly changed the development of the project.

Having four clinicals/hospitals and two Ministry of Health involved in the project has represented a very critical aspect. These organisations have been fully involved at the forefront of fighting the spread of the pandemic. Project activities in which these organisations were involved have been stopped (and consequently all project activities, also referred to the other organisations in the partnership, have interrupted). Furthermore, the

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<sup>2</sup> European Regulation 679/2016 (GDPR)

times and ways in which the pandemic spread in the territories of the Programme area were different and often not entirely coincident. Indeed, in Italy, the pandemic has already spread since the beginning of March with the peak of the emergency during Spring 2020. In Albania and Montenegro, the pandemic came later and lasted longer, even in those periods in which the situation in Italy was starting to improve (Summer 2020).

All of this has further exacerbated a very critical situation. Furthermore, the pandemic has had a fluctuating development, with periods of relative "calm" alternating with periods of emergency. This situation, which has been going on for about 2 years, has certainly prevented doctors, researchers and all the health and administrative staff working in these organisations from devoting themselves to the activities of the project.

Apart from Covid, the project is still facing many difficulties and even if project partners are strongly committing themselves to project activities, project implementation is progressing slowly and the expenditures reported and approved by CA by September 2021 are about the 7% of the total budget. The risk of decommitment for this project is very high.

Main difficulties that still affect project implementation rely on bureaucratic delays. Clinicals and hospitals are not used to Interreg procedures (especially when the reference person of the project within these organisations are doctors and clinical professionals), and their administrative structure is composed of several departments and offices which exchanged information and documents (in many cases, it requires too much time also to have document signed by the person in charge). Furthermore, the administrative staff of these clinicals and hospitals is not familiar with the reporting procedures and the general regulations, related, for instance, to public procurement.

Moreover, when dealing with the public regional and national authorities, main critical elements are: staff turnover and unclear divisions of competences among people involved in the project.

## Project results

### What are the results achieved by the project?

PHASE selected one Programme output indicator "Common interventions aimed to improve the cross-border framework conditions in which the facilitators of competitiveness operate". The project has not yet reached the proposed target.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common interventions aimed to improve the cross-border framework conditions in which the facilitators of competitiveness operate	The three Pilot Platform (WPT6)	3	0

**What is the added value of your project?**

Main project added value rely on the design and the implementation of the three pilots that will contribute to define a transferability model towards other experiences in different geographic contexts. Additionally, the exchange of competences and experiences with the IPA countries is reported as a main added value (the project intends to implement training courses for cardiologist in Albania).

## Durability and capitalisation potential

**How do they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

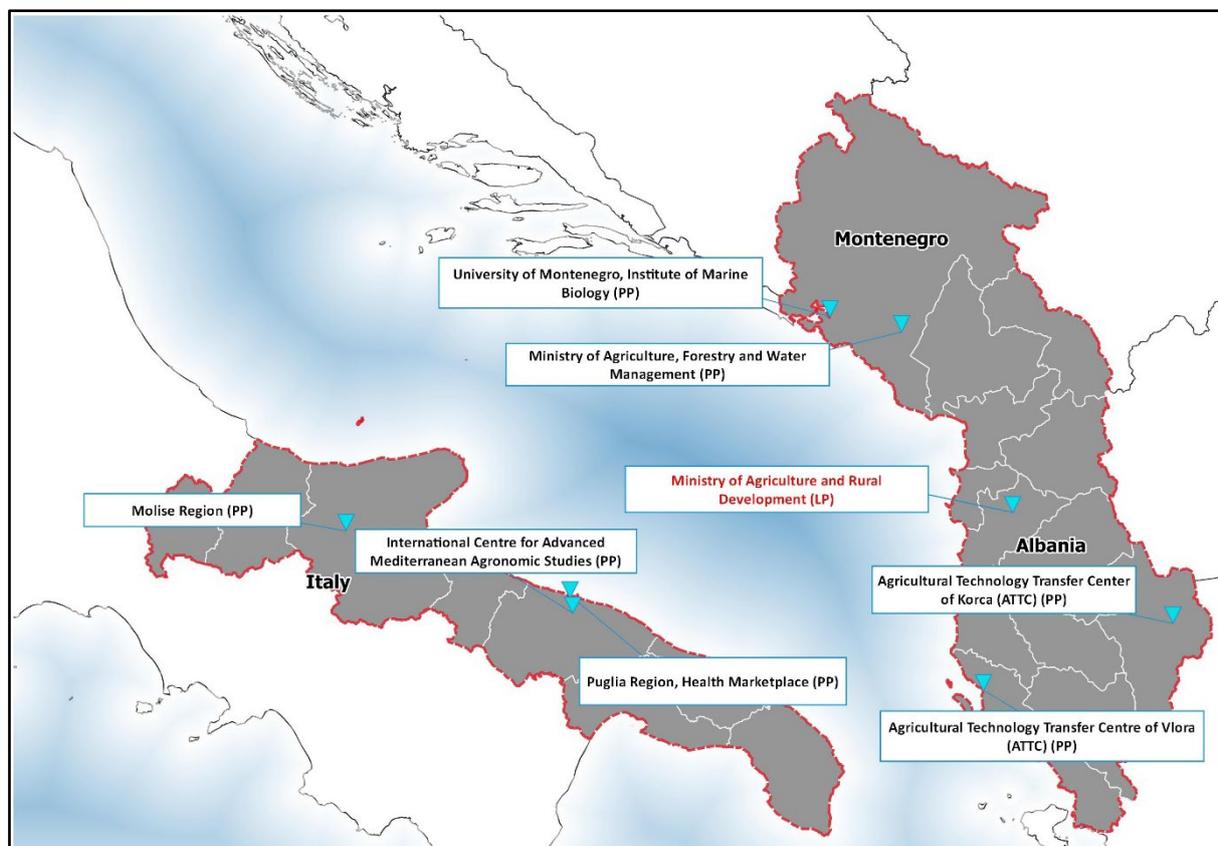
As reported in the Application Form, project partners will guarantee the durability of results of the project after the EU funding. Furthermore, some of the project main outputs will also contribute to the durability of PHASE such as the eHealth web platform (WPT5.1), workshops and webinars (WPT2-4 and WPT5) and the CB network of stakeholders (WPT5), which will remain after the project. Institutional partners should ensure the political and institutional durability of PHASE results also through capacity building activities with a medium-long term impact, contributing also to the increase of stakeholder attitude, knowledge and awareness on eHealth.



## FOOD4HEALTH

Sustainable and innovative  
Agro food and fisheries  
value chain for MSME's cross  
border market

### Case study report



## Executive Summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Project Partner International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 01.06.2019

**Ending date:** 30.06.2022

**Duration:** 37 months

**Overall budget:** 4 964 651.20 Euro (AF)

**Expenditures approved by CA by September 2021:** 939 710.86 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated (Euro)	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021) (Euro)
LP	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	ALBANIA	Tirana	362 445.13	22 061.19
PP	Agricultural Technology Transfer Center of Korca (ATTC)	ALBANIA	Korça	600 747.91	51 854.60
PP	Agricultural Technology Transfer Centre of Vlora	ALBANIA	Vlora	595 397.98	18 746.33
PP	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari	ITALY	Bari	1 429 239.00	328 947.24
PP	Puglia Region, Presidency - Administrative Direction of the Cabinet	ITALY	Bari	395 394.84	97 306.29
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	752 764.79	73 771.68

<b>PP</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	252 288.83	13 425.55
<b>pp</b>	University of Montenegro, Institute of marine biology	MONTENEGRO	Kotor	576 372.72	333 597.98

## Project preparation

### The project overall objective

The geographical areas of Tricase (in Puglia region), Campobasso (Molise Region), Vlora and Korca (Albania) and Kotor (Montenegro) present common problems and challenges in the field of agri-food and fishery.

Indeed, these areas are characterized by a low level of development (e.g. the area of Tricase and Campobasso are considered “internal areas” while the areas of Vlora, Korca and Kotor are often referred as “economies in transition” aimed mainly at aligning with the EU acquis) and are affected by common problems, namely, the high number of micro and MSMEs, the weakness of the value chain, the low level of innovation and the lack of connection between production and research. The productive system is heavily fragmented and consists of small family-based businesses that often carry out activities at home which are not in line with food safety standards and product quality. At the same time, these areas are faced with a high level of youth unemployment; a high number of young people with a very good background emigrate towards areas offering more job opportunities, despite the available rich local products with high potentials for marketing.

The FOOD4HEALTH (F4H) project aims at fostering growth, competitiveness, and innovation of MSMEs operating in less developed and internal areas of the three countries. To do so, it promotes the improvement of production techniques, transfer, sharing and adoption of EU quality standards for the processing and enhancement of typical and traditional products of the agri-food and fisheries sectors.

As per Application Form, project specific objectives are to:

- *Establish common procedures, guidelines and instruments for the valorisation of the agri-food and fishery value-chain.* In order to reach this objective, the project will collect and share best practices, analyses, studies and technical insights. It will also improve the consistency and the coordination of policies and tools on quality standards, safety and health issues in the cross-border area, thus facilitating the access to the market of the MSMEs and improving their skills and attitudes in innovation, food processing and enhancement of the agri-food and fishery value-chain
- *Ensure knowledge transfer, pilot demonstration projects and innovative solutions for the strengthening of the local production system.* As said, F4H aims at establishing the Food 4 Health Community Labs, which will be aimed at:
  - accompanying the creation and change of business to improve the quality of typical and traditional products;
  - strengthening competitiveness in the cross-border market through the

transfer of process and product innovation; • retraining the productive chains not valued in depressed areas and marginal cross-border area.

### **The project partnership**

The project partnership is composed of eight partners.

The lead partner is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania. Two are the other independent Albanian institutions: the Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers (ATTC) of Korca and Vlora. The ATTCs deliver and transfer innovations and new techniques to farmers, universities etc. Each one has its own field of expertise: the one in Korca deals with production lines, while the one in Vlora deals with fisheries.

The partnership is also composed by three Italian Institutions. Two are regional administrations (Puglia and Molise regions) and one is the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari.

Montenegro is represented by two organizations: the counterpart Ministry of Agriculture of Montenegro and the University of Montenegro, Institute of marine biology.

Food 4 Health is the first trilateral project that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania is leading. According to the information gathered with the case study interview, project management has been particularly challenging especially due to the high number of project partners. The project management is still particularly demanding in terms of day-to-day communication with Joint Technical Secretariat, partners, process for request of payments, reimbursements, reports to PPs, sharing of best practices, etc. Moreover, especially in the very first steps of the project implementation, these difficulties were somehow exacerbated by the differences in administrative practices and mechanisms among the different institutions involved in the project.

Indeed, as reported by project partners, the presence of four national and local administrations in the partnership (two Ministries and two regional administrations) sometimes represented a bottleneck, since these administrations are characterized by long bureaucratic managerial and decisional processes. As consequences, project formulation has been long and the discussions on the division of tasks, activities and budget has been particularly challenging.

Right after the project start, Montenegro faced some political changes and for more than 6 months the Ministry faced difficulties in the establishment of the internal team to be dedicated to the project. The Ministry experienced a staff turnover that slowed and hampered the activities they had to carry out. This situation resolved once the new team was finally established.

# Project implementation

## What are the main project activities?

Apart from WP Management and WP Communication, the project displays 3 WPs:

WPT1, *Improving the cross-border framework conditions for the valorisation of the agri-food and fisheries value-chain.*

The activities under this first work package ensures common protocols addressed to MSMEs for strengthening the framework conditions and EU standards in the cooperation area. To reach this, the project foresees the activities of exchange of best practices through a report and a cross-border meeting in Bari. Additionally, the work package foresees the implementation of institutional negotiating tables (online) aimed at sharing and drafting the policy papers. Finally, the WP foresees the definition of the “F4H Guidelines and procedures” for agri-food and fisheries value chain and SMEs.

By the time data were collected, almost all project partners prepared the best practices reports that should have been finalized within the month of October 2021. Additionally, the joint report on legal gaps has been finalized.

WPT2, *Pilot projects: Food4Health Community Labs.* This WP, led by the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari, focuses on the eco-efficient structural and functional recovery of five buildings, currently disused and abandoned, located in the municipalities of Tricase and Campobasso (IT), Valona and Korcia (AL), Boka Kotorska Bay (MN). Each pilot project, named “Food4Health Community Labs”, will be appropriately equipped for providing integrated and assistance services to the Agri-food and fishery SMEs.

For ensuring a high impact level of the Labs on the competitiveness of SMEs, the project also promotes the establishment of clusters among enterprises/universities/research centres of the related value chains. For each of them, the innovation needs are identified and the established clusters provides effective solutions and collaboration schemes for their satisfaction. In addition, the design of each Lab has been done by involving stakeholders and potential users in the drawing of an executive project (Living Labs) in order to collect preferences, suggestions and recommendations based on local main products and technical specifications of the pilot plant to satisfy their operational and organizational needs.

According to the information collected through the case study interviews, the implementation of this WP is progressing. The Food4Health Community Labs of Kotor and Tricase have been finalized and the 100% of infrastructure works have been completed.



The Tricase F4H Community Lab has been opened and presented to stakeholders on the 28 of July 2021, in a ceremony at the presence of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania. The Lab allows local stakeholders to use its spaces for the agri-food processing of their products.

Three sectors have been equipped with suitable spaces in line with all the health and food safety provisions of the European Union: a Honey Lab, an Agri Lab for processing fruit and vegetables, a Fish Lab. In addition, the structure equipped a Cook Lab where also a show cooking space is available. To complete the structure, a market area is at disposal of the stakeholders to present and promote their elaborated products.

In Kotor, the F4H Community Lab has been implemented in the building of the Institute of Marine Biology. Part of the Institute building was upgraded in a total area of about 260m<sup>2</sup>, which includes the formation of a modern, fully equipped "Food4Health" laboratory for innovative research in mariculture, training and transfer of knowledge and technology, food production, with all scientific, technical and technological capacity, like regional centers of similar activities.



