

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



Interreg - IPA CBC
Italy - Albania - Montenegro



Final evaluation report

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Acronyms

CP – Cooperation Programme

CPR – Common Provision Regulation

EQ – Evaluation Question

ETC – European Territorial Cooperation

EU – European Union

IPA – Instrument of Pre-Accession

JMC – Joint Monitoring Committee

JS – Joint Technical Secretariat

LP – Lead Partner

MA – Managing Authority

NIP – National Info Point

PA – Priority Axis

PP – Project Partner

SO – Specific Objective

TA – Technical Offer

I.Executive summary - response to the evaluation questions

This executive summary provides responses to the evaluation questions.

I.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROGRAMME TO THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SMES

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the creation of networking actions involving business support organizations for supporting the internationalization of SMEs in the area?

Generally, projects financed under all SO contributed to creating and consolidating cross border networks. In case of projects financed under SO 1.1, the networks created involve SMEs, business support organisations, research centres and other key business actors. These networks primarily aim at increasing the technology transfer and the competitiveness of the SMEs in the national and international market. For example, the standard project **HISTEK** created an innovation community network that defines the common standards to be adopted in the education systems in order to train highly qualified young technicians. In addition to fostering the development of high-skilled employees, this network allowed cross-border SMEs to develop real and sustainable competitiveness and facilitate the technicians mobility at cross-border level, improving SMEs internationalization capacity. Contributions aimed at bolstering the innovation capabilities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and, consequently, boosting their potential for international expansion can also be attributed to thematic projects. As an illustrative example, **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth** initiative establishes a cross-border Blue Growth Cluster comprising 60 registered businesses and research entities, along with an online platform dedicated to capacity building in the field of Blue Growth.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to create actions for improving access to research results and technology transfer for SMEs?

Networks created under SO 1.1 are primarily aimed at increasing technology transfer to SMEs. An example is offered by **FILA** that addressed the lack of innovation characterising the agri-food sector. Basically, the project encouraged the interactions between research and SMEs through the realisation of cross border “Fertilization and Innovation Labs in Agri-food”. Another interesting example is offered by the hub established by **INERRAnT** that contributed to the dissemination of best practices in the industry 4.0 field. Similarly, the thematic project **FOOD4HEALTH** established agro- food and fisheries clusters and networks among universities and research centres specialized in agro-food and MSMEs, with the aim of enhancing technology transfer from the research sector to SMEs.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to promoting innovative start-ups, clusters and networks?

As underlined in chapter 5.3, the creation of cross border networks is one of the most common types of outputs of the projects financed under the 1st call. Under SO 1.1, the programme has contributed to creating and/or consolidating several networks involving key actors, such as policy makers in charge of innovation policies, business support organisations, research centres and SMEs. In some cases, project activities also led

to the establishment of new clusters focused on specific topics. Among the most significant examples, the above mentioned **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth** initiative establishes a cross-border Blue Growth Cluster comprising 60 registered businesses and research entities and the CBC cluster created by **HISTEK**.

To what extent has the Programme helped to promote the development of innovative approaches and funding tools to strengthen skills and encourage entrepreneurship for innovation, including social innovation (such as social inclusion, business angel networks, crowdfunding, open-innovation, and start-up lab, ...), and the improvement of the health system (development of new services, e-health)?

While it is reasonable to expect the territorial cooperation would yield enhanced policy instruments such as funding tools, as a prominent outcome, the situation differs when it comes to initiatives specifically aimed at bolstering SME competitiveness. In these cases, the potential for fostering greater synergy and integration among regional innovation policies appears to be somewhat limited. Even within thematic projects, which considering the characteristics of their partnerships, would logically be expected to exert a substantial influence on the formulation of public policies, the evaluation results do not demonstrate significant impacts on the development of new policies to support innovation.

In contrast, the programme offers examples of projects contributing to the improvement of the healthcare sector. Among these the project **PHASE**, developed innovative solutions in the field of eHealth and contributed to increase the quality (both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness) of the specific healthcare services and promoted the Cross-Border cooperation among private and public stakeholders through the creation of an international network for the promotion of common strategies in eHealth.

1.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROGRAMME TO PROMOTING GREATER ATTRACTIVENESS OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL ASSETS AND TO IMPROVE SMART AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the development of common models and plans for the management of smart and sustainable tourism, stimulating the skills of public operators and civil society stakeholders, also favouring a bottom-up approach?

Most of projects funded under SO 2.1 developed common models and plans for the management of smart and sustainable tourism. For instance, **Co.Co.Tour** developed a cross border eco-museum model and a common strategy, focused on community tourism; **NEST** developed a Smart Tourism Destination Action Plan; **REGLPORTS** developed a Cross border nautical tourism plan; **wISHfUI** developed a common action plan for the smart management of tourist destinations to be adopted by the public authorities of the Programme area. These outputs show the capacity of the programme to mobilise local actors (also through bottom-up approaches) in developing new models and approaches for the innovation of the tourism offer of the area. However, despite the relevant number of activities and outputs related to the management of smart and sustainable tourism, the impact of the projects did not lead to the integration or harmonisation of the tourism policies in the cross-border area.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the development of distinct and diversified tourism products and to the definition of new services targeting specific target groups (e.g., disabled, young and old, etc.) and sectors (food and wine, sports, religious tourism, etc.) including through small-scale investments and demonstration projects?

Some of the projects financed under SO 2.1 aimed at improving the quality of the tourism offer of the area, by targeting specific types of target groups and sectors. Concerning target groups, **WISHfUI** led to the adoption (by the project partners) of a common action plan for the smart management of tourist destinations which provides for specific actions to increase the accessibility for tourists with diseases and special needs to cultural and natural programme areas. **Co.Co.Tour** developed a cross border eco-museum model also targeting specific types of groups (young, foreigners, and disabled in particular). On the other hand, with regards to specific sectors, the food and wine one is considered one of the key diversifying sector thanks to the approaches developed by **NEST** and **Co.Co.Tour**. In this regard, it is worth noting that the gap analysis performed by the Programme in 2018 indicated the following missing topics for the targeted call: Promote tourism offer and services for families, Tourism offer and services linked to sport/adventure, Promote tourism offer and services for youngsters

To what extent has the Programme contributed to promote actions having an impact on the protection and quality of the environment, on the enhancement of lesser-known destinations, protected areas (parks, Natura 2000 sites) and cultural heritage of the area?

The promotion of sustainable approaches in the tourism sector is the key objective of most of the projects financed under SO 2.1. By way of example, **3D-IMP-ACT** developed specific technological solutions (e.g. Virtual Reality Platform) for the natural and cultural heritage of the area including lesser-known destinations.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the creation of cross-border cooperation platforms (cooperation platforms for creativity in the southern Adriatic) and networks of cultural and creative industries, also promoting public-private partnership?

Projects financed under SO 2.2 supported the creation of networks among the stakeholders of the cultural and creative sectors. For instance, **ADNICH** created a South Adriatic network between Italy, Albania and Montenegro aimed at developing joint artistic productions; **CIRCE** consolidated a network of public sector institutions whose primary role is the development of local and regional policies to foster the development of cultural and audio-visual sector. **EarPieCe** set up a cross-cultural network around the popular musical repertoires aimed at studying, comparing and classifying the artistic production of existing music repertoires. A contribution to the dynamisation of cultural and creative networks has also been offered by small scale projects: **NetFolk** consolidated a network of folk music associations to develop an innovative, creative and cultural product; **REMOTE** created a network to export some best practices of site management in the programme area; **CAVES** (under SO 2.1) created a cross-border network to exchange experiences, skills and good practices, mainly related to the use of natural cavities.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to new creative productions and to enhance the cultural heritage of the area?

Projects financed under SO 2.1 contributed to new creative productions. An example comes from **ADNICH**, that despite limitations to travel due to COVID-19, led to the creation of new theatre productions and to the organization of a cross-border festival (organized through a YouTube Channel). Another example is the project **EarPieCe**, which created a new shared transboundary music repertoire and promoted new interregional music compositions. The new compositions were performed in festivals in the Programme area, with specific regards to the Three Nations Festival organized by the project. Also, the project **CIRCE** supported the development a web series of nine episodes on the subject of “journey” to promote the natural, cultural, artistic and architectural heritage of the Programme area.

1.3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSS-BORDER GOVERNANCE FOR POLICIES TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROMOTE THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES, RESOURCE EFFICIENCY, RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES AND THE TRANSITION TO A SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE LOW-CARBON ECONOMY

Have the conditions been created for a lasting cooperation between institutional actors and private actors in the prevention and management of risks deriving from climate change?

Projects financed under PA 3, and more specifically under SO 3.1 led to the creation and consolidation of cross border networks in the field of risks prevention and risks management.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to strengthening technical and scientific capacities, to create cross-border platforms and innovative solutions for research, observation and monitoring, and to the development of common knowledge and data gathering tools in support of integrated environmental and landscape planning activities, according to European directives?

Looking at the projects financed under SO 3.1 we can observe several activities aimed providing innovative solutions for research, observation and monitoring. For example, **WELCOME** not only carried out research on marine litter but also created a valid background for future research and monitoring activities, especially in the two IPA countries. In fact, thanks to the project, the University of Montenegro carried out specific monitoring activities that contributed to harmonise the monitoring approaches of Montenegro to the EU standards provided for the EU Marine Framework Directory. Similarly, the thematic project **TO BE READY** carried out specific pilot actions for testing solutions of natural risk management and biodiversity protection.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the development of joint plans for the management of cross-border habitats and ecosystems?

The projects analysed through the web-survey and the case studies offer examples of activities contributing to the development of joint plans for the management of cross-border habitats and ecosystems. For instance, **LASPEH** contributed to develop a transnational strategy aimed at preserving common species and habitats, in particular it is meant for the species protected by EU Directives 92/43/EEC and 79/409/EEC and/or threatened by environmental variations caused by climate changes and wrong management. Also, **WELCOME** defined a Common marine litter management plan (however, the project partners believe that such plans can be impactful if extended beyond the programme area's borders). Similarly, the thematic project **CrossWater** developed an Integrated Water Management System Plan, to improve the cross-border framework conditions for the management of water resources.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the implementation of measures to raise awareness among farmers on the negative effects of excessive use of chemicals on the water cycle and on the promotion of environmentally friendly farming practices?

One of the most significant outcomes of projects funded through PA 3 is the heightened awareness of local stakeholders. Whether they are standard, thematic, or small-scale projects supported within this axis, they all play a role in fostering greater involvement of local actors in matters pertaining to the environment. For more in-depth information, please refer to chapter 5.2). Nonetheless, it's worth noting that the emphasis on

addressing the adverse effects of excessive chemical usage on the water cycle and promoting eco-friendly farming practices remains somewhat limited in these initiatives. There are few evidences about these types of impacts: **FILA** and **AWeSOMe** contributed to these measures through the creation of innovative clusters and networks between research and business actors of the agro-food system, and by testing and promoting the reuse of waste as a green thermal insulating material.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the cross-border exchange of regional / national good practices in the field of renewable energy sources with the aim of developing common models for energy planning, increasing endogenous renewable energy potentials and achieving energy efficiency goals?

The creation of cross border networks is one of the most common type of outputs of the projects financed under the first call. Under SO 3.2, these networks mainly serve the exchange of practices in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. For example, **REEHUB** created a network of Hubs located in public buildings in each region involved. The Hub is meant to serve as a reference point, allowing the sharing of experiences among countries with similar backgrounds (Mediterranean) as an “agora” where local policy makers can have open dialogues with building material industries, designers and green SMEs for the implementation of local energy plans. Also, the project **AWeSOMe** tested and promoted the reuse of agro-waste as a green thermal insulating material that can enhance energy efficiency in buildings.

Have public administrations identified and adopted European standards and created a sustainable energy mindset at local community level?

Exchanges of practices between EU public authorities and local authorities from IPA countries are among the key activities financed under SO 3.2. In this sense, the Programme is paving the way for increasing the adoption of EU standards in IPA contexts. By way of example, **REEHUB** contributed to the adoption of new policies addressing the nZEB directive¹ in Albania and Montenegro. However, the adoption of EU standards in the RES and REU sector for public administration is one of the missing topic identified by the Programme gap analysis, addressed by the targeted call for proposal.

Have the actors developed local action plans for sustainable energy (also by promoting citizen/stakeholder participation)?

REEHUB led to the adoption of seven energy efficiency actions plans that were developed and discussed with the involvement of local communities. **ENEA** enhanced the elaboration of a joint strategy on energy efficiency, **DE-RESS** focused on implementing a renewable energy community strategy while **Re-sources** developed a smart industry development strategy.

Have the actors conducted feasibility studies, identified financial opportunities and implemented pilot initiatives to achieve the energy efficiency objectives in public buildings (or other initiatives)?

AWeSOMe project partners conducted a set of open labs for prototypes (pilot actions) in each region to test the effectiveness of different agricultural waste material converted into insulating panels for public buildings.

¹ Nearly zero-energy buildings Directive 2010/31/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL, aims at promoting the use of energy from renewable sources in buildings, in order to lower their consumption and the amount of energy produced. This will increase the level of energy performance of both public and private buildings.

I.4 CONTRIBUTION TO INCREASE CROSS-BORDER ACCESSIBILITY, PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SERVICES AND IMPROVE PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Have the funded interventions contributed to improving the accessibility of the area?

Projects financed under SO 4.1 offer examples of outputs and results showing a contribution to the improvement of the accessibility of the area. The case study on the project **SAGOV** highlights the contribution of the project to the improvement of interoperability and connectivity in the field of maritime transport.

Has multimodal transport been improved?

Projects financed under SO 4.1 offer some examples of outputs and results showing a contribution to the improvement of the multimodal transport. The project **PORTS**, for instance, developed a multimodal transport network chart that shows possible connections for the different modes of transport between origins and destinations, while the project **SAGOV** created a Transport Connectivity e-platform to promote a common and coordinated governance of the maritime transports, including multimodal transport systems.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to improving the cross-border network of customs stakeholders to improve customs procedures for passenger and freight traffic?

Project funded offer some examples of results contributing to the improvement of customs procedures for passenger and freight traffic. Namely, the project **ISACC** analysed procedures and best practices for the harmonisation of customs procedures in the Programme area.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to fostering links between the main cross-border transport infrastructures and the trans-European corridors of the EU, aimed at promoting sustainable transport in the region, also by making small-scale investments in advanced services and physical infrastructure?

The project **SAGOV** offers a clear example on how the Programme is fostering the links with the trans-European corridors. During the conference that marked the end of the project activities (*Adriatic Connectivity Forum*, 18th of February 2021), representatives of both Italian and IPA public institutions discussed about possible opportunities in the South Adriatic Area that may arise from the Connectivity Agenda, in order to increase trade competitiveness and maritime safety not only in the specific Programme area, but also in the East-West route, that goes from the Black Sea to the Italian Adriatic regions (the so-called Corridor VIII). Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, lights were turned on the Corridor VIII as an alternative route, and the project contributed to enhancing the strategic relevance of the route at the European level.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to improving the intra-regional connectivity of the area as a hub for both freight and passengers to and from other destinations?

The project **PORTS** offers an example of how the Programme is contributing to the improvement of the intra-regional connectivity. Indeed, the project develops new sustainable solutions for maritime transport and sustainable mobility networks in order to strengthen and improve internal links of tourist transport and pleasure cruises. Integrated transport (passenger and freight) are also strengthened across Ionian and Adriatic Seas, in order to boost sustainable development and full inclusion of areas characterized by complex accessibility.

To what extent has the Programme contributed to the improvement and to the exchange of skills in terms of sustainable transport systems for both operators and those in responsible for the management?

The project **PORTS** implemented online capacity building workshops for strategic management of ports, addressed to operators and those responsible for ports management. However, the gap analysis outcomes suggested to further developed the topic through the targeted call for proposal.

2 Introduction

The Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme involves two Italian regions (Puglia and Molise) and all the territories of two countries affected by the pre-accession process (Albania and Montenegro).

Figure 1 -IPA II Program - CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro - Cooperation area



Programme budget for 2014-2020 is 84.1 million euros. In total, the Programme funded 80 projects (excluding TA):

- 32 standard projects financed under the 1st call for proposal: 7 projects under axis 1, 14 projects under axis 2, 7 projects under axis 3 and 4 projects under axis 4.
- 8 thematic projects, focusing on the following topics: Telemedicine for SMEs; Internationalisation/governance for SMEs; Agro-food for SMEs; Tourism; Culture; Risk management and Civil Protection; Water management; Transport.
- 20 standard projects and 20 small scale projects financed through a targeted call. This call targeted specific topics not sufficiently covered by the previous calls.

In January 2021, t33 has been commissioned by ARTI, *Agenzia Regionale per la Tecnologia e l'Innovazione* of Puglia Region, to perform the ongoing evaluation of the Programme. In coherence with what proposed in the Technical Offer, the evaluators submitted the following reports during the period of evaluation:

Submission date	Report name
2021	Thematic report on the results of the projects financed under the first call
	First report on the Programme efficiency and effectiveness
	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
	Thematic report about the impacts of the Programme at the level of each SO
	Thematic report on thematic projects
	Report on the Programme contribution to EUSAIR

2022	Report on the quality of the partnership and involvement of target groups
	Contribution to the Annual Implementation Report
	Thematic report on Small-scale projects
	Thematic report on thematic projects (update)
	Preliminary assessment of the of Simplified Cost Options developed by the Programme Authorities in the context of Art. 94.2 EU Reg. 2021/1060
2023	Contribution to the Annual Implementation Report

The present report represents the final stage of the evaluation process expressed in the table above, and it provides insights and conclusions regarding the results of the projects financed under the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro.

The final evaluation report is divided into the following sections:

- 1) Analysis of the progress in the implementation of the Programme;
- 2) Analysis of the impacts;
- 3) Annexes which present the case studies' 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 selected projects, etc.). The following chapter provides full details on the methodology used by the evaluators.

3 Methodological approach

The main objective of this evaluation is to assess the results of all the projects financed under the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro. Moreover, the analysis contained in the next chapters include differentiations and insights depending on Specific Objectives and projects calls. The table below summarizes the elements evaluated in this report.

Table 1 - Elements evaluated




Elements evaluated	Sub-elements
Analysis of the progress in the implementation of the call	Types of beneficiaries
	Financial progress
	Output indicators
	Result indicators
Analysis of impacts	Project outputs
	“Direct results”
	Cross-border added value
	Contribution to EUSAIR
	Project sustainability e process capitalisation

The evaluation of the presented elements is based on the analysis of both primary and secondary data. The analysis of Programme documents and administrative data retrieved from the Programme monitoring and reporting system served as the main starting point for the evaluation. Additionally, the analysis has been further refined with the information collected during the analysis period through interviews, case studies, and web surveys. This data was used to develop the previous reports and serves as informative material for the analysis conducted in this final report.

To enhance this extended volume of information, new data collection was also carried out between May and August 2023. Firstly, between May and June 2023, a web survey involving all project Lead Partners was conducted to gather information on the progress made by the projects in terms of outputs and results, their cross-border added value, and their contribution to EUSAIR. Furthermore, between June and August 2023, the evaluators conducted 9 case studies, which included 18 interviews with project Lead Partners and Project Partners. Among them, 5 are an update of the case studies previously conducted by t33-NAXTA in 2021, while 4 ex novo case studies are based on targeted projects. The case studies were selected in agreement with the JS and ensured a balanced coverage of program-specific objectives and countries.

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

Table 2 - Data sources

Desk analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme documents • Programme web site and projects portals • Application forms and progress reports • Available literature on policy and programme • Data from project evaluation survey launched by the JS
	Available databases (e.g. <i>cohesiondata</i>)
	Data retrieved from the monitoring and reporting system
Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews and case studies conducted for the development of the previous reports conducted in 2021 and 2022 • 9 case study report² in 2023, for a total of 18 interviews with project Lead partner and Project partner
Web surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web survey addressed to Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme beneficiaries (2021 “first call”, 2022 “thematic” and 2023 “all projects”)

² Case studies reports are available in the Annexes.

4 Analysis of the progress in the implementation of the call

4.1 TYPES OF BENEFICIARIES

The 80 projects approved involve 368 partners (including the 80 LP). As illustrated by the table below, 45% of beneficiaries come from Italy. Partners from Albania and Montenegro represent respectively the 31% and 24% of the total. Looking to lead partners, beneficiaries from Italy leads 60% of the projects, while in case of Albania and Montenegro, the percentage of LP is respectively 28% and 13%.

For what concerns the distribution of the allocated budget across the countries, also in this case Italy leads with 47% of the budget allocated to Italian beneficiaries, followed by Albania (29%) and Montenegro (24%).

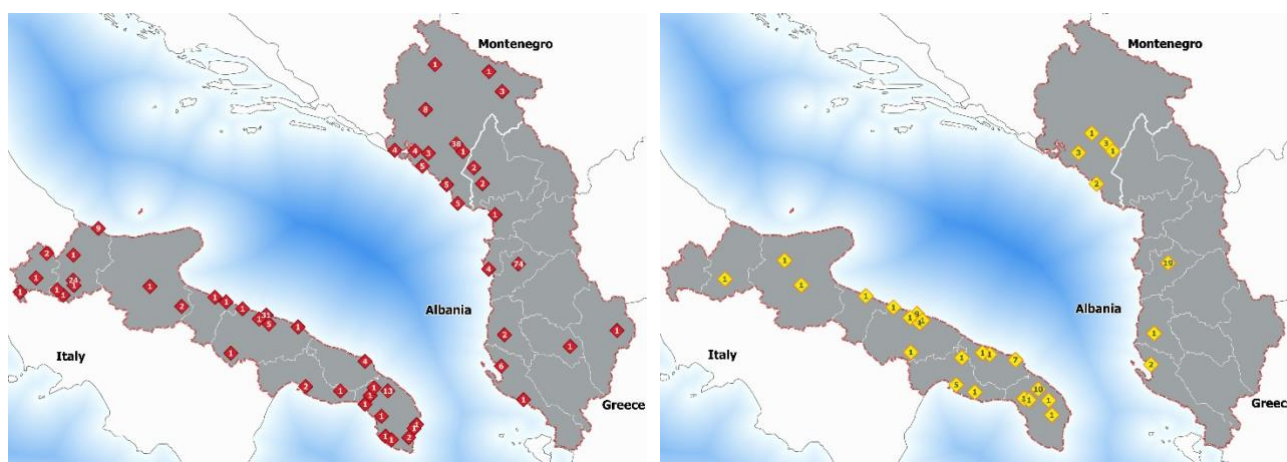
Table 3 Distribution of partners, LP and budget across countries

Country	N. partners	N. LP	Budget MEUR
ALB	116	22	24,3
ITA	165	48	39,9
MNE	87	10	19,8
Tot	368	80	84,1

Source: eMs

The two maps below illustrate the geographical distribution of the partners and lead partners across the cooperation area. As the maps show, beneficiaries are concentrated in the main cities (Bari, Lecce, Podgorica and Tirana).