As regards the Food4Health Community Labs of Korca and Vlora, the two Business Plans have been finalized. In Korca, the Lab will be built in an unused market area. Due to Covid-19 and budget restriction, construction works have not started yet but the call for tenders will be published soon, and the construction works will be



probably finalized by the end of the project implementation period.

Similar situation apply for the Lab of Vlora, that will be built by recovering an old building in the fishing port. In October 2021 the Qendra e Transferimit të Teknologjisë Bujqësore në Vlorë, responsible for the implementation of the Vlora

F4H Community Lab, organized a local participatory meeting to present the project and identify the needs of the territories and establish a cluster among MSMEs in the fishery sector.

As regards the Lab that should be implemented in Molise, as per application form, the latter should have been built in the centre “La Cittadella dell’Economia”, near Campobasso. However, the building is now used as vaccination center and the localization of the Lab is going to be modified.

WPT3, *Supporting SMEs and start ups innovation in the international market*. This WP aims at supporting MSMEs and start-ups in improving the agri-food quality and safety in compliance with the EU standards in order to increase competitiveness and access to the market. Through the pilot plants implemented in WPT2 the project will organize and practically apply technological transfer activities based on the use of innovative processing technology and processes. Through a cross-border food4health technological platform (Output: F4H platform), information and services about how to improve food products quality and safety as well as about the importance of food for nutrition and quality of life - including the possible role of public and private institutions involved in health management - will be implemented.

The technological platform, coordinated by Puglia region, is finalized. Project documents, best practices concerning health standards and other good practices are uploaded regularly. Furthermore, efforts are being made to better disseminate the objectives of the Food4Health Project and to involve all stakeholders in the exchange of information and best practices within the ICT platform.

As regards the WPC, related to Communication, this is led by Molise Region. According to data provided by the LP in October 2021, the website <https://food4health.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/> has reached over 2,000 contacts and more than 3,750 page views.

### What output indicator does your project contribute to?

By the time data were collected (October 2021), all programme output indicators selected by the project have not reached their target value, as shown in the table below.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial (common indicator – reference to the Annex of Regulation support (EU) No 1299/2013)	Common protocols addressed to MSMEs for strengthening the framework conditions and EU standards in the cooperation area	5	2
	Local "Food4Health Community Labs" created	15 (as per AF)	2
	Food4health platform created	107	1

Number of business and research institutions involved/offering non-financial support	Clusters established among research and business actors	10	5
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By the time data were collected, the two “Best practices reports” on quality schemes and consumer health of Puglia and Molise regions have been approved and uploaded in the platform.

Two are the Food4Health Community Lab already finalized, in Tricase and Kotor.

As regards the platform, the project has already launched its platform and documents are regularly uploaded and available for the stakeholders. Five are the clusters already implemented between research and business actors.

### **Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?**

According to the information collected with the web survey and the case study interviews, the most challenging aspect related to project implementation relies on the partnership itself. Indeed, the presence of two Ministries and two regional administrations has slowed the implementation process for two main reasons: firstly, public national and regional administrations, because of their status, have different and long bureaucratic procedures and the time needed to take decisions changes from an institution to another. Additionally, these administrations often do not dispose of specific resources (staff) responsible for the implementation of the project activities. In many cases staff turnover and the limited number of resources dedicated to the project strongly affected the implementation of project activities.

Main external factors that hindered project implementation are related to the earthquake that hit Albania in November 2019 and the spread of the pandemic of Covid-19. As reported in the first project report, in the months subsequent to the earthquake, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has been obliged to transfer funds which had been previously allocated to the project toward emergency.

The spread of Covid-19 pandemic also has impacted project implementation. Project activities in all the programme area were conducted under the national and international restricted rules. In some case, the deadlines have been extended and rescheduled. Indeed, the project converted almost all the in-presence meetings to online meetings. In this regard, since face to face meetings were not possible, thanks to the activities performed by Puglia region as responsible for the provision and implementation of the F4H platform, they were able to exchange information.

Moreover, due to the problems caused by Covid-19 pandemic, infrastructure works have been delayed in all the Programme area. However, as regards Italy and Montenegro, this has not substantially affected the realization of the remaining activities on Food4health community Labs.

It is worth noting that the project demonstrated a proactive behavior despite the difficulties imposed by the pandemic: thanks to the use of the platform, project partners acted in strong cooperation with the others and the platform become essential for sharing documents, good practices and analysis.

## Project results

### What are the results achieved by the project?

The main results expected from the project as per application form are:

- a) Enhanced MSME's cooperation and competitiveness through better interaction among the business and research actors;
- b) Strengthened entrepreneurial mind sets, skills and attitudes (mainly in the field of food processing, quality and consumer health).

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common interventions aimed to improve the cross-border framework	a) Enhanced MSME's cooperation and competitiveness through better interaction among the business and research actors	5	2
	b) Entrepreneurial mind sets, skills and attitudes strengthened		

### What is the added value of your project?

This project is intended to improve the cross-border framework conditions for the agri-food and fishery innovation and competitiveness of MSMEs. This approach will be developed by streamlining the partnership specific skills, in particular by capitalising on the results achieved in the projects funded under previous programs (Apulian Life style, Agricoltura e Qualità) and targeting the Albania Country Strategy Paper as well as the Strategy Paper for Montenegro. Therefore, the value added of cross-border cooperation activities will be mainly linked to the teamwork and the contribution of each partner to the shared definition of models and approaches. Cross-border cooperation can produce value added compared to a local/national approach, because it can bring together skills to respond to SMEs innovation and competitiveness needs and to boost opportunities for cross-border cooperation in sustainable agriculture and food processing focusing on agri-food and fishery products of the 5 target areas. The territorial cooperation among the partners can also contribute to increase the innovation community networking (clustering) and finally give more opportunities to SMEs and start-ups to access funds and international markets.

# Durability and capitalisation potential

## **How they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

The durability and sustainability of the project output will be ensured after project completion. Indeed, as regards the F4H Community Labs, their sustainability will be ensured through a public procurement procedure, that will allow the selection of a proper entrusted subject. For awarding purposes, a management plan of the Laboratories (based on the experience gained at the pilot stage) aimed at complying with expressed requirements like technical skills, management and economic requirements, and incubation activities will be requested and assessed. To this end, a Food4Health Management and Sustainability Plan (Business Plan) will be drawn in order to highlight the management and sustainability aspects of the pilot plant (the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari is already preparing their Business plan). All services will be carefully described together with the management procedures related to the usability of services and plants for ensuring the durability of the Labs.



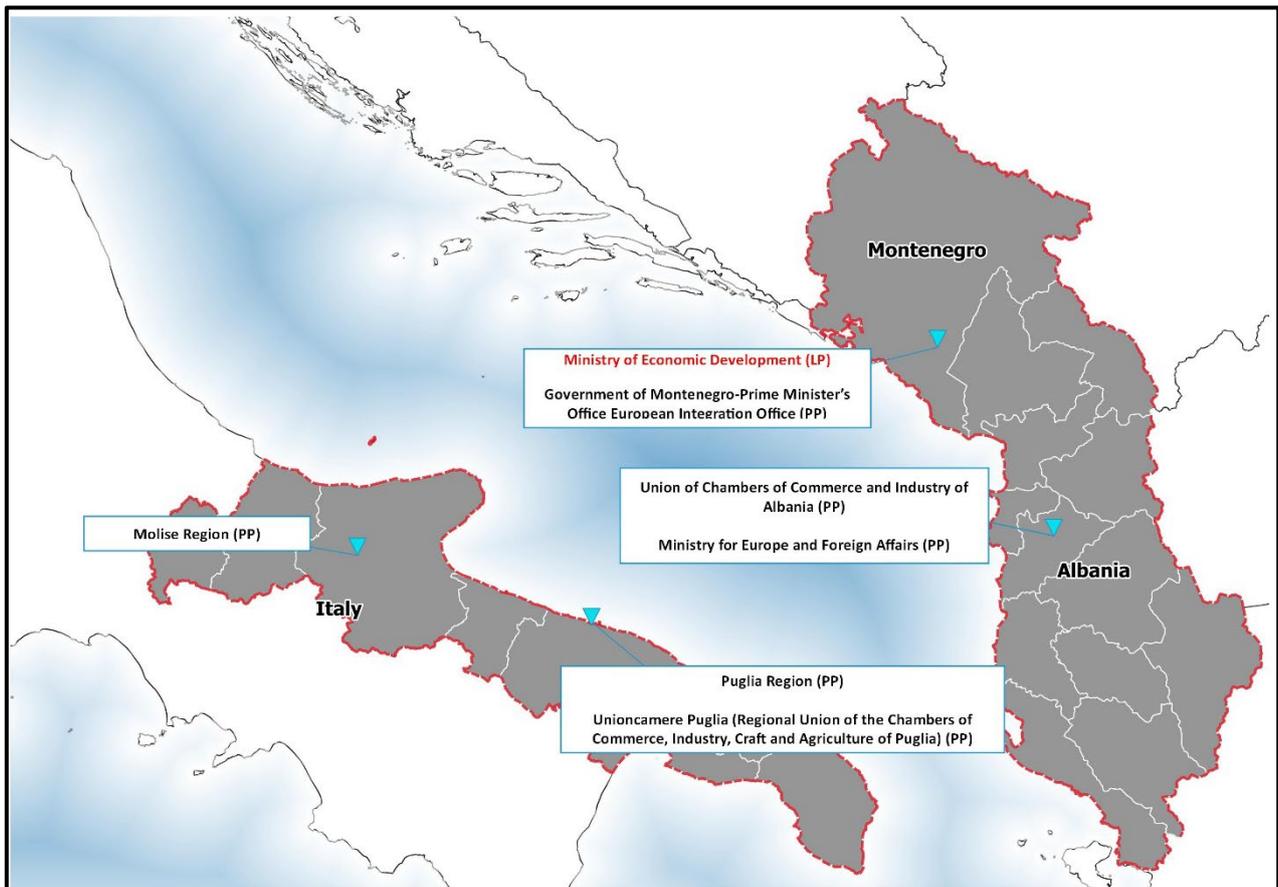
# Interreg - IPA CBC

## Italy - Albania - Montenegro



## SMART ADRIA Blue Growth

### Case study report



## Executive summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro and the Project Partner Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania, UCCIAL.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 15.05.2019

**Ending date:** 30.06.2022

**Duration:** 37 months 16 days

**Overall budget:** 2 154 970.67 Euro

**Expenditures approved by CA by September 2021:** 266 581.45 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated (Euro)	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021) (Euro)
LP	Ministry of Economic Development	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	628 809.58	205 376.14
PP	Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania	ALBANIA	Tirana	526 949.35	0
PP	Puglia Region	ITALY	Bari	194 105.33	27 743.00
PP	Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs	ALBANIA	Tirana	76 539.40	591.80
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	387 179.39	1 040.11
PP	Government of Montenegro Prime Minister's Office European Integration Office	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	99 833.33	8 395.00
PP	Unioncamere Puglia - Regional Union of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Craft and Agriculture of Puglia	ITALY	Bari	241 554.29	23 435.40

# Project preparation

## The project overall objective

The project's overall objective is to promote cross-border cooperation, competitiveness and the development of new market opportunities for SMEs of the Adriatic area which operate in blue economy-related fields.

Specifically, the project wants to create the framework conditions for the Blue Growth of cross-border SMEs, while creating hybrid governance structures supportive of 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution.

The main reason behind the project is that the programme area lags behind the European economy in terms of economic development and innovation, with main needs being the weak competitiveness of SMEs and their insufficient cooperation with clusters and research centres.

Also, Blue Growth is not a widespread topic in part of the programme area, especially in Albania as reported by the Albanian partner. Thus, there was the need to open discussions on this topic especially at the Ministerial level.

The project is funded under the SO I.I “Enhance the framework conditions for the development of SME's cross-border market”, which is coherent with the Pillar I “Blue Growth” of the EUSAIR Action Plan and the Cross Cutting issues “Capacity building” and “Research innovation and SME's development”.

As per Application Form, the project specific objective is:

- Blue Growth Cluster established and strengthened to enhance the framework conditions for the development of sustainable blue SME's cross-border market, by providing a cross-border platform for quadruple helix cooperation. The project will link the systems of University, Industry, Civil Society and Government to accelerate the transfer of Research and innovation results to regional growth.

## The project partnership

The partnership is composed of seven partners. The Lead Partner is the Montenegrin Minister for Economic Development. In the preparation phase, the project underwent several changes: it was in fact initiated by the European Integration Office (EUIO) of Montenegro which drafted the project proposal. Following some internal changes, the partnership changed, and the role of LP was assumed by the Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro, while the European Integration Office of Montenegro remained as project partner.

The partner from Albania are the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The former, during the interview, reported that the drafting of the proposal was a very interesting experience for themselves, as it provided the chance to interface with Ministries, namely the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro. Also, each partner collaborated to the proposal writing also to avoid overlapping with the activities of other ongoing projects.

The Italian partners are Puglia Region, Molise Region and Unioncamere Puglia (Regional Union of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Craft and Agriculture of Puglia).

The partnership set up was not difficult, giving previous well-established cooperation activities and synergies in the area. For instance, there are very good relations between the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania and the Chamber of Commerce of Bari, which are already working together on the project Interact 4.0 (Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro).

## Project implementation

### What are the main project activities?

Apart from WP Preparation, WP Management and WP Communication, the project displays 3 WPs:

WPT1, *Establishing a Blue Growth S3 Platform to create the right framework conditions for business R&I investments along value networks*, focusing on joining forces in the Region among “quadruple helix” for cross-border application of Smart Specialization Strategies, with the potential to connect innovation ecosystems, complementary skills, infrastructure and markets. The challenge is to promote investment synergies between the private and public sectors and to build competitive interregional value networks.

The first step for the development of the SMEs Innovation Platform foresees the definition of the actual framework context of the SMEs’ ecosystem; after the mapping study, there will be a clear picture of the state of art, potentials and needs of the most interesting sectors of the project area. This will allow the development of tools, expertise and recommendations to support the innovation and internationalization of SMEs. A specific CBC network of 3 Blue Labs - set within the project - will feed this process. Furthermore, considering the IPA context, institutional capacity building activities will be provided, too.