Map 1 Geographical distribution of partners (left panel) and lead partners (right panel)



Source: DB list of operations approved + eMs

The analysis of the data reveals also that the majority of partners involved in the Programme are public authorities, which account for 76% of all partners and receive 89% of the allocated budget. Looking at Table 4, it provides further insights into the distribution of partners and the budget allocated by type. Local public

authorities have the highest number of partners (101), with a budget of 20.8 million Euros. National public authorities follow closely with 64 partners and a budget of 21.4 million Euros. Among these public authorities, local governments are prevalent especially in Italy (52 partners), while national authorities, such as ministries, play a significant role in Albania and Montenegro, with 38 and 26 partners respectively.

Interest groups, including NGOs and non-profit organizations, have 59 partners, but a smaller budget of 6.6 million Euros. Finally, universities and research centers also have a noteworthy presence, accounting for 12% of the partners. Italy has 23 partners in this category, followed by 8 from Albania and 8 from Montenegro; their budget is of 6,1 million of Euros.

Overall, the data indicates a strong involvement of public partners, particularly local and national authorities, in the Programme. However, interest groups, universities, and research centers also play significant roles, contributing to the diverse range of beneficiaries in the funded projects.

Table 4 Type of partners: number and budget

Type	N. partners	Budget MEUR
local public authority	101	20.1
national public authority	64	21.4
interest groups including NGOs/no profit organization	59	6.5
regional public authority	39	16.5
higher education/research center/university	39	6.1
other	24	3.8
business support organisation	21	2.4
infrastructure and (public) service provider	9	4.9
sectoral agency	6	0.8
education/training centre and school	3	0.3
International organisation, EEIG under national law	3	0.4

Source: eMs

It is interesting to note that, according to the information provided by the JS, there is a 44% recurrence of the same partners. The percentage was calculated by dividing the total number of partners involved by the number of partners who have participated in more than one project. This provides a quantifiable measure of the frequency of repeated partnerships within the context.

Findings from previous reports: difficulties encountered in the project preparation and the support provided by the Programme

The two surveys conducted in 2021 and 2022, targeting the LPs of both small-scale and thematic projects, revealed common concerns related to the preparation phase. These concerns encompassed partnership meetings, the formulation of project ideas, and the submission process. The interviews conducted with the main Programme authorities further confirmed these difficulties in the interviews conducted by t33-Naxta during the data collection process.

Notably, the surveys provided valuable insights on the beneficiaries' perception of the support they received from the Programme during project definition and preparation. According to the analysis conducted for the small-scale projects, a significant majority of LPs (87.5%) requested clarification and support from Programme authorities in developing their proposals. Overall, all lead partners found the information they received to be helpful or very helpful.

4.2 FINANCIAL PROGRESS

The projects financed by the Programme started between 2018 and 2022. Specifically, the projects funded under the first call began in 2018, the thematic projects in 2019, and the second call (targeted and small scale) mostly in 2020. None of the projects ended before 2020, which means that all of them were affected by the emergence of the pandemic. Specifically, the impact of COVID-19 and the problems related to delays in the certification process resulted in extended deadlines for project closure. According to information provided by the JS³, more than 40% of the projects were granted deadline extensions.

Regarding the absorption of the available budget, the analysis below is based on data provided by the JS on July 15, 2023. As of this date, 55 projects have been concluded, while 35 are still in progress. The financial progress of the concluded projects is based on real data, while for the projects that are not yet concluded, a projection of the financial progress has been conducted based on the concluded projects, according to JS.

The analysis in this report considers different levels of aggregation to evaluate financial progress. Firstly, overall financial progress is calculated by adding up the expenditure of all projects (both real and projected) and dividing it by the total budget. The resulting value is 102%. This is due to the fact that seven projects (Reehub plus, SuMo, 3C, TOBEREADY, FOOD4HEALTH, ALMONIT, and CrossWater) have exceeded their budgets. However, the median value of financial progress is 91%, indicating that most projects have spent less than their budgets.

Secondly, there are differences in financial progress across different axes. While the first axis has a financial progress of 91%, all other axes are overbudget. Specifically, the overbudget is influenced by Specific Objective 2.2, 3.1, and 4.1, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Financial Progress for Axis and Specific Objectives

Axis	Expenditure/budget	S.O.	Expenditure/budget
1	91%	1.1	91%
2	108%	2.1	89%
		2.2	135%
3	106%	3.1	112%
		3.2	90%
4	101%	4.1	101%

Source: eMS (July 2023)

Finally, another level of aggregation that helps understand financial progress is determined by the call of the Programme. The analysis shows that only Thematic projects are overbudget, while all first and second calls experience underspending. Specifically, this is mostly due to the First Call for Ordinary Projects and the Second Call for Targeted Projects.

³ List of operations

Table 6 Financial Progress for Typology of Projects and Calls

Typology of Projects	Expenditure/budget	Call	Expenditure/budget
Standard	88%	1st Call for Ordinary Projects	88%
Targeted	90%	2nd Call for Projects - Targeted	89%
		2nd Call for Projects Targeted Small Scale	97%
Thematic	102%	Thematic	119%

Source: eMS (July 2023)

Findings from previous reports: Projects delays and financial differences during the implementation phase.

There are various explanations for project delays during the implementation phase. Firstly, it is worth noting that the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on projects. This is emphasized by the Lead Partners in a web survey conducted by the evaluators in 2022. Specifically, movement restrictions implemented during 2020 and 2021 forced projects to reorganize their project management, and logistical delays resulted in a slowdown of certain activities. In response to this, the Programme extended the deadlines for several projects. In fact, more than 40% of the overall projects were granted deadline extensions.

Secondly, as evident from the evaluation of the First Call Standard Projects, public authorities are the category most significantly affected by delays in certification. This assumption is further supported by the report on the Thematic Projects.

Finally, there is a positive finding from the analysis of the Small Scale projects. In this category, most of the participants stated that the financial and certification activities were "easy" or "very easy" to complete, and none of them found them "very difficult". It is worth highlighting that the respondents found the "certification of expenditure" to be easy or very easy, which indicates that the purpose of the small-scale procedures for beneficiaries, utilizing Simplified Cost Options (SCOs), has been successfully accomplished. Therefore, the utilization of SCOs can be regarded as a beneficial approach that enhances the efficiency

4.3 CONTRIBUTION TO OUTPUT AND RESULT INDICATORS

Based on the data provided in the Table 9 below, it can be observed that most of the output indicators have successfully met the target set for the year 2023. However, there are two exceptions, namely indicator CO01 (Axis 1 and 2) and indicator 4.1.2 (Axis 4), where the targets have not been achieved as expected. Additionally, it is evident that the target for 2023 was underestimated for all the axes. One possible explanation for the underestimation of the target value could be a lack of accurate data or information at the time of setting the targets. It is possible that the data used to estimate the targets for the output indicators were outdated or incomplete, leading to an underestimation of the actual target value. This could have resulted in unrealistic or overly conservative targets being set. Another possible explanation could be a lack of understanding or awareness of the full potential and impact of the projects contributing to the output indicators. If the projects were not fully evaluated or their potential outcomes were not properly assessed, it could have led to an

underestimation of the target value. This highlights the importance of conducting thorough assessments and evaluations of projects before setting targets to ensure a more accurate estimation of their potential impact. In conclusion, further efforts may be done in the next Programme to correctly estimate the target for the output indicators.

Table 7 – Projects outputs achieved 2022 and expected 2023

PA	ID	Name	Target 2023	2022	2023	Expected/ Targeted (%)
				Achieved	Expected	
1	1.1.2	Number of business and research institutions involved/offering non-financial support	11	62	92	836%
	CO01	Number of enterprises receiving financial support	11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	CO04	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	11	68	348	3164%
2	2.1.1	Number of new products, services and pilot or demonstration projects realized	4	100	83	2075%
	2.1.2	Number of valorized sites	4	44	38	950%
	2.2.2	Number of cross-border creative platforms created	4	16	20	500%
	CO01	Productive investment: number of enterprises receiving support	4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	4	23	70	1750%
3	3.1	Number of new products and services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	15	182	140	933%
	3.1.2	Number of users involved (in pilot or demonstration projects).	15	176	238	1587%
4	4.1.1	Number of new products, services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	4	21	40	1000%
	4.1.2	Number of new multimodal connections for the benefit of passengers and freight	4	2	7	175%

Source: own elaboration based on AIR 2022 and on data provided by the JS

On the other hand, the result indicators have mostly not reached the target for 2023, except for Specific Objective 2.2.

Table 8 – Projects results achieved 2022

PA/SO	Type	Name	PF Baseline	Target 2023	2020 Achieved
1/1.1	Result	Common interventions aimed to improve the cross border framework	8	15	7
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	3,9
2/2.2	Result	Cross-border networks in the cultural and creative fields	2	5	7,6
2/2.2	Result	Cross-border agreements in the cultural and creative fields	1	3	1
3/3.1	Result	Common plans enhancing and safeguarding water landscapes (including marine ones)	3	7	4
3/3.2	Result	Common plans for energy efficiency and sustainable energy production	1	4	0
4/4.1	Result	Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions	5	7	2

Source: own elaboration based on AIR 2022 and on data provided by the JS

5 Analysis of impacts

This chapter is based on the information collected through the survey and the case studies. Section 5.1 presents the types of outputs realised by the projects, section 5.2 illustrates the types of “direct results”, while the last three sections (6.3, 6.4, 6.5) provide insights on the cross added value, the contribution to horizontal principles and the contribution to EUSAIR.

5.1 PROJECTS OUTPUTS

Data collected from case studies and web survey confirm one of the key characteristics of ETC interventions: most of projects’ outputs are “intangibles”, meaning that they usually refer to elements such as the set-up of cross border networks, the carry out of awareness-raising activities and/or the elaboration/implementation of policy instruments.

The table below is based on the survey and it shows, for each SO, the percentage of respondents considering the specific type of output relevant to their 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 many SOs, projects have tested new tools and solutions.

Table 9 Types of outputs per SO

Types of outputs	TOT	OS 1.1	OS 2.1	OS 2.2	OS 3.1	OS 3.2	OS 4.1
Set up of cross border networks	78%	75%	89%	100%	50%	50%	100%
Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies, actions plan, protocols	40%	0%	89%	0%	67%	0%	100%
Implementation of joint monitoring activities	2%	0%	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%
Joint studies/research	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%
Awareness-raising and capacity building activities	42%	38%	22%	0%	33%	100%	67%
Test of new tools and solutions	47%	50%	0%	100%	67%	0%	83%
Small scale infrastructural interventions	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	17%

Source: web survey

The following sub-sections provide additional information on the main types of projects outputs by providing concrete examples from various SOs by combining the results of the most recent evaluation activities with the analyses presented in previous reports on thematic projects and small scale projects.

Most of the projects analysed are carrying out activities aimed at setting up and consolidate **cross border networks**. For instance:

under SO 1.1:

- Standard projects: **INERRAnT** established a Cross-Border Technological Network and a Cross-Border Innovation Hub. This network contributes to sharing knowledge between Universities, Government and Public Institutions, Start-up, Clusters, Trade Associations, Industrial Players, Investors Incubators and Research Centres; moreover, the Hub is a promoter of several engagement activities in order to disseminate expertise and best practices in the industry 4.0 field.
- Thematic projects: **PHASE**, **SMART ADRIA Blue Growth** and **FOOD4HEALTH** which 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** established agro- food and fisheries clusters and networks among universities and research centres specialized in agro-food and MSMEs.
- Small scale projects: **LONETA** creates an innovative collaborative space in which stakeholders, companies and authorities from the involved countries can collaborate on negative emissions technologies themes.

under SO 2.1:

- Standard projects: **DUE MARI** set up a Cross-Border network between 4 territories in order to start cooperation and exchange of best practices among territories but also to promote and valorise the unique natural and cultural resources of the area. **Co.Co.Tour** developed a cross-border model of cooperation based on heritage enhancing and tourism innovations; this cross-border model of management through the enforcement of the Tricase Port Museum and the startup of two new similar realities in Albania and Montenegro allows a significant improvement in the governance of the material and immaterial assets of the areas and services offered by the territories. **REGLPORTS** brings together and establish cross-border cooperation amongst public authorities, nautical tourism professionals, travel agents, civil organisations and SMEs that are interested in the nautical environment and sustainable development. **INTERFIDE-CRT**, where the suffix -CRT stands for “Cross-border Religious Tourism”, piloted and measured the impact of an interfaith cross-border itinerary.
- Small scale projects: **EXCELLENT** enhanced cross-border cooperation in the field of sustainable tourism, accessibility, visibility and market uptake of less-known traditions and experiences. **CAVES** created a cross-border network to exchange experiences, skills and good practices, mainly related to the use of natural cavities.

under SO 2.2:

- Standard projects: **EArPieCE** created a cross-border and shared artistic production network around the Popular Musical Repertoires. **CIRCE** consolidated a network of public sector institutions whose primary role is the development of local and regional policies to foster the development of cultural and audiovisual sector. **COMPLICITIES** created and promoted a cross-border network of Culture and Creative Industries implementing an innovative cultural route.
- Thematic projects: **3C** creates networks of cultural and creative industries to jointly develop cultural heritage products and services area.

- Small scale projects: **NetFolk** consolidated a network of folk music associations to develop an innovative, creative and cultural product, contributing to the attractiveness of the Programme area in terms of tourism offer diversification. **REMOTE** created a network to export some best practices of site management in the programme area.

under SO 3.1:

- Standard projects: **LASPEH** created a network of organizations cooperating for nature conservation and improvement of Natura 2000 sites. **ADRINET** created a network among cross-border partners regarding best practices and know-how on coastal management. **TO BE READY** developed an operational model of prevision and emergency management for flood events and forest fires.

under SO 3.2:

- Standard projects: **REEHUB** set up a network of hubs working for increasing energy efficiency in public buildings. More precisely, the project created a network of Hubs located in public buildings in each region involved. The Hub is meant to serve as a reference point, allowing the sharing of experiences among countries with similar backgrounds (Mediterranean) as an “agora” where local policy makers can have open dialogues with building material industries, designers and green SMEs for the implementation of local energy plans. **AWeSOMe** set up a cross-border network with the aim of promoting sustainability in buildings.
- Small scale projects: **SECS** had the main goal of developing a community relying on smart energy, involving young researchers, students, smart energy providers and consumers. **DE-RESS** created strong connections between economic operators, general public and public bodies in order to promote the creation of new "Community Cooperatives" on the importance of common efficiency and sustainable energy plans.

under SO 4.1:

- Standard projects: **EFINTIS** contributed to the development of agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solution; this approach has the objective of boosting maritime transport, short-sea shipping capacity and cross-border ferry connectivity. **ALMONIT** studied the economic technical feasibility of the cross-border maritime connection service between Bari – Bar, Bari– Shengjin, Shengjin-Bar; This study is intended to support the on-going cross-border mobility between the Italian regions (Puglia and Molise) and those of the countries of the opposite Adriatic coast, Montenegro and Albania. **ISACC** developed an interoperable platform that supports customs anti-fraud controls and inspection activities, promoted the sharing of best practices and delivered webinars to improve the customs skills of officials and private operators, with the final aim to facilitate the procedural harmonisation in the sector.
- Thematic projects: **ALMONIT - MTC** develops a cooperation platform/network to improve multimodal connections and to facilitate and promote sustainable cross border cooperation in the project area.
- Small scale projects: **SkEye** fosters collaboration among R&D (universities and research centers), industries, SMEs and policy makers to exploit the innovation potential of future aerospace. **ECSYT** created a network of economic operators in southern Adriatic ports while **PORTS 4.0** implemented a solid network of public and private stakeholders in the field of logistics and maritime transport for smart and sustainable development.

Almost half of the projects analysed are contributing to the elaboration and implementation of joint strategies, action plans, protocols. For instance:

under SO 2.1:

- Standard projects: **Co.Co.Tour** developed a cross-border eco-museum model and a common strategy, focused on community tourism. **REGLPORTS** developed a Cross border nautical tourism plan. **INTERFIDE-CRD** set up a Common Action Plan with a joint declaration of intents, containing both legally binding and programmatic parts, that will be the basis for further development, scale-up and transferability endeavour.
- Thematic projects: **DUE MARI** developed a common strategy and action plan for sustainable tourism in programme area.
- Small scale projects: **CAVES** promoted the implementation of common action plans for smart management of tourist destinations to be adopted by public authorities in the Programme area, while **EXCELLENT** developed a sustainable model to promote cross-border destinations by valorising cultural heritage and natural resources of less developed areas. **FRIENDS4FAMILY** proposed a Cross-Border quality branding for family tourism in rural areas, while **CASTER** developed a common and sustainable cross-border sports tourism plan.

under SO 2.2:

- Small scale projects: **NetFolk** develops a joint strategy contributing to the attractiveness of the Programme area in terms of tourism offer, while **REMOTE** fosters the creation of a community-led local strategy for urban memory development.

under SO 3.1:

- Standard projects: **ADRINET** developed an environmental risk management plan; **BLUE LAND** developed a common model for participatory management and monitoring of biodiversity and ecosystem services in selected marine coastal areas; **LASPEH** defined a common strategy to preserve the natural heritage and the landscape in the low Adriatic area.
- Thematic projects: **CrossWater** developed an Integrated Water Management System Plan, to improve the cross-border framework conditions for the management of water resources.

under SO 3.2:

- Small scale projects: **ENEA** enhanced the elaboration of a joint strategy on energy efficiency, **DE-RESS** focused on implementing a renewable energy community strategy while **Re-resources** developed a smart industry development strategy.

under SO 4.1:

- Standard projects: **ISACC** defined protocols and procedural flow in order to enhance and support regulatory advancements in the management of inspection processes; **EFINTIS** developed an Action plan for development of ICT connection which aimed at improving connections among ports in order to meet modern technological requirements.
- Small scale projects: **SkEye** favoured the endorsement of EU regulations in the aerospace sector in the two IPA countries while **ECSYT** developed a common strategy to increase coordination and efficiency in southern Adriatic ports.

Most of the projects analysed are carrying out awareness-raising and capacity building activities. For instance:

under SO 1.1:

- Standard projects: **HISTEK** promoted the development of a new transnational tertiary education level course (theoretical and practical activities) focused on the acquisition of job-specific

competencies, transversal skills and critical knowledge co-designed by SMEs and Educational institutions.

- Thematic projects: **PHASE** tests capacity building and training schemes for SMEs.
- Small scale projects: **LONETA** organised B2B meetings and workshops to foster early-stage and pilot investments on negative emissions technologies in Puglia, Albania and Montenegro.

under SO 2.1:

- Standard projects: **REGLPORTS** developed a strategic tool named “REGLPORTS Area Brand”; this encompassed a set of marketing and communication methods that helps to distinguish REGLPORTS’ touristic product (destinations, routes, activities, etc.) and raise awareness of tourists and firms.
- Small scale projects: **CAVES** developed workshops and initiatives in the speleological tourism sector, while **EXCELLENT** implemented two workshops and one incoming event with travel bloggers to foster networking, capacity-building, education and product validation for a Sustainable Tourism Development. Through workshops, study visits, and B2B meetings, **FRIENDS4FAMILY** proposed innovative services for family-friendly tourist hospitality, while **CASTER** organised conferences focused on the valorisation of sport tourism destinations, as well as institutional seminars, an incoming mission and B2B meetings targeted to public and private tourism stakeholders. **EXTRA** developed a joint programme of workshops and B2B experience laboratories, following the principles of sustainable tourism, with a focus on parks, Natura 2000 sites, traditional agricultural practices, and typical products.

under SO 2.2:

- Small scale projects: **NetFolk** carried out two training and knowledge exchange workshops (one in Puglia and one in Albania), involving local music associations and artists.

under SO 3.1:

- Standard projects: **ADRINET** organised capacity building activities for fishermen.
- Thematic projects: **TO BE READY** delivered training activities to operators in the forecasting, monitoring and emergency response. **CrossWater** implemented awareness raising campaigns addressed to stakeholders to promote the sustainable use of water resources and avoid wastages.
- Small scale projects:

under SO 3.2:

- Standard projects: **REEHUB** organised roadshows for stakeholders. **AWeSOMe** set up pilot labs on technical solutions with bio-based building materials; this activity increased the awareness of the involved countries about the adoption of innovative construction strategy.
- Small scale projects: **ENEA** organises dedicated workshops to enhance the capacity of public authorities to perform excellent energy efficiency in buildings, while **DE-RESS** teaches private and public stakeholders about new European measures and innovative solutions in the field of energy efficiency. **Re-sources** disseminated new practices related to energy saving and energy efficiency in the industrial sector.

under SO 4.1:

- Standard projects: **EFINTIS** organised dissemination events for presenting project activities and increase knowledge of wider audience regarding Intermodal transportation and ICT systems.
- Thematic projects: **ALMONIT - MTC** organises exchange of practices in the field of sustainable transports.

- Small scale projects: **SkEye** enhanced knowledge transfer and market uptake of smart aerospace technologies, while **TRADAM** organised two international conferences (1 in Italy, 1 in Albania) to enable a virtuous exchange of expertise, professionals, best practices, and market opportunities in the Programme area. **ECSYT** organised a cross-border workshop, an international conference and two incoming events to improve knowledge and skills of economic transport operators.