Activities to be realized within this WP: Blue Economy mapping study; Blue Growth Cross-border conference; Blue Labs; Blue Growth trend watching events; Smart Adria Blue Growth governments seminar series.

WPT2, *Establishing Blue Cluster covering Adriatic-Ionian region*, set of activities performed with the aim of establishing an influential and long-term network of regional stakeholders that may work together for enhancing SME competitiveness and innovation. The main output of the WP is the creation of cross-border Blue Cluster, in which participants from the public and the private arena collaborate and define common strategies and innovate for blue growth purposes.

WPT3, *Promoting Blue Growth opportunities through SMEs development and Capacity Building*, increasing the profitability of BG activities by building capacity of Public Administrations, SME representatives and/or allowing for diversification of BG competitiveness by adding value to their core businesses.

### What output indicator does your project contribute to?

The project outputs are:

- No. 3 virtual Blue Labs in Italy, Albania and Montenegro, supporting commercial exploitation, testing and piloting of innovative products and services
- No. 1 cross-border Blue Growth Cluster in the Adriatic-Ionian region
- Blue Growth services promoted through SMEs development and capacity building actions

According to the information collected, the implementation of the project activities is progressing. By the end of October 2021, none of the output indicators had achieved their target value, as shown in the table below.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Three (3) virtual Blue Labs established IT, MNE, ALB supporting commercial exploitation, testing and piloting innovative products and services	3	0
	Blue Growth related services (3 SMEs received non-financial support)	3	0
	Capacity building in Blue Growth	1	0
Number of business and research institutions involved/offering nonfinancial support	1 cross-border Blue Growth Cluster registered (60 business and research institutions involved)	1	0
	Online Capacity Building platform in Blue Growth	1	0

Particularly, the output “1 cross-border Blue Growth Cluster registered (60 business and research institutions involved)” was reshaped throughout the project once the activities shown that there were already different clusters covering the Adriatic area. Thus, on the recommendation of the JS, it was decided not to create a new structure with the same objectives, but to establish working groups within the existing organisations.

To date (November 2021), the project prepared the Blue Economy mapping study and innovative case studies and presented it at a conference in January 2021. In this occasion, a Memorandum of Understanding on the development of Blue Labs was also signed.

Also, in October 2021 a webinar was organised to inform the stakeholders of the Blue Economy coming from the quintuple helix (education, economic and political systems, natural environment and civil society) on the financing opportunities in the next programming cycle to support cooperation activities focusing on the Blue Growth and affecting the Adriatic region and the pre-accession countries.

### Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?

According to the information collected via the web survey and the case study interviews, the project implementation faced specific difficulties right from the outset. Following the reassignment of the LP role, the

Ministry of Economic Development found the initial activities challenging as *Blue Growth and fisheries* was a new topic in its political agenda and the personnel had no prior experience in the field. This turned out to be an opportunity for deeper collaboration with other government bodies, particularly in the project formulation phase, when for the first time multiple Ministries developed and wrote the proposal jointly. Nevertheless, these initial difficulties slowed project activities.

The same applies to the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania, which reported fruitful cooperation in the drafting of the project, namely with the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro.

Regarding certification of expenditures, the Albanian partners reported the most considerable delays, because of the organisation of the First Level Control system. This issue was partially solved in the past year and the situation improved.

Until October 2021, the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania certified until the 5<sup>th</sup> progress report, and they are currently waiting for the second tranche of pre-financing. This allows UCCIAL to have cash availability in their budget and to carry out activities in time. Reporting activities have been done according to the guidelines and in line with PRAG, what slowed the approval from FLC was mainly due to the difficult technical component of procurement procedures.

In addition, some changes to the rule of threshold of expenditures would be welcomed. Being so rigid, if one partner is late with the certification of expenditures, the risk is that the whole partnership will not receive reimbursement for the tranche. Therefore, the Lead Partner suggests removing the threshold or decreasing it, for instance from 15% to 10%.

On the other hand, the main external factor which had a considerable impact on project activities is the Covid-19 pandemic. First, many people from the project teams got sick, complicating coordination of activities and the carry out of interviews, more difficult to be conducted by email. Some beneficiaries, such as the fishermen's organisation of Montenegro, were hardly reachable by email (although communication improved in time).

Second, Covid happened when the fundamental activities were expected: while the first phase of the project was mostly dedicated to fact finding, research and data gathering (such as the output "Mapping Study on the Blue Growth"), the activities which followed included meetings in person, but they could not take place. For this reason, the 6 months extension was very important.

Furthermore, the pandemic is still impacting the activities: from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the project was supposed to carry out an on-site visit in Albania and one in Montenegro. Due to the worsening of the situation in Montenegro, the partners decided to carry out the whole study visit in Albania, while on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2021 it was possible to hold a study visit in Puglia and Molise in person, which was the first physical meeting of the project since its beginning.

# Project results

## What are the results achieved by the project?

The Project Progress reports indicate the following results achieved until today:

- R1: Blue Growth Smart Specialization Platform developed to create the right framework conditions for business R&I investments along value networks;
- R2: The formation and promotion of Blue Growth Cluster covering Adriatic-Ionian region (as explained above, this output was adapted to the creation of working groups within existing clusters);
- R3: Blue Growth opportunities promoted through SMEs development and Capacity Building.

The project set the basis for the creation of discussion tables with stakeholders from the Blue Growth sectors in order to jointly identify services and solutions to facilitate Blue Growth and innovation within SMEs in the Programme Area, in response to the programme's SO 1.1 "Enhance the framework conditions for the development of SME's cross-border market".

The partners believe that the skills and competence of the SME's involved had increase as a result of the project activities. However, this will be enhanced by the end of the project thanks to all the capacity building activities that are foreseen for the next phases of the project. Thanks to the development of Blue Growth as new topic in the political agenda of Montenegro, the topic will be connected to the RIS3 policies and with new funding mechanism.

The project also contributed to strengthen the knowledge of PRAG in IPA countries, however UCCIAL believes that their knowledge of PRAG was sufficient for the proper implementation of tendering procedures, also because UCCIAL is an important partner in IPA CBC projects, as they are currently implementing 8 projects, such as Interact 4.0 (Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro) which they are Lead Partner of.

The most remarkable result indicated by the Lead Partner is the contribution to the creation of the Innovation Fund of Montenegro, which will secure and execute the funds to encourage innovation activities and include Blue Growth in the political agenda, under the example of Puglia Region. Thanks to the project, the Director of the Innovation Fund will take part to a study visit to Puglia Region to meet officers in charge of innovation projects in the last 3 years.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common interventions aimed to improve the cross border framework conditions in which the facilitators of competitiveness operate	Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans	5	5
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	5	5
	Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements	300.000,00	0

	Number of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements	60	0
	Number of trained persons	182	72

### What is the added value of your project?

For the interviewed partners, one of the most interesting aspects of the project is the promotion and transfer of competences and good practices from Italian SMEs to Montenegrin and Albanian ones, as well as the promotion of a better governance and international networks.

In addition, the Lead Partner believes that the project was fundamental in creating a different working culture in the Ministry: at the beginning of the project, the Department in charge for project management had 5 staff members, but because of the administrative restructuring of the Ministry, the size of units increased to 15. For the old and new staff, the project was an important chance to learn about project management. SMART ADRIA contributed to giving staff more responsibilities and the possibility of working with people of different languages and cultures. An important result reported by the Lead Partner is an improvement at the level of office culture and mindset: many changes are happening not within the project but because of the project, putting in place a set of competences that will stay beyond the project.

Also, another added value is technical: in general terms, the project gave many insights on how to improve internal operations. The Department for EU integration and EU funds in the area of Economic Development of the Montenegrin Ministry manages IPA funds and SMART ADRIA is their only ETC project. The project gives an insight of the implementation of Structural Funds: this allows to see the actual side of their implementation by learning from the methods of partners which are already EU members.

Another added value is the topic of Blue Growth itself: the involved department of the Montenegrin Ministry has no actual jurisdiction on Blue Growth, however the project created the opportunity for an efficient collaboration with other relevant Ministries. Blue Growth is a very important part of all strategies, including economy, so this creates the opportunity for the Ministry to search more and to try to find synergies with policies that can bring further development in the area.

Last but not least, Blue Growth was a totally absent topic within the government of Montenegro. The project remarkably introduced the discussion and without it would have needed much more time to reach such level. With these regards, the interviewed project partner UCCIAL believes that the project has a strong policy impact, as it contributed to initiate the concept of Blue Growth within the Ministries. This result has impacts in the long term which are not easy to quantify at the moment.

Also, UCCIAL believes that, once the Blue Growth approach is introduced, it would be useful to enhance eco-friendly projects to create awareness on sustainable innovation.

## Durability and capitalisation potential

**How do they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

The project proposal already foresaw follow up activities in shape of 8 seminars for representatives of national and regional governments and public sectors to support Blue Growth and the application of S3 with available funding and future financing options (IPA, Interreg, H2020, COSME, private investment etc). The seminars are foreseen for the first half of 2022.

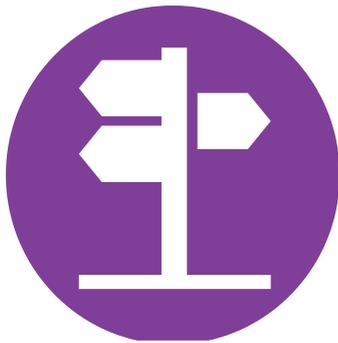
However, the most remarkable achievement on sustainability of the project activities and objectives is the establishment of an Innovation Fund by the Government of Montenegro, regulated by the Law on Innovation Activities published in early November 2021 and created as a new institution (limited liability company) with a view to efficient implementation of innovation policy, and securing and executing the funds to encourage innovation activities, with the final aim to connect Blue Growth and Smart Specialisations, by putting in place and transferring best practices identified and studied within SMART ADRIA, such as the Puglia Region innovation voucher models. Thanks to this fund, the development of voucher schemes can be sustainable even after the project but also with the connection with other projects.

The Lead Partner reports that this is an unexpected and remarkable achievement that was not possible to envisage at the beginning of the project.

The interviewed project partner reports about the intention of creating a hub to capitalise the results of the project Interact 4.0 (Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro) however it will be possible to use it to capitalise SMART ADRIA as well.



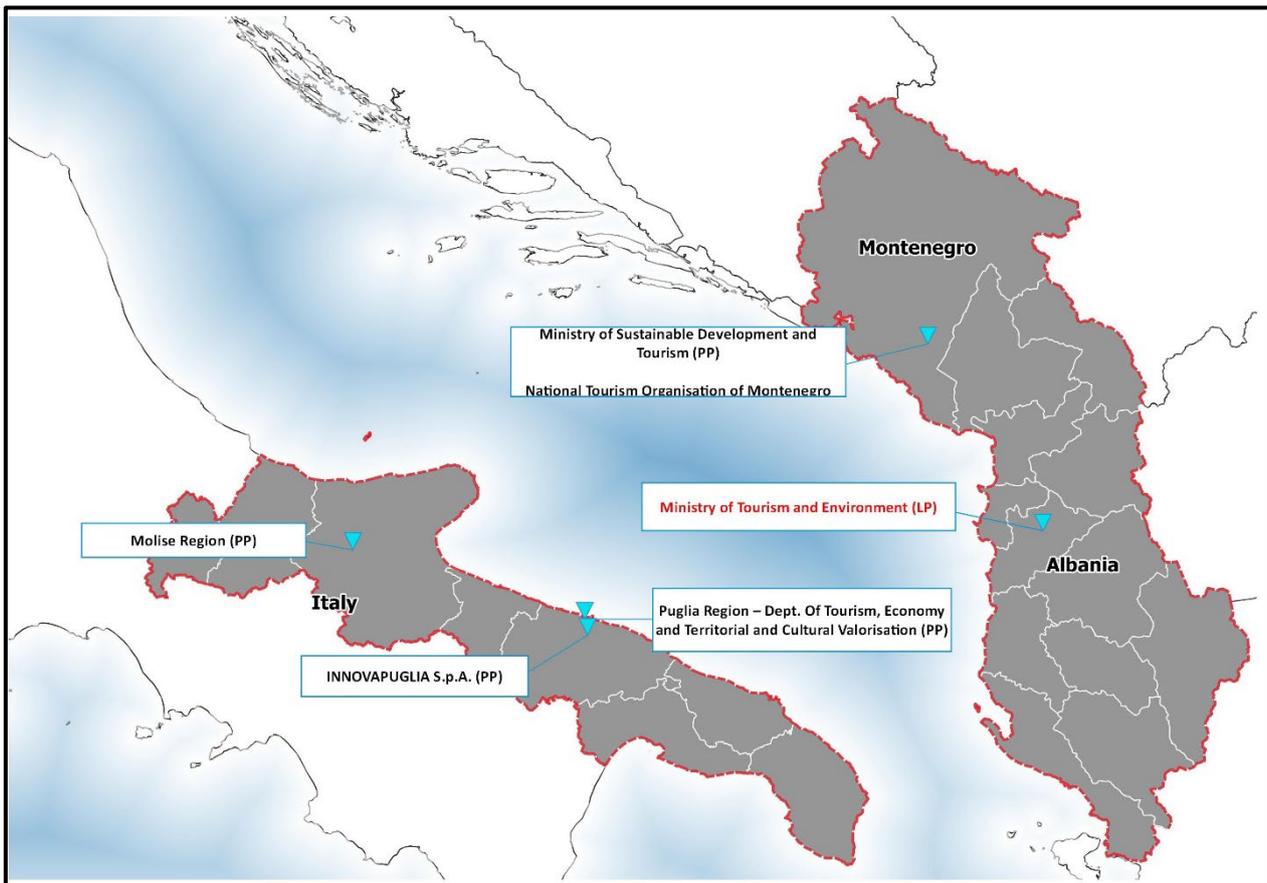
**Interreg - IPA CBC**  
Italy - Albania - Montenegro



## DUE MARI

Next generation tourism  
development

### Case study report



# Executive Summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the Project Partner INNOVAPUGLIA S.p.A.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 15.05.2019

**Ending date:** 14.05.2022

**Duration:** 36 months

**Overall budget:** 5 206 934.15 Euro (AF)

**Expenditures approved by CA by September 2021:** 388 546 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated (Euro)	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021) (Euro)
LP	Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Tirana	ALBANIA	Tirana	1 962 046.80	225 411.90
PP	Puglia Region – Dept. Of Tourism, Economy and Territorial and Cultural valorisation	ITALY	Bari	444 718.80	20 416.43
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	775 761.00	11 990.62
PP	INNOVAPUGLIA S.p.A.	ITALY	Bari	1 003 680.00	2 895.02
PP	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	MONTENEGRO	CRNA GORA	705 958.25	65 935.61
PP	National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	CRNA GORA	314 769.30	61 896.06

# Project preparation

## The project overall objective

Tourism represents one of the most essential pillars in the development of the Programme region's economies, but it also represents a main challenge. Due Mari project has the aim of addressing the main Adriatic – Ionian challenges concerning sustainable tourism development through the use of smart technologies. Indeed, Programme area is characterised by a lack of integrated information and adequate marketing strategies regarding touristic destination, capable of attracting not only seasonal tourism demand but through the whole year. Additionally, the regional technological infrastructures and their low level of diffusion are other constraining factors that hinder the development of an innovative tourist offer. Due Mari focuses on the development of a joint valorisation strategy of the unique cultural and natural assets of all the 3 Programme's regions.