Most of the projects analysed are testing new tools, products and solutions. For instance:
under SO 1.1:

- Standard projects: **PHASE** developed three eHealth systems: Infarct.NET for heart attack support, a platform for Integrated Care Pathways in Neurodegenerative diseases and PPlatform for remote monitoring of chronic patients. **INERRAnT** set up a new Technological Centre in Tirana. **HISTEK** set the CBC cluster, which contribute to develop common tools for assessing SMEs' needs in terms of human resources, and to create common standards to be adopted in the education systems for developing young highly qualified technician.
- Thematic projects:
- Small scale projects:

under SO 2.1:

- Thematic projects: **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.
- Small scale projects: **CAVES** developed speleological tourism itineraries, while **FRIENDS4FAMILY** proposed a cross-border quality branding for family tourism in rural areas.

under SO 2.2:

- Standard projects: **EArPieCe** analysed the local popular repertoires music; this research led to the development of a shared music network, aimed at valorising territorial peculiarities and common traditions. **COMPLICITIES** developed a Common Strategy for creative regeneration of suburbs, which represents a tool for territorial development.
- Small scale projects: **REMOTE** developed new solutions for urban regeneration.

under SO 3.1:

- Standard projects: **ADRINET** carried out specific pilot actions for testing solutions such as the test of fishing equipment endow with RFID micro-chips. **LASPEH** carried out specific pilot actions focused on selected habitat/species. **BLUE LAND** developed a common, replicable model for participatory and ecosystem-based management of biodiversity.
- Thematic projects: **TO BE READY** carried out specific pilot actions for testing solutions of natural risk management and biodiversity protection.

under SO 4.1:

- Standard projects: **EFINTIS** developed two ICT tools in Port of Termoli and Port of Durres and improved two Port Community Systems (Bar and Bari). **ISACC** designed, developed and piloted the IT platform supporting customs controls activities.

5.2 “DIRECT RESULTS”

For what 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” produced by the programme can be traced back to some macro typologies (see table below).

Table 10 Types of “direct results” per SO

Types of results	TOT	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 4.1
Increased skills and competences of key actors	53%	100%	44%	75%	33%	38%	17%
Increased awareness and more engagement of local actors	42%	0%	67%	0%	50%	88%	50%
Better governance	36%	0%	22%	63%	33%	13%	100%
Increased attractiveness of the cooperation area	11%	0%	56%	0%	0%	0%	0%
More efficient/effective delivery of public services	13%	0%	0%	0%	67%	0%	33%

Source: web survey

As the table above shows, all SOs contribute to increase the skills and the competences of the key actors.

Impacts concern the improvement of competencies of public actors and of others involved in the definition and implementation of public policies. This is particular evident under SO 1.1 and SO 2.2:

- Standard projects: **CIRCE** paved the way to apply the Italian tax incentives policy for cultural and creative industries also in Albania and Montenegro, according to their legislation, to allow enterprises working in audiovisual sector to benefit from incentives and increase their job opportunities. **INNERAnT** fostered knowledge sharing and talents mobility, by strengthening competencies and skills of the main R&D stakeholders. **HISTEK** created a dedicated cluster SMEs/Training Institutions/Public Institutions belonging to the three Countries which improved the skills of the persons involved in the territories. **AIDA** favoured the exchange of experiences, knowledge and competences through training conducted by research institutions toward production firms.
- Thematic projects: **SMART ADRIA** introduced the topic of Blue Growth in the political agenda of Montenegro, and it set the basis for the creation of discussion tables with stakeholders from the Blue Growth sectors in order to jointly identify services and solutions for SMEs. **PHASE** increased digital competences in MSMEs (also traditional ones), raised skills of public authorities and empowered common citizens in CBC area about new trends of digital processes in healthcare sector. **FOOD4HEALTH** strengthened entrepreneurial mind sets, skills and attitudes (mainly in the field of food processing, quality and consumer health).
- Small scale projects: **CAVES** organised workshops addressed to speleological tourism operators to hone/upgrade their skills on natural cavities preservation.

Similarly, under PA 3, project activities led to the improvement of public actors capacities in defining and managing public policies related to risk management or to environmental protection. For example:

- Standard projects: **REEHUB**, increased the capacities of policy makers in dealing with sustainable energy planning.
- **WELCOME**, increased the long-term Adriatic marine litter management through the development of guidelines, the testing of a soft method for coastal dune consolidation using wood ML and the increase of public awareness on sustainable development.
- **LASPEH**, provided to managing and public actors useful and transferrable tools and information/evidences on best practices to improve their management skills.
- Thematic projects: **TO BE READY** improved the quality of the emergency response by setting up more accurate measures for better prevention and preparedness, and promoted them to policymakers. **CrossWater** implemented workshops for staff and technicians from each partner country to improve upgrade their skills and competences through capacity building actions.

In some cases, benefits concern the economic actors themselves. For instance, under SO 1.1 and 2.1, several projects contributed to increase skills and competencies of the SMEs of the tourism sector:

- Standard projects: **HISTEK** contributed to increase skills and competences of workers, in particular in Albania and Montenegro, by training them on Key Enabling Technologies. **FILA** improved the innovation capacities of the SMEs of the agri-food sector. **INNOTOURCLUST**, through specific building digital labs, targeted the improvement of the skills of the economic actors of the tourism sector. **Co.Co.Tour** and **REGLPORTS** increased skills and competence of tourism actors in promoting sustainable and smart models.
- Small scale projects: **EXCELLENT** improves skills and competences of tourism operators in cultural heritage sustainable valorisation. **EXTRA** increases competences of tourism operators thanks to the implementation of experience laboratories on parks, Natura 2000 sites, traditional agricultural practices, and typical products.

Similarly, under the SO 2.2, projects activities led to increase the skills and the competences of the stakeholders in cultural and creative industries:

- Standard projects: **CIRCE**, **RECON** and **COMPLICITIES** contributed to increase the skills and the competences of relevant actors in promoting innovative cultural and creative products. **EArPieCe** developed musical knowledge through training courses that reduce the gap between popular music and cultured music.
- Small scale projects: **REMOTE** enhances site management skills of Albanian tourism operators, in particular of those involved in the preservation of the Forced Labor Camp in Tepelene.

The increase in the awareness and in the engagement of local actors is another impact, in particular for projects financed under PA 3. For instance:

- Standard projects: **REEHUB PLUS** increased the awareness of the involved countries about the existence of fully sustainable building materials, made of agricultural waste and the adoption of innovative construction strategies necessary to achieve the energy savings required by the EPBD 31/2010. **LEC** promoted the development of “local community of active energy consumers” (LEC) which cooperates with municipalities (public-private partnerships), by increasing the knowledge of local actors on sustainable Municipalities models; these models are based on local actions inspired by the change in the everyday behavior of the citizens. **SOLAR** successfully disseminated project results and best practices which impacted on the citizens’ awareness on healthy and sustainable habits that can support environmental protection and facilitate the achievement of energy policy objectives in their daily lives. **EFFECTS** developed specific common action plans for energy efficiency and sustainable energy production in school buildings. Through these activities, local communities (students, parents, teachers, etc.) located in Italy, Albania and Montenegro increased their awareness about how to maintain a sustainable environment, with the possibility to have a huge leverage effect, assuring long term impacts. **AWeSOMe** organised open laboratories on self-building of agro-waste materials to show potentials and advantages of the proposed technologies for energy efficiency in buildings, which were attended by students, representatives from SMEs and local public administrations from the targeted areas.
- Thematic projects: **CrossWater** improved stakeholders’ awareness of water leakage, waste and high consumption levels.
- Small scale projects: **SESC**, **ENEA**, **DE-RESS** and **Re-sources** contributed to enhancing knowledge and raising awareness about the need to encourage the development and implementation of clean energy solutions, focusing on smart energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency.

With regards to the impacts generated by the projects interventions on the **improvement of the governance of the area** we can observe that the Programme had a positive impact, especially concerns SO 4.1, where all the projects were involved, and SO 2.2, with 62% of the projects. For instance:

- Standard projects: **ISACC** defined information methodologies, models, processes and structures that simplify and harmonize innovative approaches in the anti-fraud inspection and control phases in Italy, Albania and Montenegro. **EFINTIS** increased the intermodal efficiency flow in port sites of the programme area, through the update of the information management systems, and the improvement of administrative procedures and commercial operations. **CRISIS** developed an ICT platform for monitoring and hazardous materials transportation. This improved the governance and the management of environmental risk situations. **EArPieCe** paved the way for setting up a creative cross border production; this network, which is composed of multiple assets including people, musical contents (traditional/modern), technologies and institutions (public/private), improved the governance of the cultural activities on the area. **AIDA** created local community networks in the cities of Lecce, Campobasso, Tirana and Ulcinj, in order to connect them in a cross-border network of communities of the Adriatic area. This represents a replicable and scalable governance model which may improve the knowledge on the Adriatic identity. **COMPLICITIES** created a joint transferable model and dedicated guidelines for the regeneration of suburbs, based on the collaboration between Culture and Creative Industries (CCIs), local communities and public institutions.

Concerning the **increased efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of public services**, it is worth noting that under SO 3.1 several of the projects analysed had a positive impact in this sense. For instance: under SO 3.1:

- Standard projects: **TOBEREADY**, **ADRINET**, **BLUE LAND**, **WELCOME**, contributed to increase the intervention capacity of the public actors in carrying out interventions for protecting environment and biodiversity.
- Thematic projects: **CrossWater** should enhance the provision of adequate responses and ensures the protection of water resource, its uses, and the balance of ecosystems.

Finally, data collected shows the contribution of projects under SO 2.1 to increase the attractiveness of the cooperation area. This represents a direct result common to all projects analysed under SO 2.1. For example: under SO 2.1:

- Standard projects: **CASTER** promoted the touristic attractiveness of the area by sustaining sustainable sport tourism through a common cross-border sports tourism-plan. **FRIEND4FAMILY** proposed innovative services for families and create a cross-border network of touristic operators for improving the quality of services offered by rural tourism infrastructures, based on public-private partnerships. **ROOTS** created cross-border thematic experiences in Albania and Puglia, to offer visitors the chance to discover natural beauties and points of historical and cultural interest. **G.W.A.** contributed to establish a sustainable, widespread, and innovative international sport and adventure tourism system.
- Thematic projects: **DUE MARI**, contributed to 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.

5.3 CROSS BORDER ADDED VALUE

Most of the project partners consider that cross border cooperation help promoting transfers of good practices (78% of respondents) and contribute to EU objectives (62%). Approximately half of the respondents consider that the added value relies on setting up transnational networks. Almost one-third of LP taking part to the survey, perceive the cooperation as an opportunity to promoting better governance, to facilitate the movement of people and goods and to facing common threats and obstacles. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who perceive benefit related to economies of scale is more limited.

Table 11 What is the added value of your project?