Throughout the use of a new cross border platform centered in 360° virtual reality, the project wants to reinforce the competitiveness of the Programme area by developing new touristic products (new regional cultural heritage routes), boosting the existing ones and developing thematic itineraries.

As per Application Form, project specific objectives are to:

1. Boost attractiveness of natural and cultural assets – The project intends to promote the beauty of landscapes as well as the rich cultural assets in Montenegro, Albania, Molise and Puglia that are less or are not at all known to tourists and valorise at least 150 sites (800 points of interest) in each of partners areas;
2. Increase the cooperation of the relevant key actors for the delivery of innovative tourism products – The project wants to boost the cooperation of relevant key actors (Ministries, regional authorities, tourism agencies, etc), in order to create a common strategy for the Due Mari platform management, common strategy for the management of new tourist route as well as policy paper of common touristic routes management in the Programme area and policy paper on use of innovative digital technologies in promotion of sustainable tourism.
3. Promote innovative practices and tools for sustainable tourism on all levels – The project aims at promoting the best practices, lessons learned and innovative Due Mari tools to the various project stakeholders (national, regional and local public authorities, as well as tourist boards, tourist operators and agencies and tourism service providers).

## The project partnership

Project partnership is composed of six partners, among which the only Albanian partner is the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, that acts as project lead partner. Among the three Italian partners, two are regional

authorities (Puglia and Molise Region) while the third Italian partner is INNOVAPUGLIA, an in-house company of Puglia Region, offering technical support to Puglia Region in strategic planning of the digital innovation.

The two Montenegrin partner are the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism and the National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro.

Four out of six project partners are national and regional authorities, and this is in line with the objective of the project to influence policy orientation towards a more synchronized sustainable tourism development in the area. Indeed, the project bases on the development of a common Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable and Innovative Management of joint assets and development of new touristic routes.

In this regard, INNOVAPUGLIA provides expertise for the technological development of the virtual platform. Indeed, through the use of the Virtual reality platform, smart mobile applications, holographic demos, etc, the project aims at contributing to the promotion of innovative tourist routes, as well reducing seasonality of the regional tourism offer.

According to the information collected through the case study interviews, all partners contributed to project development from the very first stages of project implementation by identifying common territorial challenges and needs.

However, it is worth noting that project formulation takes a lot of time. Project development takes more than 32 weeks, and it required systematic changes and revisions. Most challenging aspects were related to the timing of the activities and the deliverables, but also budget division creates difficulties.

## Project implementation

### What are the main project activities?

Apart from WP Management and WP Communication, the project displays 3 WPs:

WPT I, related to the *Due Mari Virtual Interactive 360 Degree Platform*. This implies the provision of the technical (data centre and servers) and technological part (platform content). The technical part refers to data centre in Albania and the backup servers (based in Puglia Region). The virtual platform will make available a matchmaking system that will be combined the information delivered by the users with the contents already included by the system, in order to provide customized suggestions to the users and allow them to have a preview of the touristic destinations and attractions. This will be possible by using IT innovative technologies such as Geo-



localisation (e.g. how to reach the points of interests); Virtual Reality (e.g. the users can feel the experience of visiting virtual reality 360° tours of the attractions from home by using a VR headset or a Cardboard with a smartphone); Augmented virtual reality via hotspots (e.g. when the users will visit the destinations the project mobile application will give them more information related to the place and the attractions).

WPT2, *Common Strategy and Policies, Capacity Building*. This WP is composed by a set of propaedeutic activities focused on identified touristic offer based on the valorization of endogenous resources and attractions, which are otherwise not adequately exploited by the market. This WP focuses on the establishment of the Due Mari Joint Model on sustainable tourism in Adriatic-Ionian Region.

WPT3, *Pilot projects*. Four pilot projects in different sites aim at valorising a specific itinerary in each region. These will increase the quality, identity or image, of a specific itinerary.

### What output indicator does your project contribute to?

According to the information collected, the implementation of the project activities is progressing slowly.

By the time data were collected (October 2021), all programme output indicators selected by the project haven't reached their target value, as shown in the table below.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of new products, services and pilot or demonstration projects realized	"Due Mari" Virtual Interactive 360D Platform	1	0
	Data storage system, data center and servers	1	0
	Due Mari Joint Model on sustainable tourism in Adriatic-Ionian Region	1	0
	Joint management board	1	0
Number of valorized sites	4 pilot projects	4	0

To the day interviews were conducted (October 2021), partners refers that none of the project outputs have been realized yet. The "Due Mari" Virtual Interactive 360D Platform has not been implemented yet since the procedure for the establishment of the data centre has been particularly challenging. INNOVAPUGLIA faced difficulties in launching the tender for the economic operator that should implement the data center due to a lack of information and coordination with the project lead partner.

Despite none of the project output has been achieved yet, project partners refer projects activities are proceeding and all project outputs will be achieved by the end of the project.

### **Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?**

Project implementation has faced specific difficulties especially in the very first steps of project development. The project started in May 2019 and the very first activities related to project organisation and management. Project lead partner faced some difficulties in establishing a strong coordination among partners. Despite previous experience in managing similar projects, main difficulties faced by the lead partner was related to the institutional building strategy within the Ministry that caused some months of delays.

Internal re-organisation in the Albanian Ministry prevented this partner from fully covering its role of leader and project partners refers a lack of coordination from the LP.

Additionally, considering that the data centre should be placed in Albania, the difficulties faced by the lead partner had direct consequences on the implementation of the activities of the other partners, in particular in relation to the activities that INNOVAPUGLIA should have carried out, as technical partner responsible for the implementation of the virtual platform.

Additionally, the earthquake happened in Albania in 2019 and the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected project implementation.

## **Project results**

### **What are the results achieved by the project?**

The table below shows the target and achieved value of the result indicator selected by the project. The data were retrieved in October 2021, but they should be updated in the following months, as the activities are still ongoing.

<b>Programme result indicator</b>	<b>Title of the project result</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Common interventions aimed to improve the cross-border framework	Common strategies MoU of sustainable tourism	4	0

### **What is the added value of your project?**

DUE MARI project meets the specific objective of the Programme that aims at boosting attractiveness of natural and cultural assets to improve a smart and sustainable economic development.

Innovation is a key factor for the Programme's regional economy and tourism is one of the sectors where innovation is particularly needed to better promote touristic destination and overcome the seasonality. Project main output, the "Due Mari" Virtual Interactive 360D Platform, based its idea on a consolidated technology that is related to the virtual tour. Despite this is a well-known technology, the project wants to spread this application and go beyond by implementing a concrete production of digital products. This will also boost know-how and transfer lessons learned and best practices among other stakeholders (e.g. use of V3D technology in marketing on destination, pros and cons of virtual guides, etc).

## Durability and capitalisation potential

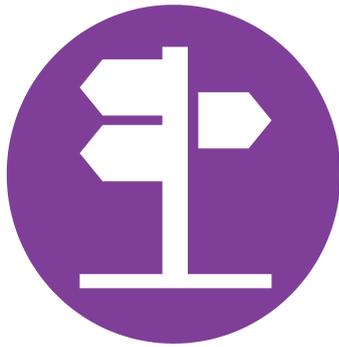
### **How do they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

The partners are intending to make outputs and results sustainable over time and this is already foreseen in the project's Application Form. Project partners will create a common structure that will manage projects result after project end - through Memorandum of Understanding as well as common strategy and action plan for Due Mari platform management. Additionally, the Due Mari Virtual Interactive Platform, hosted by LP, will be managed by internal IT staff and the LP will provide budget for server and data maintenance beyond project end. INNOVAPUGLIA will host the Virtual Interactive 360 D data for Puglia Region, while Molise Region and Montenegro will store data on its own servers and will provide necessary funds and personnel for maintenance beyond project end. Lastly the newly created Due Mari touristic routes/itineraries will remain as a common product and used to promote the whole territory in common future projects.



# Interreg - IPA CBC

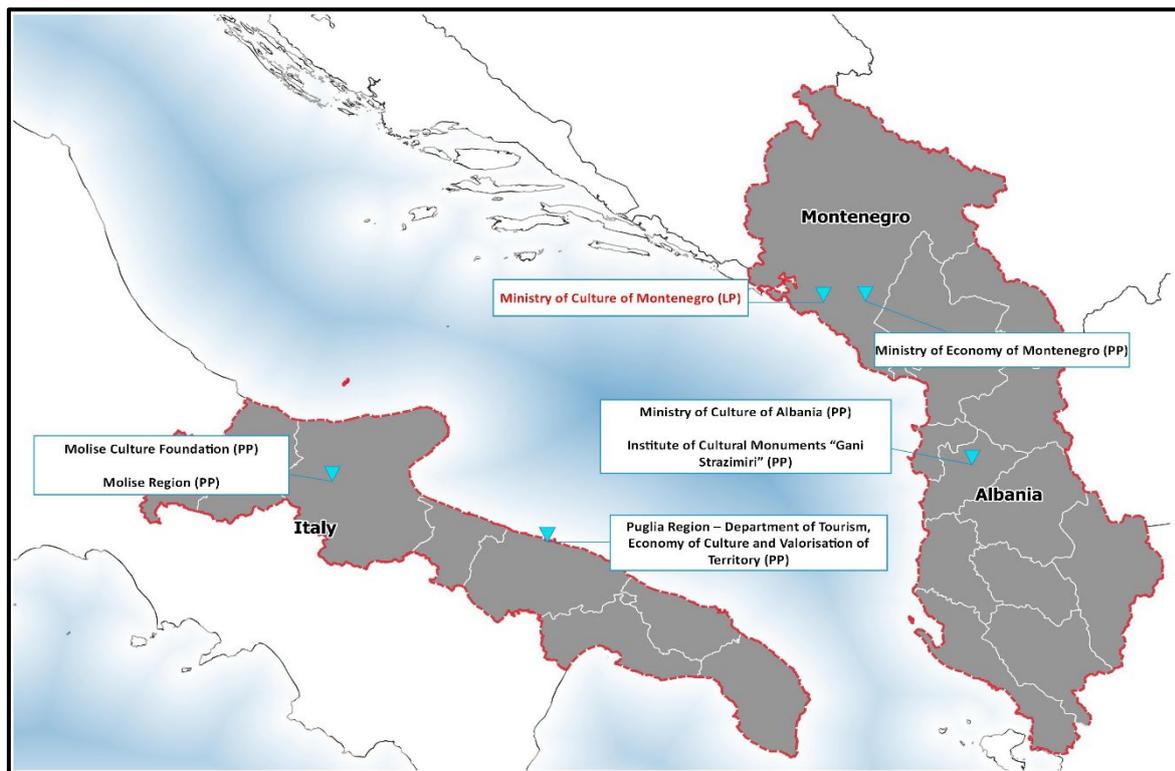
Italy - Albania - Montenegro



**3C**

## Cross-border exchange for the development of Cultural and Creative industries

### Case study report



# Executive Summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected exclusively during the interview with the project Partner Puglia Region, Department of Tourism, Economy of Culture and Valorisation of Territory.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 15.05.2019

**Ending date:** 30.06.2022

**Duration:** 37 months 16 days

**Overall budget:** 4 281 675.26 Euro (AF)

**Expenditures approved by CA September 2021:** 1 239 960.33 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021)
LP	Ministry of Culture of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Cetinje	1 271 336.81	1 020 700.63
PP	Ministry of Economy of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	91 457.50	18 487.51
PP	Ministry of Culture of Albania	ALBANIA	Tirana	1 030 538.00	4 037.60
PP	Institute of Cultural Monuments "Gani Strazimiri"	ALBANIA	Tirana	69 570.00	2 688.07
PP	Puglia Region – Department of Tourism, Economy of Culture and Valorisation of Territory	ITALY	Bari	1 121 824.25	98 573.42
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	352 626.45	38 465.16
PP	Molise Culture Foundation	ITALY	Campobasso	344 322.25	57 007.94

# Project preparation

## What is the project overall objective?

“3C - Cross-border exchange for the development of Cultural and Creative industries” aims at enhancing cooperation between the CCI actors in the project area, through the creation of innovative centers with residential arts programmes and joint cross-border cooperation networks. The project overall objective is to contribute to reconnecting culture and territory, and share knowledge, experiences, and creative potential, by revitalizing heritage through contemporary art. The EU has always recognized the value of cultural industries and their significant contribution to dynamism of the EU economy and its competitiveness. Starting from different backgrounds, countries will cooperate by sharing and transferring best practices from more experienced to less experienced partners and by implanting cross border activities involving all PPs. Growth of cross-border cultural and creative industries can act as a catalyst for economic development.

As per Application Form, project specific objectives are:

- 1- *Setting up cross-border cooperation platform and network on cultural and creative industries in order to jointly develop cultural heritage products and services of the targeted area, with the aim to define strategies and implement actions to enhance the sector, supporting exchange of experiences, knowledge and ideas through transnational products development, marketing, branding and to use it to properly and sustainably valorize cultural assets of the region.*
- 2- *Increasing a level and quality of innovative non-financial support to enterprises dealing with culture and creative sector through Regional Arts Mobility and Visiting Program. It will implement specific activities conceived to improve the skills of culture and creative enterprises through workshops/training activities through Regional Arts Mobility and Visiting Program stimulating target group representatives to learn from each other and exchange experiences, to ensure the adaptation to market developments and production of new market oriented cultural products and services. This capacity building action within the network will help joint planning and implementation of activities, also fostering the development of a creative macroregional thinking.*

## The project partnership

The project partnership is composed of seven partners.

The lead partner is the Ministry of Culture of Montenegro. Moreover, Montenegro is represented by another institution, the Ministry of Economy.

Among the three Italian partners, two are regional departments for Tourism and Cultural policies, one from each region; while the third one is Molise Culture Foundation, a permanent cultural institution controlled by

Molise Region. Since 2011, the Foundation has carried out activities with the aim to enhance, identify, protect, and promote cultural events, manifestations, and heritage.

In addition, the partners from Albania are the Ministry of Culture and Institute of Cultural Monuments “Gani Strazimiri”, a budgetary public institution depending on the Ministry. It was established in 1965 and its mission is the study, protection, conservation, restoration, revitalization, and promotion of Albanian cultural heritage.

The idea for the project is linked to a previous cultural cooperation agreement between Puglia Region and Albania. The initiative aimed to celebrate and pay tribute to Antonio Gramsci, an Italian politician, whose ancestors came from Albania and who spent years in prison in Turi, Puglia. In fact, Gramsci Foundation of Puglia is an associated partner in the project. The partnership consortium was subsequently enlarged to Montenegro and the scope of the project changed as well, by including additional cultural initiatives and activities not only related to Gramsci.

According to the information gathered with the case study interview, the project formulation was long and took more than 32 weeks. It also required systematic changes and revisions to better identify single activities and budget allocation, following JS suggestions. Each partner developed and took care of the formulation of its own pilot project, which then were added into the final document.

## Project implementation

### **What are the main project activities?**

Apart from WP Preparation, WP Management and WP Communication, the project displays 3 WPs:

*WPT1, Creation of Culture enterprises’ network and cross border web platform.* This WP aims to set a base for better cooperation between different cultural and creative institutions in the programme area by developing cross-border network and a web platform, offering information on related cultural subsectors. Desk-based research will be carried out to identify and map national or regional culture and creative resources, including description of their main portfolios and area of specialization. Network members, together with the project team and experts, will identify weaknesses and strengths of national/regional cultural sector policies related to innovative and market-driven development of the sector.

The cross-border web platform will be used to support innovation, competitiveness, and regeneration of the sector.

*WPT2, Regional Arts Mobility and Visiting Programme* to enhance cross-border institutional capacity, cooperation, exchange of good practices and experience, with the aim of boosting regional and local development of cultural and creative products and services. To do so, mobility of artists and culture professionals based on Arts Visiting Programs will be promoted. The mobility of artists and culture professionals is essential for a variety of reasons,

including building partnerships and contacts; creating networks; promoting new markets to Arts Visiting Programs beneficiaries; creating new jobs; promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and increasing and broadening their audience.

WPT3, *Investment in multi-functional culture centers*. The spaces could be used for educational workshops, presentations, manifestations. To date, the selected company of LP has delivered all planned works in accordance with the contract, while Albania and Puglia region partners are in tender preparation phase. As regards the centers:

- 1- In Kotor (Montenegro), the project realizes reconstruction works of the old prison building in the old town of Kotor. The building will be mainly used for the Regional Arts visiting program. The space could be used for educational workshops, presentations, manifestations, but also as a space for the temporary accommodation of guest and artists. The building has:
  - A conference (workshops) room, up to 25 people with the necessary video and audio equipment
  - Rooms for student work, up to 20 people
  - Rooms for individual work of students or courses and workshops' participants
- 2- In Turi, in the province of Bari, a space/artwork replicating the same size of the "Room of Gramsci" will be realized and collocated outside the prison, exactly in front of the window of the prison cell where Gramsci was imprisoned. This activity also covers the renovation of public squares and the restauration/re-functionalization of a small building, which is strictly related to the creation of the innovative artwork and the new public area for temporary and permanent cultural activities.
- 3- In Molise, the activity covers the purchase of innovative equipment to promote the cultural heritage of the three countries beyond national borders. After a procedure on the MEPA, a consultant was hired to conduct a preliminary study for the design of the project, in relation to the acquisition of the thematic equipment.
- 4- In Tirana, Albania the realization of the "Art Park" through the revitalization and requalification of the territory of Former Kinostudios "Shqiperia e Re".

#### **What output indicator does your project contribute to?**

According to the information collected, the implementation of the project activities is progressing. By the time data were collected (October 2021), none of the programme output indicators selected by the project have reached their target value, as shown in the table below. Regarding culture centers, the company selected by LP has delivered all planned works in accordance with the contract, while the other partners are in tender preparation or application phase.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial (common indicator – reference to the Annex of Regulation support (EU) No 1299/2013);	Regional Arts Mobility and Visiting Program	40	0
	4 multi-functional culture centers/spaces in the region	4	0
Number of cross-border creative platforms.	Culture enterprises' networking web platform	1	0

According to the information included in the project progress report, at the end of 2020, the cultural centre of Kotor was 72% delivered.

### **Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?**

According to the information collected via the web survey and the case study interview, the project implementation faced specific difficulties right from the outset, due to political changes in Montenegro which led to an internal re-organization of the Ministry. The previous administration had in fact agreed on the sites to be directly involved in the project, but some changes were considered by the new administration. This also weakened and hampered the coordination role of the LP. Project partners autonomy in the formulation process negatively affected their performance, as they were not always sure of how to proceed. In addition, public administration internal procedures and bottlenecks added to the already existing difficulties. Uncertainties regarding specific departments or resources (staff) responsible for the implementation of the project activities, together with complicated tender applications and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures to obtain authorizations significantly delayed project activities. Changes at the top of public administrations or the reluctance to apply simpler, new tender procedures slowed the processes as well.

The main external factors hampering project implementation are related to Covid-19. WPT2 activities were probably the most hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, as exchanges were not possible due to travel restrictions. Moreover, online exchanges were not as productive as they would have been in person, given the nature of the cultural sector. This had somehow a positive effect on the choice of the buildings to use as cultural centers, thanks to the availability of extra time for the assessment of their initial status.

## **Project results**

### **What are the results achieved by the project?**

The main results expected from the project, as per application form are:

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Cross border networks in the cultural and creative fields	Cross border networking platform of Culture enterprises	1	0
	The Agreement will be part of the Networking platform.	1	0

The project main results are focused on two main components:

- a) Established cross-border cooperation/networking platform on cultural and creative industries and
- b) Introduced Regional Arts Mobility and Visiting Program.

The first result directly contributes to the achievement of the following result indicator: Increased number of cross border networks in the cultural and creative fields.

The second project's result, by joint actions on new common cross border products and services and non-financial support to more than 45 cultural enterprises, is contributing to the increase of cross border agreements in the culture and creative fields.

### **What is the added value of your project?**

Partners recognize the role that cultural and creative sectors can play in their territorial development as key strategic resources for their regions, on which it is important to invest to boost economic growth. All participating partners are interested in preserving and promoting their cultural and natural heritage, exploiting its potential to enhance the attractiveness of their region and modernize the territorial productive system. The main benefit of cross border cooperation is therefore related to the use of a wider pool of natural and cultural assets as well as of human resources than are available in one country. The project's successful leverage is related to the use and synergistic combination of these assets that will be gathered in the co-development of the joint products and services, through a network operating as cooperation platform among key actors of creative industry.

## **Durability and capitalisation potential**

### **How they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

3C project results and outputs are going to be visible after the end of implementation period. The project durability can be extremely effective through achieving the main project output (creation of the network model through cooperation platform) that consequently leads to increased cooperation between cultural and creative

institutions. Public institutions partners are the main referent of policy in culture sector in their regions, therefore are able to dedicate resources to keep the network operative as a platform where it will be possible to exchange ideas and experiences in the specific field of intervention, facilitating their access to the EU market.

Additionally, newly introduced capacity development model (Regional Arts Mobility and Visiting Program) will be recognized among the network members as an innovative approach which will, together with reconstructed premises and strengthened management of those culture support centers, represent a base for future initiatives (products and services development) in the field of Culture and Creative industry.

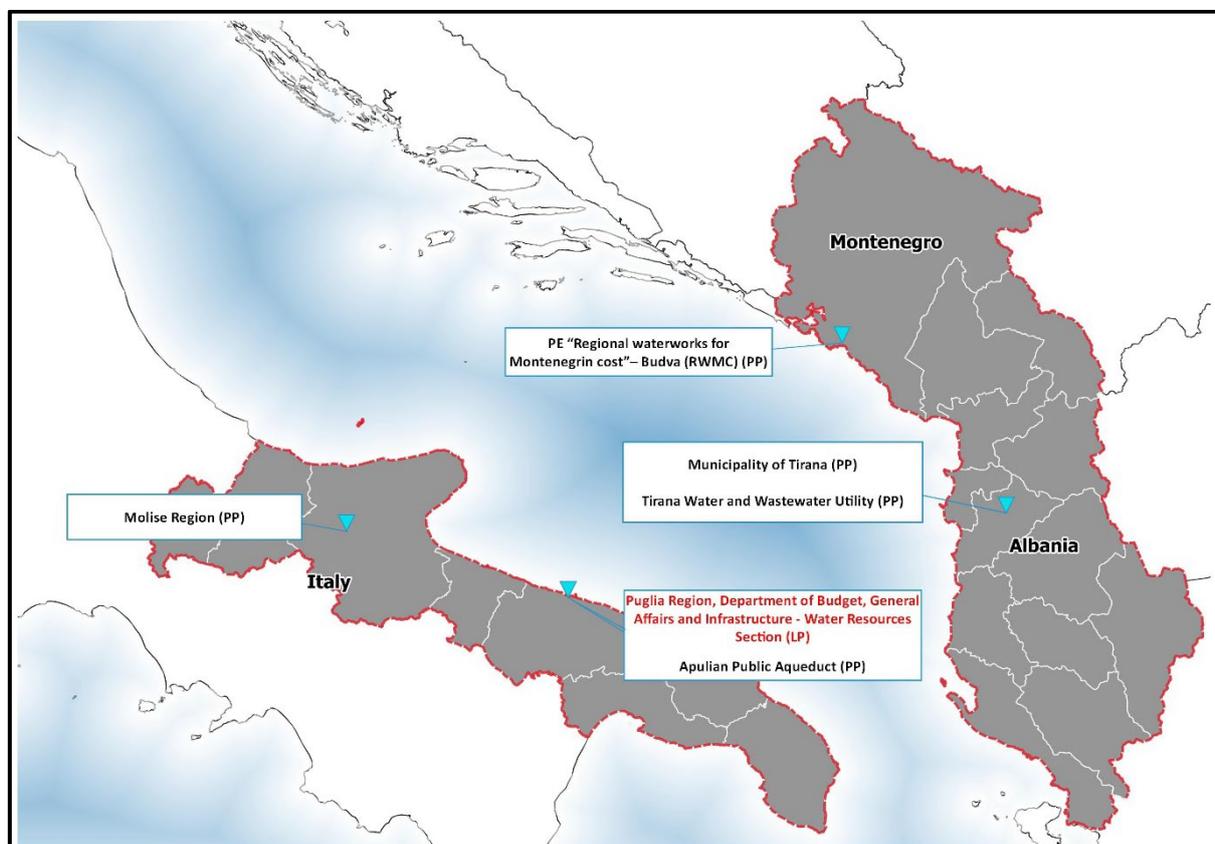
The outputs generated through the implementation and the realization of project activities can be directly applicable and replicable by other local and national institutions, which are in need for greater integration and connection with the other relevant institutions from abroad.



## CROSS WATER

### Integrated Water Management System in cross border area

## Case study report



# Executive Summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Puglia Region, Department of Budget, General Affairs and Infrastructure - Water Resources Section and the Project Partner Regional waterworks for Montenegrin cost, Budva.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 15.05.2019

**Ending date:** 15.05.2022

**Duration:** 36 months 1 day

**Overall budget:** 5 570 738.01 Euro (AF)

**Expenditures approved by CA by September 2021:** 734 041.39 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated (Euro)	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021) (Euro)
LP	Puglia Region, Department of Budget, General Affairs and Infrastructure - Water Resources Section	ITALY	Bari	1 038 793.94	231 379.81
PP	Apulian Public Aqueduct	ITALY	Bari	867 364.94	90 621.62
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	1 001 457.56	51 746.23
PP	Municipality of Tirana	ALBANIA	Tirana	728 802.51	138 338.83
PP	Tirana Water and Wastewater Utility	ALBANIA	Tirana	876 879.07	42 259.64
PP	PE "Regional waterworks for Montenegrin cost" – Budva (RWMC)	MONTENEGRO	Budva	1 057 439.99	179 695.26

\*Change of Department of Puglia region during project implementation. As per Application Form, the initial department involved was the Agriculture and Rural and Environmental Development, Water Resources Section.

## Project preparation

### The project overall objective

“Cross Water” aims to establish an efficient and effective cross-border Water Management System (WMS) in the regions of Montenegro, Albania, and southern Adriatic Italy by developing new infrastructures, technologies, and new control and measurement systems.

Water cycle management constitutes a priority at international level. In the framework of the SDG to be achieved by 2015, the issue of water management was strongly addressed. At European level, directive 2000/60/CE has defined the elaboration of a management plan through the implementation of an integrated approach for each hydrographic basin. As water management and environmental issues do not have geographical, political, or social borders, it is important to face this challenge in terms of international and cross-border cooperation. Despite the different issues and priorities faced, in part due to their different water resources, the Cross Water project will develop a cross-border Integrated Plan and a Common Policy Paper on water management system. Four pilot initiatives will be carried out, one for each project area, focusing on water resource protection, and optimization of the water supply management. Moreover, capacity building activities will be provided to technicians and policy makers, and a cross-border awareness campaign on water use and re-use will be addressed to citizens, in particular to the youth and families.