	TOT	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 4.1
It contributes to achieve common European objectives	62%	50%	56%	63%	50%	100%	50%
It allows to achieve economic scale	9%	13%	22%	0%	0%	0%	17%
It promotes and transfers good practices	78%	100%	78%	63%	100%	63%	67%
It promotes a better governance	29%	25%	22%	38%	67%	13%	17%
It allows to face common threats and obstacles	29%	50%	33%	13%	33%	13%	33%
It facilitates the movement of people and goods	29%	13%	11%	25%	0%	50%	83%
It promotes international networks	58%	63%	78%	75%	50%	13%	67%

Source: web-survey

In general, the project evaluation survey confirms that projects' main added value relies in the transfer of good practices and the increase cooperation among partners.

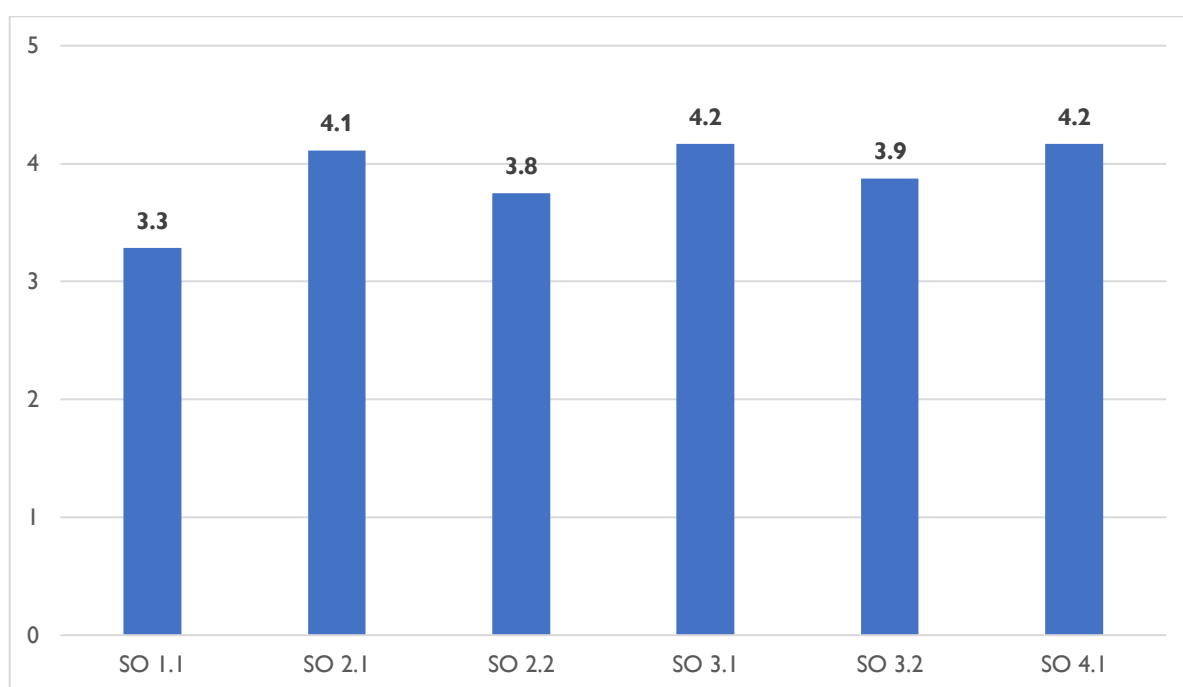
5.4 CONTRIBUTION TO EUSAIR

According to Article 27 of the 2014-2020 Common Provisions Regulation for European Structural and Investment Funds (EU Reg. No.1303/2013), programmes in regions or Member States that participate in macro-regional strategies should set out the contribution of the planned interventions in the strategies, according to the needs of the programme area. The Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme has foreseen its contribution to the implementation of the EUSAIR through its projects in its four programme priorities.

As illustrated by the table below, lead partners perceive that their projects are contributing to EUSAIR with a good level of intensity. The contribution is perceived as particularly strong in the case of LP from SO 2.1, SO 3.1 and SO 4.1. In this regard, SO 2.1. "Boost attractiveness of natural and cultural assets to improve a smart and sustainable economic development" is coherent with both Topics of Pillar 4, Diversified Tourism

Offer (4.1) and Sustainable tourism (4.2), mainly through the support to: common tourist / territorial brand building; sustainable and accessible tourist offer; thematic tourist routes; natural heritage; upgrade of tourist products. SO 3.1. “Increase cross-border cooperation strategies on water landscapes” is coherent with both topics of Pillar 3 “Environmental Quality”, i.e. Marine environment (3.1) and Terrestrial habitats and biodiversity (3.2). SO 4.1. “Increase coordination among relevant stakeholders to promote sustainable cross border connections in the cooperation area” is coherent with Pillar 2, with reference to topics 2.1 Maritime transport and 2.2 Intermodal connections to the hinterland.

Figure 2 How much does your project contribute to EUSAIR? (1=no contribution / 5= strong contribution)



Source: web-survey

Following this data, here are provided some relevant examples of the projects part of SO 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1: under SO 2.1:

- Standard projects: **Wishful** contributed to the Pillar 4, topic 4.1: The project goal is to increase the capacity of the Programme area to develop a wider touristic offer integrated to medical services, by creating an interconnected system between touristic offer and medical services, enabling people affected by particular diseases to access a wide range of services while enjoying their holidays. Thus, the aim of the project is to reduce barriers preventing people having particular diseases and/or disabilities through innovative tools and solutions.
- Thematic projects: **DUE MARI** contributed to the Pillar 4, topic 4.2: The 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. The project specific objectives are: Boost attractiveness of natural and cultural assets; Increase the cooperation of the relevant key actors for the delivery of innovative tourism products; Promote innovative practices and tools for sustainable tourism on all levels.

under SO 3.1:

- Standard projects: **WELCOME** contributed to Pillar 3, topic 3.1: The main overall objective of the WELCOME project is to support the long-term marine litter management through the development of guidelines, the testing of a soft method for coastal dune consolidation using wood marine litter and the increase of public awareness on sustainable development.
- Thematic projects: **TOBEREADY** contributed to Pillar 3: The overall objective of the project is to enhance prevention and preparedness measures of the partner countries regarding natural and man-made disasters and improve safety in the Programme area. The expected results are: a) the improvement of the ability of risk preventions in the field of forest fires and floods; b) 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.

under SO 4.1:

- Standard projects: **SAGOV** contributed to Pillar 2, topic 2.1: The SAGOV project aims to enhance the maritime connectivity networks in the South Adriatic Area. The project has the ultimate goal of challenging national institutions to prioritize projects for the implementation of new maritime infrastructures, strengthening the connectivity between South-Adriatic countries. The project idea stems from a lack of interoperability and connectivity in the field of maritime transport between the three countries. The main result refers to the Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement for maritime coordination in the South Adriatic.
- Thematic projects: **ALMONIT – MTC** contributed to Pillar 2, topic 2.2: The overall objective of ALMONIT-MTC is to increase cross-border accessibility, promote sustainable transport services and facilities and improve public infrastructures. The expected project results of the project are: a) improved multimodal maritime transport mobility between the region of Molise and Puglia and Molise and Montenegro; b) studies for the improved multimodal maritime transport mobility between the Region of Puglia, Montenegro and Albania; c) enhanced existing land transport connectivity between the Maritime station of Termoli and the port of Bari due to increased multimodal maritime mobility within the program area Region of Molise and Puglia; d) improved multimodal lake transport mobility between Albania and Montenegro by establishing the line between Virpazar and Shkoder.

5.5 PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY AND PROCESS CAPITALISATION

The process of capitalisation, in general, is a process of assimilation of the achievements. It represents the transformation of what has been acquired (individually or institutionally) into an established asset of the organisation and individuals. Thus, the primary objective is to capitalise on previously developed results while avoiding projects operating in isolation, overlapping or duplicating each other. To this end, projects are part of the policy cycle, which consists of 3 fundamental moments:

- the identification of a threat or a common need and its proposition on the political agenda (identification). In this phase, the most common actions involve research and study of the phenomenon and/or campaigns to create awareness;

- the search for common responses (formulation). This phase is realised through, for example, pilot actions, exploratory activities, experimentation of interventions and definition of methodologies and tools;
- the concrete intervention to solve a problem (implementation). In this phase, joint modes of cooperation and coordination, joint planning or joint regulation can be developed.

Capitalisation aims to develop policy from one phase to the next: from the perception of the problem to the formulation of answers, from the testing of possible solutions to implementation.

Furthermore, when analysing capitalisation activities, it is also important to take into account the sectoral and territorial dimensions of the previous programme, so as not to invest in the same economic sectors and/or territory:

- sector: diversification of investments helps to promote economic diversification, reducing over-dependence on a single sector and stabilising the economy as a whole;
- territory: a policy that invests in different geographical areas can help reduce regional inequalities, promoting a distributional balance and fairer allocation of resources. It also fosters cultural enrichment and the exchange of good practices, encouraging sustainable development and cooperation between different communities.

The table below therefore summarises in which policy cycle individual SOs can be identified, on which territorial realities interventions have been defined and in which sectors.

SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 3.2	SO 4.1
Phase of the policy cycle: identification	Phase of the policy cycle: formulation	Phase of the policy cycle: formulation	Phase of the policy cycle: implementation	Phase of the policy cycle: identification	Phase of the policy cycle: implementation
Area: target e programme area	Area: target e programme area	Area: target area	Area: programme area	Area: target area	Area: programme area
Sector: Agri-food, digital health, technological innovation, blue and green economy	Sector: (sustainable) tourism, food and wine, sport	Sector: culture	Sector: civil and environmental protection	Sector: energy efficiency	Sector: ICT, logistics, infrastructure

Specifically, in order to capitalise on the experiences of the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme, the next programming period should develop a different phase of the policy cycle and/or invest in different economic and territorial sectors. Here are provided some examples:

- **FILA (OS 1.1)** helped to develop the knowledge and skills of companies operating in the agri-food sector, particularly in the areas of Bari (IT), Korce (AL) and Niksic (ME); the new programme could: a) develop pilot actions in the sector, such as the development of new technologies; b) improve expertise in other areas; c) develop skills to enter the market in other sectors, such as bio/medtech.
- **CIRCE (OS 2.2)** developed an action plan to transfer the Italian tax incentive policy for cultural and creative industries to Albania and Montenegro. The new programme could: a) develop joint planning or joint regulation.

- **WELCOME (O.S. 3.1)**, through the development of research activities, beach cleaning and the creation of artistic installations as anti-erosion systems, has contributed to the protection of specific coastal areas; the new Programme could: a) develop joint planning for the protection of coastal areas in areas with a high density of tourism; b) develop the activities already carried out in other territories; c) strengthen protection through initiatives operating in other sectors (e.g. technology sector).
- **REEHUB (OS 3.2)** showcased best practices for audit and enhanced capacities for energy efficiency in buildings. The new programme could: a) develop pilot projects on energy efficiency in buildings; b) develop joint modes of cooperation and coordination, joint planning or joint regulations.
- **PORTS 4.0 (OS 4.1)**, as a continuation of the PORTS project financed within the first call, enabled the construction of a public-private network in the field of logistics and maritime transport based on Industry 4.0. This network was then translated into business agreements to be signed during three B2B events, one in each project country. The project has therefore already reached the final stage of the policy cycle; the new programme could: a) develop joint planning in other sectors, such as airports.
- **SAGOV (4.1)** provided an exchange of good practices, identifying the respective challenges and presenting concrete examples of integrated governance in maritime transport; the new programme could: a) develop pilot projects on maritime governance in specific areas; b) extend the exchange of good practices to other areas (e.g. common governance systems for fisheries and aquaculture).