As per Application Form, project specific objectives are:

1. *Improve the cross-border framework conditions for the WMS through a common integrated plan, addressing water problems related to soil and environmental defence, in line with the objectives of EC Directive 2000/60. Starting from a diagnosis of the state of the water systems, the plan will provide the political, institutional and technical answers to resolve water resources problems at a cross border level, also through the exchange of best practices.*
2. *Four pilot projects to implement the WMS integrated plan, one in each country. According to territorial intervention priorities, structural and non-structural interventions will be carried out.*
3. *Cross-border policy paper, on the management of water resources accompanied by recommendations for the regions / countries involved in the project.*

### The project partnership

The project partnership is composed of six partners, all are public institutions with specific institutional and financial responsibilities in the water management system of their respective areas.

According to the application form, the lead partner was supposed to be the Department of Agriculture and Rural and Environmental Development, Water Resources section of Puglia Region. However, during project implementation the Water Resource section of the Department of Budget, General Affairs and Infrastructure took over the role of lead partner.

Two other Italian partners are involved: Molise Region and the Apulian Public Aqueduct, a joint-stock company controlled by Puglia Region, responsible for the water cycle management of the whole region.

The partnership includes two Albanian institutions: the Municipality of Tirana and Tirana Water and Wastewater Utility (UKT) which, following the Administrative and Territorial Reform of 2015, has managed the water supply in the municipality.

There is only one partner from Montenegro, the Regional Waterworks for Montenegrin Coast (RWMC), a state-owned company, which controls the only regional water source of Montenegro, the Bolje Sestre spring.

The project formulation was mainly carried out by the lead partner, while each project partner, having a better understanding of the local needs and resources, developed its own pilot project. In fact, the territories involved in the project have different priorities determined by their different types of water resources. For example, in Albania and Montenegro the main issues are related to water saving, rational usage of surface waters, coverage of rural areas and wastewater dischargement. On the other hand, in Puglia, Apulian Acqueduct is one of the biggest water supply systems in Europe. The region, however, has no relevant source of fresh water and its needs are thus linked to water quality, re-use, and reduction of water losses. Lastly, Molise has freshwater surface which is distributed through five water systems and therefore enhancement of the water cycle management is needed. However, this autonomy in developing the pilot project sometimes resulted in a lack of coordination among partners activities, with subsequent deadlocks.

The formulation process took more than 32 weeks, and it required systematic changes and revisions. The most challenging aspects were related to compliance with Interreg regulations, budget allocation and deliverables.

## Project implementation

### **What are the main project activities?**

Apart from WP Preparation, WP Management and WP Communication, the project displays 3 WPs:

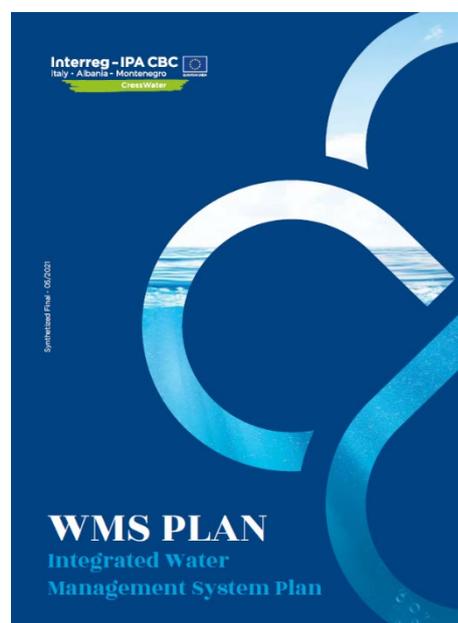
WPT1, *Improving the cross-border framework conditions for WMS*, in progress. The work package is led by PE RWMC, which defines the methodology of analysis, divides and manages the collection of information, organizes data and information collected, in collaboration with LP.

Starting from a best practices analysis at international level, partners are able to compare and share innovative methods and strategies that are used in each national WMS plan or strategy. Possible gaps or areas for improvement in relation to the best practices and EU policies are analysed as well. In the elaboration of this WMS Plan, 12 technicians that can also improve their skills and competences through the capacity building actions will be involved. This constitutes a priority for the development and implementation of adequate management plans, in line with the crosscutting issue of both the cooperation programme and the national strategies, in particular in the case of Albania and Montenegro. Moreover, the strengthening of competences will be relevant for project's activities since it will guarantee a common level of knowledge of the issue for all partners, facilitating dialogue and cooperation.

It all converges into the final Cross-Border Common Integrated Plan on WMS, which has been published on the project website. In collaboration with other partners, PE RWMC elaborated the initial draft of the cross-border plan. The lead partner, in collaboration with Apulian Public Aqueduct dealt with water treatment and water reuse; the Municipality of Tirana wrote the parts about water losses reduction and on awareness rising activities; while Molise Region wrote the chapter on the optimization of the services offered by water management companies and on the efficiency of water networks.

WPT2, *Pilot projects to implement integrated plan for WMS*. This working package is behind schedule. Based on the information collected through case study interviews, none of the pilot projects have started. All partners have updated their pilot procurement plans and launched the relative tenders in order to start implementation as soon as possible. The delay is due to the fact that the project started almost 10 months later and also COVID 19 restriction and homeworking modality has limited sites visits and on-site assessment, as well as delaying the finalization of the Tenders for this WP implementation. WP leader is Apulian Acqueduct thanks to its vast experience and technical competence at international level.

These initiatives will address several specific needs: better water quality, waste generation and re-use, water consumption reduction, conservation improvement and promotion of a rational use of surface water and groundwater, the management of services for delivering drinking water, and wastewater treatment. Before the concrete realization of the 4 pilot interventions, a single activity to elaborate cross border guidelines for the design of the pilot projects will be carried out.



Pilot projects are tailored to the needs of each region in the cooperation area, according to the WMS plan:

- 1- In Puglia, “Automation management system and control of the depurative process for the purpose of water resource protection and energy optimization”. The pilot deals with real time measurements in two selected locations, namely in Monopoli, a town of about 60,000 inhabitants and in San Michele di Bari, a smaller town of 15,000 inhabitants.
- 2- In Molise, “strategies and techniques for the optimization of water supply management” will be developed to improve the monitoring of losses and water quality parameters. To do so, georeferencing tools will be used to provide an overview of the hydraulic network, (inspections on the pipelines to collect data) together with a hydraulic modeling software to improve data collection.
- 3- The pilot project in Tirana covers the construction of a new water distribution network in Kasalla, a village of about 2,200 inhabitants in north city of Tirana, forecasted to reach more than 3,000 inhabitants in the short term. This village lacks a system for the supply of drinking water, and the new distribution will install a new centrifugal water pump as well as a new water storage tank.
- 4- In Montenegro, “monitoring, control and protection of the Bolje sestre spring”, including the establishment of protection zones and of additional adjacent water sources to expand the capacity of the regional water supply system, the construction of monitoring stations, the installation of equipment to improve the water quality, the construction of a measuring and control unit in front of Budva pump station, and the reconstruction of the Budva Pump station.

WPT3, *Cross border policy paper on WMS* with a list of recommendations for the regions/countries involved in the project, laying down the specific commitments to be undertaken by the partners that subscribe to the agreement, together with concrete actions. This WP, led by Molise region, in collaboration with LP, is behind schedule as well.

The final document will be the result of at least 8 meetings attended by 12 policy makers, two per partner. Starting with the analysis of policies at national and international level, they will approve the CB border Policy Paper during the final meeting to be held in Bari. These meetings aim to analyze the legal and institutional frameworks, the political issues, and the different needs and priorities of each country. After each meeting a report/minutes will be produced in order to guide the elaboration of the final agreement step by step. Some meetings will also foresee the participation of experts from the European Commission.

To date, the First Cross Water Institutional Technical Table was held online on October 5th, 2021. It was organized by Molise Region, and it opened the discussion about the project CB Policy Paper.

In addition, this WP includes 4 capacity building workshops to strengthen the competences of the 12 policy makers in the institutional working table.

Additionally, the Communication WP is very important for the project especially regarding awareness raising activities. Citizenship awareness and citizen collaboration will play a significant role in reaching the project objectives, considering that in the entire project area there is a high level of water consumption and water wastage. Activities that fall under this WP include digital communication activities on social media; promotional materials such as brochures and posters in different languages; videos in English to be translated into target languages and one TV spot in English and Italian to be translated and aired on the main TV channels in the project area. It has already been presented and it will be aired from November 2021.

In addition, water villages will be established in each country. Here, students and local citizens can participate in public awareness raising events and receive educational kits. Schools in fact play a crucial role in the dissemination of good practices among families and their involvement is important for the long-term sustainability of the project.

### **What output indicator does your project contribute to?**

According to the information collected, the implementation of the project activities is progressing, and partners are trying to make up for the lost time.

By the end of October 2021, the only target achieved was the publication of the Cross Border Integrated Plan in both Italian and English, as shown in the table below. The Cross Border Integrated Plan has been published on the project website, under the section Outputs (<https://crosswater.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/outputs>).

<b>Programme output indicator</b>	<b>Title of the project output</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Number of new products and services, pilot, and demonstration projects realized;	Cross border integrated plan	1	1
	4 pilot initiatives realized in according to integrated plan "WMS"	4	0
	Common WMS Policy paper elaborated	1	0

### **Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?**

According to the information collected via the web survey and the case study interviews, the project implementation faced specific difficulties right from the outset, due to a lack of cooperation among the partners. The way the project formulation was set up made it difficult for project partners to coordinate their pilot initiatives, slowing the project formulation and preventing the constructive exchange of knowledge. In addition, other issues related to the partnership itself, such as the presence of national public institutions and

regional administrations slowed both the implementation and the reporting process. Public national and regional administrations, because of their status, have different and long bureaucratic procedures and the time needed to take decisions changes from one institution to another. Concerning reporting, the transfer of funds abroad to IPA countries was further complicated by (Italian) internal public administration procedures which require many steps for the release of funds. Moreover, the need to set up a bank account dedicated to the project in Albania additionally slowed the process.

The main external factors hampering project implementation are related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Measures such as restrictions and homeworking modality have limited site visits and on site-assessment and have delayed the finalization of the tenders for WPT2 implementation. Online conferencing and meetings significantly affected the exchange of know-how and best practices as well, and this has had impact also on the territorial and cohesion aspect of the Programme.

## Project results

### What are the results achieved by the project?

The main results expected from the project, as per application form are:

- Multi-level and multi-sector plans adopted in the field of water cycle management
- Integrated initiatives in the field of water cycle management

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common Plans enhancing and safeguarding water landscapes (including marine ones)	Multi-level and multi-sector plans adopted in the fields of water cycle management	1	1
	Integrated initiatives in the fields of water cycle management		

The realisation refers to the publication on the project website of the Cross Border Integrated Plan in both Italian and English language.

### What is the added value of your project?

CrossWater meets the specific objective of the Programme that aims at increasing cross-border cooperation strategies on water landscapes. Thanks to international cooperation, it is possible to design and find solutions through an integrated approach that puts together resources and competences.

Partners will be able to exchange knowledge and experiences, sharing best practices and learning from each other in the field of water management. For example, Puglia and Montenegro can share the methods they used to monitor water at different points along the water distribution system, namely at wastewater treatments

plants and at the source, respectively. Moreover, RWMC managed to address the issue of diminishing water resources, using a system to detect and monitor real time water loss, which they did not have before. Albania as well can learn the best ways to design and develop water infrastructure in order to avoid wastages and illegal connections, and thus having better control over the distribution process.

## Durability and capitalisation potential

### **How do they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

The durability and sustainability of the project output will be ensured after project completion. With reference to the 4 pilot projects, partners can assure the maintenance of the interventions realized using their own financial resources. They are public bodies supplying water services to the local communities at regional level, so they are obliged to save the new pilot interventions in order to offer a better water quality and to guarantee a better water use and re-use.

For example, the pilot initiative in Puglia region aims to extend the project to the infrastructure throughout the region, while in Albania the lessons learned about the construction of water networks can be replicated in other areas. The same applies to Montenegro regarding cooperation with the hydrometeorology center to improve water intake monitoring.

In addition, the Cross Border Policy paper will be used by the partners after the project ends, using their own financial resources in order to guarantee that the implementation of their institutional activities (water supply, and water cycle management) will be done following the recommendations included in this output and to ensure better local WMS plans in the future.

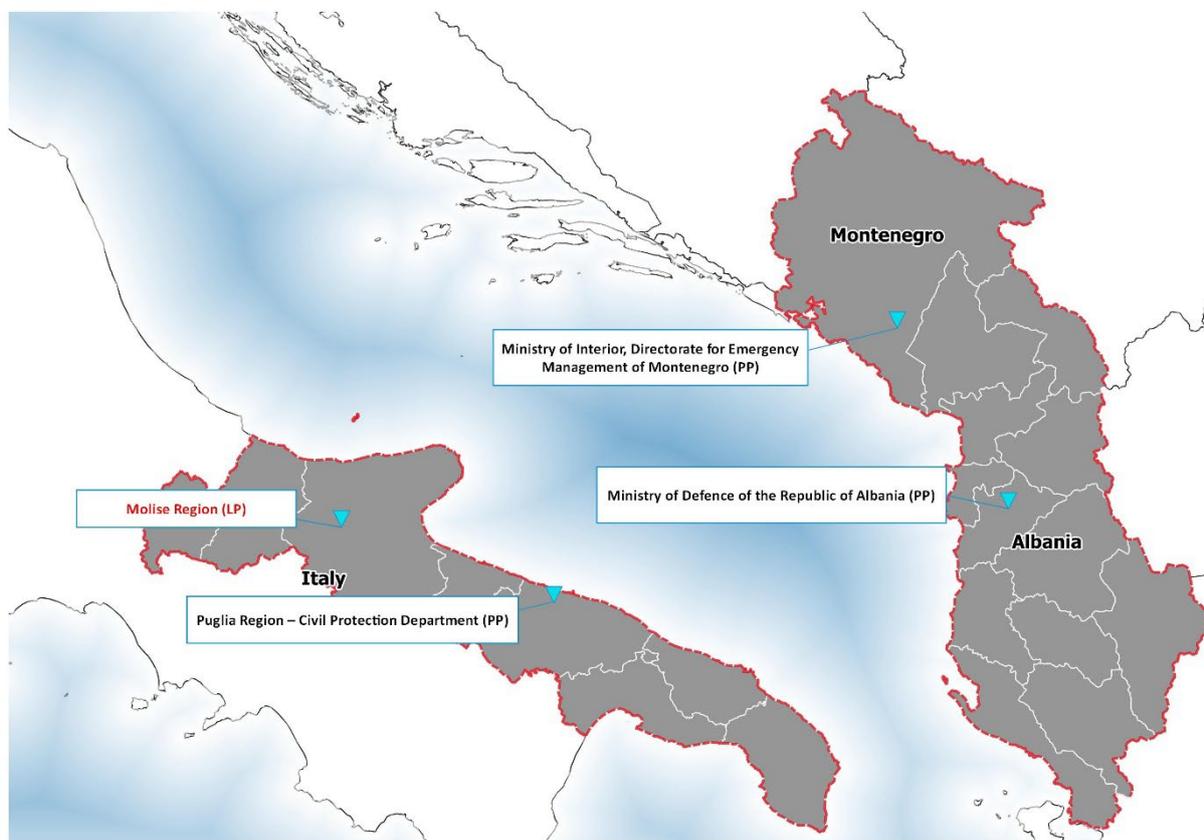
Furthermore, project partners committed themselves in undertaking serious monitoring actions during and at the end of the pilot project. They will continue to be engaged in follow up activity for the 12 months after the pilot projects realization, to produce a technical follow up report.



## TO BE READY

The flood and Big fire foREst,  
prediction, forecAst and  
emergencY management

## Case study report



## Executive summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Molise Region and the Project Partner Ministry of Interior, Directorate for Emergency Management of Montenegro.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 15.05.2019

**Ending date:** 30.06.2022

**Duration:** 37 months 16 days

**Overall budget:** 5 893 686.46 Euro

**Expenditures approved by CA by September 2021:** 871 449.50 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated (Euro)	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021) (Euro)
LP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	2 008 136.66	245 148.69
PP	Puglia Region – Civil Protection Department	ITALY	Bari	1 189 999.95	0
PP	Ministry of Interior, Directorate for Emergency Management of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	1 216 499.96	601 924.99
PP	Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Albania	ALBANIA	Tirana	1 479 049.89	24 375.82

## Project preparation

### The project overall objective

The project TO BE READY is funded under the priority axis 3 “*Environment protection, risk management and low carbon strategy*”, Programme Priority Specific Objective being 3.1 “*Increase cross-border cooperation strategies on water landscapes*”.

The overall objective of TO BE READY is to enhance prevention and preparedness measures of the partner countries regarding natural and man-made disasters and improve safety in the Programme area by contributing to the expected result of the programme “Integrated initiatives in the fields of water cycle management, coastal and inland environmental risks prevention and biodiversity safeguard”.

The Programme Document identifies as one of the main challenges the fact that “*many parts of the Programme Area present a relatively high exposure to risks of natural and human causes compared to national and EU average (landslide, seismic, hydraulic and hydrogeological risks, soil desertification, erosion and fires, stress from urban and tourism development, or industrial pollution)*”.

In response to this issue, the project aims at facing common challenge shared among Italian, Albanian and Montenegrin Adriatic regions which in the last years have been hit by various natural and man-made disasters, mainly many wildfires and floods, that have caused notable human losses, damages to environment and infrastructures. Such events shown that greater cooperation between the three countries is required for disaster risk management prediction, prevention and intervention.

TO BE READY wants to tackle this challenge by sharing best practices among partners and other stakeholders in the sector, by improving partners’ skills and preparation to prevent and deal with disasters resulting from floods and forest fires, as well as from marine pollution. The main expected change to be achieved is improved coordination and level of preparation of strategic key actors involved in the phase of prevention and management of the emergency in case of fires and floods hazards.

### **The project partnership**

Partners were identified based on their territorial competences and responsibilities: the project partnership is composed of the main competent authorities in the field of civil protection and risk management with experience and expertise in research, analysis and management risk.

Molise Region was assigned the leadership of the project due to consolidate their experience from previous ETC projects on the same topic.

Also, topics and objectives were jointly identified and developed during the project preparation phase in order to select those areas in which a transfer of competences from the Italian partners to the Albanian and Montenegrin ones was needed the most.

The project preparation took several months and entailed the organisation of 3 meetings from April to July 2018, in order to jointly agree on the project’s main goals. The preparation activities were coordinated and supervised by the Lead Partner and external technical experts.

Interviewees did not report specific challenges with the project preparation process. The application process went smooth, while the most difficult section was the project budget and the most helpful tools in the application phase were the programme manual, the infodays and eMS user manual.

Also, the Lead Partner reports that, given the consistent project budget (almost 6 MLN EUR) and the relevant budget addressed to equipment, the project received specific attention from the Programme authorities.

# Project implementation

## What are the main project activities?

The main project activities are the setting up of reference prediction models, the mapping of areas at risk, preparation of studies and manuals, cross border operating procedures for different typologies of risk, capacity building activities (e.g. training of emergency operators) and an ICT Platform for civil protection.

The main activities are foreseen under the Technical WPs and divided as follows: T1 improves capacities of the operators in the forecasting, monitoring and emergency response; T2 improves the quality of the emergency response through a more accurate scenario.

A remarkable share of the budget is allocated to the purchase of equipment (almost 53%, the majority under the WPT1 “Prediction and observation”), such as tactical vehicles, hydrometric networks and phenological monitoring networks (Molise Region), off-road vehicles and equipment for flood events and forest fire fighting (Puglia Region), multifunctional robotic system, mobile centre (Ministry of Interior, Directorate for Emergency Management of Montenegro), equipment and vehicles to deal with alluvial and forest fire emergencies (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Albania).

Also, approximately the 41% of the project budget is allocated to external expertise and services.

## What output indicator does your project contribute to?

TO BE READY is a project that concerns primarily the Civil Protection bodies of the programme area.

The main outputs of the projects are the following:

- Operational model of prevision and emergency management for flood events and forest fires
- Transnational network of operators in cross-border regions
- ICT Platform for sharing tools and knowledge in partners’ countries

The model will be developed through activities able to stimulate the exchange of experiences and know-how among the participants in the 3 countries, the establishment of intervention models and training programs with specific sessions on the organization, protocols and procedures applied in the countries of the middle Adriatic basin, in order to facilitate the easy and safe transfer of facilities, men and materials in case of major events.

Also, the project will develop an app for the interchange of information, with restricted access, between the Emergency forecasting / management structures and the field operators.

The project contributes to the following output indicator, quantified in the following table:

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of new products and services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	Operational model of prevision and emergency management for flood events and forest fires.	1	0
	Transnational network of operators in the cross-border regions	150	74
	ITC Network established in the partners' countries.	1	0

To the present date (November 2021), the project is experiencing delays: most tendering procedures have been carried out and the technical activities are ongoing.

The interviewed Montenegrin partner reports that, despite delays, it is accomplishing the foreseen activities, having spent around 55% of project partner budget. In the next months the plan is to spend up to 90% through the procurement of equipment and external services.

The Lead Partner reports that in September 2021 the level of expenditure of the Molise Region was around 900 000 EUR.

### **Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?**

According to the information collected via the web survey and the case study interviews, regarding the management of the project, the Lead Partner reports that they decided to assign the project to the relevant unit which has direct competence on the project matter, in this case to the Regional Civil Protection Unit, instead of the Service for transnational cooperation. In order to ensure that the project would be supported by strong management capacities, the Lead Partner identified external experts, namely a Project Manager and a Financial Manager.

Both interviewees report that the Albanian partner is experiencing strong delays in the level of expenditure, having spent around 40 000 EUR (data from October 2021) due to internal problems within the Ministry. This is further slowing the activities of the whole project for all the partners, and it could lead to decommitment. For this reason, the Lead Partner issued a note to the JS, which is currently assessing the issue.

Also, some partners lacked necessary competencies about programme regulations, therefore accreditation trainings to improve their knowledge about programme rules and a verification of applicants' capacities would be useful prior to the eligibility assessment and a verification of applicant's capacities. In mid-2020 the Lead Partner requested a budget change within WPTI to allocate more budget on the budget line equipment to allow the purchase (400 000 EUR) of the following items to mitigate the emergency:

- tensile structures with transport trolley;
- pneumatic tents to integrate / complete advanced medical station for citizens assistance and supplies storage;
- One field hospital with pneumatic tents and logistic trolley containers (purchased by Molise Region);
- protection materials for the field hospital.

Each partner purchased what they deemed necessary to address the emergency. Also, the partners paired the purchase of equipment with training activities on their use.

The Lead Partner reports that, despite the remarkable availability and support from the JS in carrying out the budget change, it was difficult to implement it on the programme portal. The Lead Partner believes that eMS should be improved, as it is not accessible and is not easily understandable for newcomers.

The main external factors hampering project implementation is Covid19, which is still affecting all the project activities, partner reports. During the project implementation it was not possible to hold seminars, trainings and conferences and meetings had to be held online. The Montenegrin partner reports that this created the need to purchase more technical IT equipment, such as computers for meetings, as well as equipment for disinfection in case of further contamination.

## Project results

### **What are the results achieved by the project?**

The project contributes to the specific objective SO 3.1 *“Increase cross-border cooperation strategies on water landscapes”* and to the expected result of the programme *“Integrated initiatives in the fields of water cycle management, coastal and inland environmental risks prevention and biodiversity safeguard”*.

Specifically, the expected results are:

- 1) The improvement of the ability of risk preventions in the field of forest fires and floods;
- 2) The promotion of the capacity building among the partnership by improving skills and knowledge of operators involved in the operation of risk preventions through the development of a shared action model.

The Lead Partner reports that the results achieved so far by TO BE READY concern better intervention capacity of the actors in protecting environment and biodiversity (survey).

The Montenegrin partner reports that the project helped increasing capabilities and trained its operational staff in charge for dealing with natural and manmade disasters. Also, in Montenegro the project contributed to mines dismantling and it created a multifunctional team to respond to various types of disasters.

According to the latest progress report (Period 4: 01.07.2020 - 31.12.2020), no technical deliverables have been achieved.

However, in November 2021 the Lead Partner provided the following quantification of result indicators:

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common Plans enhancing and safeguarding water landscapes (including marine ones)	Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans	5	0
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	7	1
	Number of trained persons	250	74

### What is the added value of your project?

The cross-border approach represents a significant added value for the project: all territories have different procedures for prevention and emergency management, despite the fact that challenges are common to the whole area. Thus, transnational cooperation is promoting the use of integrated plans and is enhancing the transfer of knowledge from an EU country to two pre-accession countries.

Also, the cooperation provides an opportunity to connect with counterparts, to improve and enhance the capacities of civil protection officers, fire brigades and other relevant entities which would otherwise have little chance to exchange experience and to be part of international networks.

The Lead Partner believes that the added value of TO BE READY is that, at the end of the project, there will be operational units within the Montenegrin and Albanian Ministries which will have acquired competences and will be inserted in a network of partners for future coordination and exchange of practices in case of emergencies.

There is also strong complementarity with other ETC projects, which provides the ground for collaborating with other projects and scaling up their results.

## Durability and capitalisation potential

Partners believe that, throughout its implementation, the project exploited its potentialities more than it was initially foreseen: TO BE READY created the availability of equipment that will stay at the partners' disposal and it will be possible to use it also in the future in case of emergency.

Also, the Lead Partner believes that the project will play an important role in the preparation of new thematic projects for the Programme, as it will be necessary to further capitalise the achievements and knowledge, as well as the fruitful collaboration within the partnership.

Both interviewed partners believe the project put in place a set of relevant competences and it created good connections between the people who will be able to exchange information on a daily basis in case of future emergencies. The Lead Partner reports that the project created knowledge groups.

The Montenegrin partner reports that they already identified procedures for bilateral agreements and with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism that will ensure collaboration in the future on the basis of the established collaboration among the partners. Also, the Montenegrin Civil Protection is organising exercises and trainings in 2022 and this will be the occasion to present the tools created under TO BE READY and share information for the next collaboration opportunities.

The partnership has not discussed new project ideas yet, but there is the intention to do so in the next meetings.