6 Annexes – Case study reports

This section contains the case study reports of the 9 selected projects. Case studies have been selected in accordance with the JS. Project selection has been done with the aim of guaranteeing a well-balanced coverage among programme specific objectives and countries.

The main sources of information are the interviews with the project lead partner and project partner. Additionally, case studies have been elaborated based on the desk analysis of the project application form, web survey, material received from the project partners, project websites.

Detailed information per each project is reported below.

6.1 HISTEK (SO I.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

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, May 2023 and the information collected during the interview with the project LP Ministry of Education of Montenegro and the project partner Fondazione ITS “Antonio Cuccovillo”.

6.1.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 1st Call for Standard projects

Starting date: 03.04.2018

Ending date: 30.06.2021

Duration: 38 months 28 days

Overall budget: 1 099 538.36 EUR

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 947 263.23 EUR

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	Ministarstvo prosvjete Crna Gora (Ministry of Education of Montenegro)	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	230 110.22	215 284.20 (94%)
PP	Privredna komora Crne Gore (Chamber of Economy of Montenegro)	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	170 945.73	167 898.41 (98%)
PP	Fondazione ITS “Antonio Cuccovillo” (Foundation ITS “Antonio Cuccovillo”)	ITALY	Bari	147 970.65	129 406.89 (87%)
PP	Camera di Commercio, Industria, Artigianato e Agricoltura di Bari (Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Artisanship and Agriculture of Bari)	ITALY	Bari	229 400.82	216 576.39 (94%)
PP	Fakulteti i Biznesit, Universiteti “Aleksandër Moisiu” (Faculty of Business, University “Aleksandër Moisiu”)	ALBANIA	Durrës	164 260.43	128 247.24 (78%)
PP	Dhoma e Tregtisë dhe Industrisë, Tiranë (Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tirana)	ALBANIA	Tirana	156 850.51	89 850.10 (57%)
AP	Ministero dell’Istruzione dell’Università e della Ricerca (Ministry of Education)	ITALY	Rome	n.a.	n.a.

6.1.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

In order to improve SMEs' competitiveness and innovation, one of the most important leverages is represented by human resources: companies, especially those ones that have already or intend to establish new branches in the programme area, need very highly qualified technicians with internationally recognised skills, to allow and to favour their mobility in the 3 countries/region. This represents a strategic framework condition for the development of SME's cross-border market.

For this reason, HISTEK aims at enhancing SMEs' capacities of competitiveness, innovation and internationalization through the creation of a new cross border cluster in the field of education enabling the creation of common tools for assessing SMEs' needs in terms of human resources. Thus, the aim of the project is to create common standards to be adopted in the education systems for the training of highly qualified young technicians.

The cross-border cluster members are SMEs, Training Organizations and Public Institutions, strongly committed to set-up and maintain a cross-border innovation community in order to promote an innovative network able to implement effective synergies between educational institutions and enterprises, and train young people on Key Enabling Technologies (KETs).

Another objective that the project wants to reach is to set the basis for the introduction of the 5th level of EQF for KETs in the programme area.



Source: HISTEK project, Mid-term Review Meeting in Podgorica

While such offer is partially present in Albania, although not being fully structured nor spread throughout the country, in Montenegro it is totally non existing. Italy, instead, has a certified system that is seen as a best practice at the EU level.

The idea of a common framework was born under the impulse of common needs, not only of IPA countries but also of Italian SMEs working in IPA countries and needing to increase the skills of Albanian and Montenegrin workers. Particularly, the Chambers of Commerce involved in the partnership had strong interest in establishing a framework of skills assessment to promote regional labour mobility and to address the mismatch between education qualifications and the labour market.

How was the partnership set up?

The project idea was elaborate by the partnership collectively, which expressed their needs to have a stronger cooperation between cross-border SMEs and cross-border stakeholders to solve the problem of unemployment and brain drain.

The partnership involves representatives from educational institutes and Chambers of Commerce, as well as institutional partners at the national level, in order to combine the competences and needs of capacity

providing entities and then capitalise the achievements at the policy level (such as the Ministry of Education of Montenegro).

As for Albania, the country is represented by a Chamber of Commerce and by an educational institute, namely the Faculty of Business of the University “Aleksandër Moisiu” which is the only entity that is offering 5th EQF level courses in Albania.

The project also includes one associated partner, namely: the Italian Ministry of Education.

6.1.3 Project implementation

What output indicator does your project contribute to?

Project implementation foresaw several specific objectives, which correspond to project outputs.

Firstly, the project started from the identification and the analysis of SMEs needs and key competences with a specific focus on KETs, in order to define a common highly specialized profile to foster innovation, business development and competitiveness within cross-border SMEs. This allowed the creation of a joint transnational tertiary education curriculum customized on the specific needs of cross-border SMEs with co-designed (SMEs/Training Institutions) modules characterized by strong cross fertilization of competencies and involvement of both SMEs and educational also in teaching activities.

Also, the project created a dedicated cluster that acts as a networked innovation community able to improve the process of developing young people’s technical skills (and in particular on KETs) giving a tangible answer to specific cross-border SMEs needs. The clusters were designed to be based on each partner’s suggested scheme to be in line with legal framework of their country for what concerns the national registration framework.

Additionally, HISTEK created a dedicated Toolkits and Guidelines⁴ for improving SMEs capacity in the activities of recruitment, learning and mentoring, in order to enhance technical skills of workers in business innovation field. This is a very specific document for all partners which defines the framework for cooperation between SMEs and training institutions in the 3 countries, outlining how to define the structure of new curricula, the sets of learning outcomes, assessment, evaluation process, Europass certification etc.

The Lead Partner reports that the Ministry of Education of Montenegro is planning to implement pilot activities in the town of Tuzi, where the education will be provided also in English and Albanian (the town is located next to the border with Albania). The aim is to implement the first educational training once the agreement on the certification process will be reached.

In July 2023, the Lead Partner reported that the accreditation process in Montenegro was finalised, however, due to several government rearrangements within the Ministry following 2023 elections, the trainings were not licenced yet. The LP believes that the trainings might not be operational in September 2023, however the legal process was successfully accomplished.

In July 2023, the level of achievement of the project output is the following:

⁴https://histek.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/sites/histek.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/files/inline-files/D.T2.2.1_-_CBC_ASSESSMENT_TOOLKIT_EN_0.pdf

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);	Cluster agreement	1	1
	Assessment Toolkit	1	1
Number of business and research institutions involved/offering nonfinancial support.	SMEs and Training Institutions assessments	1	1
	Consortium agreement	1	1

Territorial differences were mainly due to the different educational target of the countries: while Montenegro decided to concentrate on the training programme per se in order to implement a more country-wide approach, in Albania the focus was rather on university capacities (the Albanian educational partner is in fact a university).

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation?

The project was harshly affected by structural administrative changes within the Lead Partner: following elections in 2020, the Montenegrin government underwent a rearrangement phase: the Ministry of Education was merged within the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. The new government had settled in December 2020, however at the date of May 2021 the Ministry was still operational yet and it haven't had a legal representative for a long time, which prevented the Lead Partner from submitting a request for project extension.

In 2022, the Montenegrin government was hit by a hacker attack, which resulted in a full stop of the activities for months.

Also, as of July 2023 following the 2023 presidential elections, Montenegro is under a process of staff turnover and drastic internal reform causing staff turnover at all levels, hampering the durability of project results.

Albanian partners incurred in administrative problems too, especially during the development of the qualification framework: the Agency for National Qualification was belonging to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy. This meant that, when new qualifications were developed, both Ministries had to approve the new curricula, which resulted in a long process. During the project's implementation, the Agency was restructured and its autonomy was increased.

The Lead partner reports that the Albanian partners incurred in delays due to the highly centralised FLC system with an extremely slow expenditures certification process. Also, the Albanian partners suffered from a late delivery of the pre-financing.

Furthermore, during the interview it emerged that the Albanian university has extremely complicated administrative procedures, which created additional problems in spending and in having expenditures reimbursed.

The spread of Covid 19 pandemic, also constitute a factor hampering project implementation. Indeed, the project failed in reaching the target of engaged SMEs, since this latter were in harsh difficulties. Thus, workshops and the tailored events were not and will probably not reachable for some of the partners.

The Lead Partner reports that in Montenegro it was difficult to engage the public sector in the cluster, especially Municipalities, as it was not easy to let them understand the importance of their involvement (on the Italian side, Municipalities are taking part to the cluster, which is a strong advantage for the implementation of the planned activities).

6.1.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

The project has a tangible impact towards the Axis n. 1 and Cross-cutting priorities of the Programme, namely with the following achievements:

- Improvement of the skills profile of the workforce to respond to the specific needs of cross-border SMEs in terms of innovation to fight against the economic crisis;
- creation of a networked innovation community able to improve, with a co-responsible approach, the creation of common standards to be adopted in the education systems for developing young highly qualified technicians to favour the real and sustainable competitiveness of cross-border SMEs and for allowing the mobility of technicians at cross-border level as key factor for improving SMEs capacity of internationalization.

The project was extremely innovative, as it created the only transnational 5th EQF training programme in Europe.

Even before the end of the project, some results could already be noticed: in Montenegro an educational institute joined the cluster and, upon their initiative, they developed a curriculum for dual education system in the field of KETs. In July 2023, the Lead Partner reports that there are already 7 educational institutions willing to establish such curricula in Montenegro, and that now in Montenegro there are 2 schools for high and higher VET.

Finally, the project also paved the way for setting up a new transnational tertiary education curriculum jointly managed by the 3 countries involved (Consortium agreement). Because of Covid, it was not possible to have the training curricula validated by the 3 Ministries. However, this was achieved in March 2023 with HISTEK Plus.

The project had a high policy impact in IPA countries already during its second year of implementation. Indeed, in Montenegro, thanks to the project input, the Law book for developing of qualification now has new article which commits institutions in approving and adopting training curricula that are developed under EU initiative. Before this article was inserted, curricula proposed by sector entities (CCIs, association of SMEs or consortium of representatives of SMEs) had to be submitted to the Council for National Qualifications for approval, which makes the process extremely long.

The Lead partner reports that also in Albania there were policy impacts in enhancing the recognition of national qualifications.

Furthermore, the project meets the latest (2022) recommendations issued by the European Commission to Montenegro and Albania.

As for Montenegro, the recommendations related to Chapter 26 (Education and Culture) report that the country has a good level of preparation and that some progress was made with the development of occupational standards, new professional qualification standards and new standards of qualification levels of education thanks to EU funds (including HISTEK). However, Montenegro is advised to finalise then initiate the national VET implementation plan 2022-2023 of the VET Strategy 2020-2024, as well as to put in place the evaluation mechanism of practical learning at VET and higher education levels.