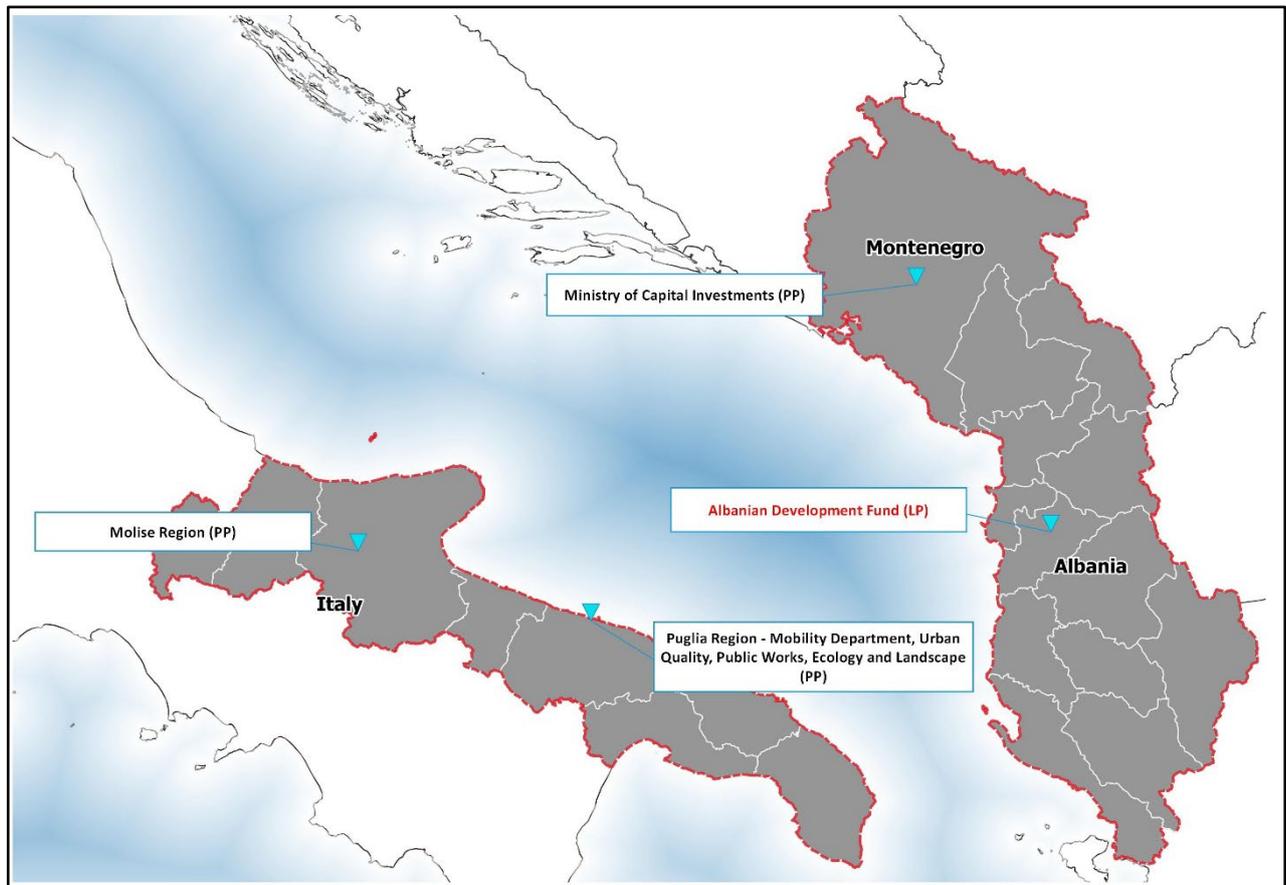
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Italy - Albania - Montenegro



## ALMONIT-MTC

ALbania, MONtenegro, ITaly,  
Multimodal Transport  
Connectivity

## Case study report



## Executive summary

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Report, the web-survey launched in March 2021 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Albanian Development Fund and the project partner Ministry of Capital Investments of Montenegro.

## Project identification

**Starting date:** 15.05.2019

**Ending date:** 30.06.2022

**Duration:** 37 months 16 days

**Overall budget:** 7 000 000.00 Euro

**Expenditures approved by CA September 2021:** 338 863.98 Euro

**List of project partners:**

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated (Euro)	Expenditures approved by CA (September 2021) (Euro)
LP	Albanian Development Fund	ALBANIA	Tirana	2 940 000.00	180 749.85
PP	Puglia Region - Mobility Department, Urban Quality, Public Works, Ecology and Landscape	ITALY	Bari	870 000.00	106 276.40
PP	Ministry of Capital Investments	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	2 440 000.00	37 324.58
PP	Molise Region	ITALY	Campobasso	750 000.00	14 513.15

# Project preparation

## The project overall objective

“ALMONIT-MTC - Albania, Montenegro, Italy Multimodal Transport Connectivity” is the only thematic project funded for the priority axis 4 – “Increasing cross border accessibility, promoting sustainable transport service and facilities and improving public infrastructures”, addressing the following thematic priority: “Promoting sustainable transport and improving public infrastructures by, inter alia, reducing isolation through improved access to transport, information and communication networks and services and investing in cross-border water, waste and energy systems and facilities”.

The overall objective of ALMONIT-MTC is to increase cross-border accessibility, promote sustainable transport services and facilities and improve public infrastructures.

As per Application Form, project specific objectives are:

- Enhance multimodal maritime transport connectivity between programme areas as well as introduce new multimodal maritime routes, by supporting both the establishment of new maritime cross-border transport connections and the by improving the existing ones. This can be achieved through integrated solutions in the diversification of transport modes and in the joint development of an integrated vision by local public authorities.
- Enhance multimodal inland water transport connectivity between program areas as well as introduce new multimodal inland water routes for freight and passengers, by supporting the establishment and renewal of inland cross-border transport networks, by involving local public authorities which will develop and adopt an integrated vision of multimodal connectivity and solutions to diversify transport modes.

The interviewed partners report that the project is strategic due to the sector it addresses: the existing transport systems are not efficient enough and the area is therefore characterized by poor accessibility and low interoperability, also affecting intra and interregional connectivity. Despite geographical proximity, the level of cross-border cooperation to promote multimodal connectivity in the project area is low. Thus, the project wants to enhance the interconnection of transport systems in the area.

Particularly, the Lead Partner reports the strong need in Albania to have connection with and from the port of Shengjin. In the past, the port was used exclusively for economic purposes and not for tourism, thus the project wants to explore such potential with the view of making the North of Albania more accessible for tourists.

In Montenegro, activities are mostly focused on the improvement of the transport sector through better waterways, however the project also provides opportunities for developing multimodal transport connections in the country. The main activity in Montenegro is related to the construction of the port of Virpazar on Lake

Shkoder/Skadar. The new connections are expected to have a huge impact which will foster tourists to visit the region.

Also, by enabling new multimodal connections and multimodal transport connectivity (i.e., maritime and inland water transport, rehabilitation of piers etc.) between the three partner countries, the project wants to contribute to easing mobility of freight and passengers, resulting in improved the intra and interregional connectivity with impact on the economy and on tourism.

Last, but not least, due to the nature of its outputs, the project is expected to have a strong impact at the policy level by providing a long-term integrated programme of cooperation in a multi-sectoral approach through multi-actor and multi-level coordination and the activation of tools and procedures for all stakeholders.

### **The project partnership**

The project partnership is composed of four partners, one from each region of the cooperation area. The Lead Partner is the Albanian Development Fund, which is and was involved in a high number of projects funded by the European Territorial Cooperation, both as project partner and as lead partner, so it could benefit from being integrated in a consolidated network of regional partners. Thus, there were no difficulties in identifying and setting up the partnership, especially for the idea of creating a strategic project in the transport sector.

The preparation of the project took a long time: the interviewed project partner reports almost 2 years for project preparation, of partners' regular meetings and consultations with stakeholders.

## **Project implementation**

### **What are the main project activities?**

The project was approved in 2018 and it is now (October 2021) in the implementation phase.

The first phases of the project foresaw a high number of studies, namely feasibility studies and legislative analyses in the field of transport, mobility and of maritime connections in the area of the project and their integration within the European Legislation. The implementation of the subsequent activities (works, primarily infrastructures) is based on these studies.

At the present stage, all studies were finalized and the partners are about to launch the tendering procedures. ADF plans to launch procurement procedures for works and infrastructures in October/November 2021, while Molise Region and the Ministry of Capital Investments of Montenegro should begin works by November 2021.

In line with the accession negotiations, all tender procedures were and will be done according to EU standards and PRAG, both for services and works and infrastructures.

The Ministry of Capital Investments of Montenegro reports that the construction works on the Montenegrin side entail a complex project. The activity was slightly delayed because of the need to cancel and relaunch one tender procedure, due to the fact that the selected enterprise did not meet contractual obligations. With these regards, the Montenegrin Ministry believes that it would be useful to increase knowledge of PRAG procedures and requirements for Montenegrin SMEs.

The Albanian Lead Partner notices that the tendering procedures were not easy mostly because of the amount equalling to 2.1 million Euros, thus they found the process complicated, and it took long time to be executed. However, the Lead Partner confirms that such project of cooperation is also helpful in building competencies with regards to EU standards and PRAG.

For what concerns incoming activities, the project also foresees trainings and workshops to guarantee that the interventions made through this project will be efficiently run, but because of Covid-19 they were postponed. The interviewed partners assume that they will be organised online. Regarding the spending level, the Lead Partner reports that the percentage up to December 2020 is low also due to the fact that the first phase of the project carried out mostly studies, which have a lower cost, while the most budget-intense phase will be the forthcoming activities (works).

For what concerns the certification of expenditures in Albania, the Lead Partner reports that the procedure used to take a long time, however in the past months the process improved drastically and the cooperation with the Albanian certifying body is positive. The Lead Partner assumes that this is also related to the change of the Head of the certifying body and his new approach.

Also, the Lead Partner thinks that it is important for the First Level Control officers to be aware about the risk of decommitment for partners.

The Montenegrin partner reports that the First Level Control procedures in Montenegro proceed smoothly and that they did not encounter any specific problem.

For what concerns the Programme platform, the Lead Partner believes that eMS is a good system but sometimes it undergoes technical problems which need to be improved.

Regarding the support received from the JS and ALMONIT-MTC project officer, both the Lead Partner and the interviewed partner give very positive feedback.

For what concerns the respective National Contact Points (NCPs), the Montenegrin partner believes that the project partners are not familiar enough with the role of NCPs which, in their opinion, should be promoted more. The NCP role should be deeply explained to the beneficiaries and their role communicated to local stakeholders.

### What output indicator does your project contribute to?

The project contributes to the programme output indicator “Number of new multimodal connections for the benefit of passengers and freight” corresponding to the thematic priority “c - Promoting sustainable transport and improving public infrastructures by, inter alia, reducing isolation through improved access to transport, information and communication networks and services and investing in cross-border water, waste and energy systems and facilities”.

At the present date (October 2021) the output indicators have not been achieved yet, as their achievement is planned for the end of the project.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
4.1.2 Number of new multimodal connections for the benefit of passengers and freight	One multimodal inland water transport connection established	1	0
	Two multimodal maritime transport connections established	2	0

### Which factors have hampered or facilitated the project implementation?

Covid-19 had a high impact on all the project activities, as they had to be carried out online which made them less efficient, but also due to the fact that the offices had to close and many people involved in the project went on sick leave.

Interviewees report that because of the lockdown some activities had to be rearranged: the Application Form foresaw the establishment of the maritime connection between Italy, Albania and Montenegro, under the responsibility of Puglia Region, but because of Covid-19 this output would not be impactful not relevant, as all cruises could not be operational and the companies operating the transport connections were about to be declared bankrupted.

Thus, the output was shifted to visibility, technical and economic studies for the connection.

# Project results

## What are the results achieved by the project?

The expected project results of the project are:

1. Improved multimodal maritime transport mobility between the region of Molise and Puglia and Molise and Montenegro;
2. Studies for the improved multimodal maritime transport mobility between the Region of Puglia, Montenegro and Albania;
3. Enhanced existing land transport connectivity between the Maritime station of Termoli and the port of Bari due to increased multi-modal maritime mobility within the program area Region of Molise and Puglia;
4. Improved multimodal lake transport mobility between Albania and Montenegro by establishing the line between Virpazar and Shkoder.

Another expected project result is the establishment of multimodal lake transport between Virpazar and Shkoder and the establishment of a naval route Bar-Bari-Shengjin, on the basis of the “*Economic technical feasibility study of the cross-border maritime connection service between Bari – Bar; Bari – Shengjin; Shengjin – Bar*” to be carried out by the end of project by the Puglia Region for future cooperation scenarios.

The project contributes to the following programme result indicator: “*Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions*”.

The following table reports the project’s result indicators and their level of achievement. The targets are expected to be reached at the end of the project after the finalisation of construction works and tendering procedures for the transport connections. An agreement between the Government of Albania and the Government of Montenegro has been signed.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions	Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans	6	1
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	6	0
	Number of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements	80	0
	Number of trained persons	200	0

For what concerns the state of the art, the following deliverables have been produced until October 2021:

- Deliverable T1.1.1: European, national and Regional legislative framework for mobility and Maritime connections assessed
- Deliverable T1.1.3: Study on new multimodal maritime transport route between the ports of Termoli and Bar
- Deliverable T1.3.1: Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Assessment prepared
- Deliverable T1.3.2: Maritime and inland Vessel Traffic Management Assessment
- Deliverable T1.3.4: Bathymetric Study of the Shkodra Lake

### **What is the added value of your project?**

The partners report that the area has common natural heritage and the countries of the programme area have positive relations one with another, in terms of both economic and political relations. For this reason, the partners believe that the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro creates a very useful means to exploit this potential and to increase socio-economic interaction among local and central public authorities.

Particularly, partners report that transport plays a very important role in the cross-border relations among partners, as per se they entail the need for joint actions and coordination: as mentioned in the Application Form, “by design, the connectivity projects cannot obtain funding from EU, or other IFI, if they miss the cross-border element”. Thus, in the transport sector the cooperation is an essential element and for this reason the partners see the project as an opportunity to strengthen relations for future coordination.

For instance, for Albania, this is the first intervention in international inland water transport.

## **Durability and capitalisation potential**

### **How do they plan to make outputs and results sustainable over time?**

The project partners already have agreements in place for ensuring sustainability to the project results: for what concerns maintenance costs and future use of the infrastructure after the project, on the Albanian side the Municipality of Shkodra (project Associated Partner) already has an investment agreement in place which foresees that the Municipality will take up the reconstruction and maintenance costs with their own funds.

In Montenegro, the maintenance of the port of Virpazar will be ensured with national funds.

Also, in late October the Region Puglia (Mobility Infrastructure Department) published a call for the expression of interest for defining a monitoring plan for the implementation of the pilot action “Metro Mare” (maritime

transport route connecting Molise and Puglia Regions, specifically Bari, Manfredonia, Vieste, Termoli), and the follow up plan to ensure sustainability of such pilot action also beyond the end of the project ALMONIT-MTC.

Furthermore, the infrastructures built by ALMONIT-MTC are by definition inserted in a wider framework, as they are connected with other infrastructures funded by other donors, which will enhance the opportunity of being renovated and maintained through time. The Albanian Lead Partner reports that the country is planning to carry out several investments which are interconnected.

For what concerns the development of a new common project proposal, the partners haven't discussed this possibility yet.