For what concerns Albania, the EC report on Chapter 26 notices that some progress was made concerning VET with the establishment and strengthening of the National Agency for Employment and Skills, the continued restructuring of National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications, the implementation of the Albanian Qualification Framework Law and in the adoption of the implementing legislation for the VET Law. However, the EC pushes for Albania to ensure the optimisation of the VET system to develop services and competences in line with the needs of the labour market, and to improve professional development and training of teachers and trainers. Also, the report notes that the Optimisation Plan of VET providers, endorsed in 2020, is not yet implemented. Albania has to adopt the implementing legislation on organisation, functions and activities of VET providers as well as on their financial autonomy, and fully implement this Plan by 2023 to ensure the rationalisation and modernisation of the VET offer.

The following table indicates the project result indicators and their level of achievement (data retrieved in July 2023):

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	6	6
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	30	39
	Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements	0	0
	Number of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements	0	0
	Number of trained Persons	0	0

As for the number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans, 3 National Public bodies and 3 HEIs achieved the target.

What is the added value of your project?

Following the analysis of project web-survey the main project's added values refer to:

- the promotion and transfer of good practices
- the facilitation of movements of people and goods

With regards the promotion and transfer of good practices, it is worth to underline the role covered by the Italian partner within project partnership. Indeed, through its participation to HISTEK project, Italy could transfer good practices to the IPA countries by spreading its system of business innovation and development already considered as a model of best practice at the European level.

According to the Lead partner interviewed in July 2023, HISTEK changed the way of thinking of the Montenegrin Council for Education.

The partner ITS “Antonio Cuccovillo” believes that the project helped the ITS grow so to understand what are the difficulties encountered by the companies which they need to address by activating strategies in support to smaller, less structured and more active enterprises. Furthermore, a high number of enterprises from Apulia Region have branches in Albania, thus it is crucial for them to have the same quality of trained professionals as in Italy.

6.1.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The partnership was awarded a capitalisation project, the small-scale HISTEK Plus lead by ITS “Antonio Cuccovillo”, which allowed several achievements to be finalised. Also, the Lead Partner is interested in submitting a new project proposal under the Interreg South Adriatic new call for priority axis 4, PO 1.

The project partner ITS “Antonio Cuccovillo” reports that one of the main issues that emerged under HISTEK is the absence of formal recognition of qualifications between Italy, Albania and Montenegro, and this was the focus of two other small-scale projects that most of HISTEK partnership implemented after the end of the project. The first small-scale project was focusing on the governance aspects (assessing a common framework that facilitates cross-border 5th level training curricula), the second one was involving chambers of commerce and enterprises to align with the 5th level training curricula.

The interviewed partners report that they believe that results will be tangible in the years to come. As a matter of facts, the project has also developed a set of tools that will be made available beyond the project’s duration, namely the toolkit and the methodology for SMEs assessment. Even after the project’s closure, SMEs can benefit from technical and operative advises on how to organize, in cooperation with cross-border educational and research institutions, practical learning activities inside SMEs strengthen the links between theory and practice. The toolkit contains Guidelines and Templates on how to integrate theoretical contents into practical context. At the present day (July 2023), the toolkit was finalised and is now available on the project website.

Finally, the consortium agreement was signed in June 2021 to secure sustainability to HISTEK’s activities and results, as the consortium agreement is legally binding.

For what concerns the cluster established under HISTEK, at the present day (July 2023) the cluster is composed by almost 100 members, including enterprises, training institutions and public entities. Around one third of the new members joined under HISTEK Plus.

However, one of the problems that might prevent HISTEK's results to have long lasting effects is the change in governance: in Montenegro there is concrete risk that the high personnel turnover and re-organisation of the government structure hampers the institutionalisation of the project's achievements.

6.1.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

One of the main obstacles is the absence of formal recognition of qualifications between Albania and Montenegro (especially regarding diplomas from private training institutions).

Another aspect is the fact that the three countries have different levels of economic development and different economic settings, which made the identification of a common framework more challenging. Montenegrin economy is more focused on the tertiary sector, while Albanian industrial sector is more developed.

Also, the economic relations between the Italian programme area and Albania are certainly stronger than the relations between Italy and Montenegro.

However, this was partially overcome with the identification of common economic sectors (mainly of the manufacturing sector) which were of primary importance for all the programme area.

In July 2023, the project Lead Partner reported that the linguistic barrier created a relevant obstacle in the training process, as with the cross-border training programme being operational the training courses in Italy were held in Italian. While Italian language is moderately spoken in Albania, it is not the case for Montenegro. Thus, only Montenegrin students with an intermediate knowledge of Italian are able to participate.

Box 1 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Interview with the Ministry of Education of Montenegro on 27th July 2023
- Interview with Foundation ITS "Antonio Cuccovillo" (Italy) on 19th July 2023
- Materials received from the project partners
- Project website: <https://histek.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/>

6.2 P.A.S.T.4FUTURE (SO 2.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

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 May 2023 and the information collected during the interview with the project LP Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania and two partners from Italy, ESCOOP and the Municipality of Gravina in Puglia.

6.2.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 1st Call for Standard projects

Starting date: 03.04.2018

Ending date: 31.12.2020

Duration: 32 months 29 days

Overall budget: 1 113 056.25

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 1 042 740.60

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	Ministry of Finance and Economy	ALBANIA	Tirana	196 795.00	162 234.04 (82%)
PP	Molise verso il 2000	ITALY	Campobasso	168 465.00	168 464.72 (100%)
PP	ESCOOP - European Social Cooperative	ITALY	Cerignola	192 740.00	185 212.56 (96%)
PP	Gravina in Puglia Municipality	ITALY	Gravina in Puglia	219 825.00	211 070.92 (96%)
PP	Malësi e Madhe Municipality	ALBANIA	Malësi e Madhe	173 063.75	155 739.73 (89%)
PP	Municipality of Tuzi	MONTENEGRO	Tuzi	162 167.50	160 018.63 (98%)
AP	ITRIA - accessible, intercultural touristic-religious routes	ITALY	Rome	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Alta Murgia National Park	ITALY	Gravina in Puglia	n.a.	n.a.

6.2.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

Tourism represents one of the key fields to improve a smart and sustainable economic development for the programme area, thanks to the enormous historical, cultural, natural and environmental heritage, so widespread as a precious legacy of the past.

At the time of the project submission, the tourism market of the area displayed a significant recovery in demand, yet characterised as mass tourism, mostly centred on coastal areas during the summer months, with a low rate of innovation and adaptability of the supply.

In Italy, and even more in Albania and Montenegro, there is a common lack of services that make the vacation accessible for everyone, especially for people with temporary or permanent special needs.

The general objective of P.A.S.T.4Future is to promote and strengthen the accessible and sustainable tourism offer of the cross-border area in Italy, Albania and Montenegro through the implementation and diversification of the tourist products/services in the target areas.

As per application form, the project main objectives are:

- To create a Cross border Accessible and Sustainable (A&S) Community Tourist Destination through the diversification and innovation of tourism products and services in the target areas. Accessible tourism consists of all the services and structures that allow people with special needs (e.g. families with children, disabled, senior citizens, people with specific medical conditions, people with food intolerances, people with temporary disabilities, etc.) to satisfactorily enjoy their holiday, with no obstacles or difficulties of any sort, autonomously and in a safe and comfortable way.
- To internationally develop and improve the image of the Cross Border A&S Community Tourist Destination, characterising it as a smart and accessible tourist destination;
- To increase the income of tourist flows in the target areas, and particularly the income of people with special needs;
- To improve the skills and raise awareness among tour operators and service providers of the Cross Border A&S Community Tourist Destination with regard to tourists with special needs;
- To afford the seasonality of the tourist flows.

The project's specific objectives are:

- Implement a Cross border Accessible and Sustainable Community Tourist Destination through the diversification and innovation of tourism products and services in the target areas: the creation of a Cross border Accessible and Sustainable Community Tourist Destination is necessary for the economical and sustainable development of the area. In fact, Tourism, and in particular A&S Tourism, can be a powerful tool for the community development and the reduction of inequalities, when – as in the Project - it engages the local population and all the key stakeholders in its development. A&S Tourism contributes to rural development and reduces regional imbalances by giving communities the opportunity to prosper in their place of origin
- Develop and improve at international level the image of the Cross Border A&S Community Tourist Destination as a smart and accessible tourist destination: The activities of the Cross-border Network for A&S Tourism, and in particular of the Cross border Destination Management Organization, will allow the target territories to characterize themselves as accessible tourist destinations and

communities, able to offer customized services to the international market of tourists with special needs. A&S Tourism is an effective means for developing countries to take part in the global economy.

- Increase the incoming of tourist flows in the target areas, and particularly the incoming of people with special needs: the specialized tourist services and products offered by the Cross border Network for A&S Tourism, and in particular by the Cross border Destination Management Organization for A&S Tourism, will allow people with special needs to increase the incoming tourist flows on the target territories, due to the entry of people with special needs and their accompanying persons. Seasonal adjustment – and thus lower prices of tourist services/products on one hand, and, on the other, the possibility to travel in less crowded periods for senior citizens as well – will also contribute to increase the incoming

How was the partnership set up?

The project idea was born in 2017, when the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised informative events on cross border collaboration opportunities together with the Managing Authority Apulia Region. The Albanian National Contact Point developed a list of stakeholders that implemented similar projects in the past and tried to support the creation of new partnerships among participants. The partners of P.A.S.T.4Future met in this occasion during the informative meeting and during the launch event of the call in Bari.

The preliminary project idea was generated by ESCOOP (one of the main Italian partners with sound experience in the sector), and later, together with the Lead Partner, they carried out several missions to meet with staff of the Ministry of Economy of Albania to define the project's objectives and activities.

6.2.3 Project implementation

The Project has contributed to the PSO 2.1 “SO 2.1 Boost attractiveness of natural and cultural assets to improve a smart and sustainable economic development” by implementing a Cross border Accessible and Sustainable Community Tourist Destination through the diversification and innovation of tourism products and services in the target areas.

The first activity of the project was the conduction of a Benchmarking Analysis of Accessible & Sustainable (A&S) Tourism in the programme area and in the target areas. Based on this, the partners set up the cross-border network for Accessible and Sustainable Tourism, with the aim to immediately involve public and private actors in the tourism governance since the very beginning of the project.

The project then carried out a set of local workshops for stakeholders on the market-based approach to Accessible and Sustainable Tourism, with analysis of case studies and success stories, to promote the participation to the A&S Network. Also, the network activities were complemented by capacity building activities directed to public and private stakeholders in the tourism sector to improve skills on accessibility and sustainability, as well as reception of travellers with special needs.

The project has also put in place a knowledge base in form of a guide to accessible and sustainable tourism in Puglia, Molise, Albania and Montenegro.

Subsequently, the project developed cross-border accessible and sustainable tourism products and services, in form of a web platform and an app which mapped the services at the local level, with a specific focus for tourists with special needs.

Furthermore, the project partners followed with small scale infrastructures aimed at the valorisation of 5 sites to enhance the accessibility and touristic exploitation in the target areas: 1 site in Gravina in Puglia, 2 sites in Malesi e Madhe Municipality and 2 sites in Urban Municipality of Tuzi. The infrastructures involved works such as the realization of sanitation facilities, realization of a small food court, building of a security fence, removal of architectural barriers through the installation of ramps along the route, perimeter fencing around archaeological excavation sites and similar interventions to ensure better fruition of selected sites.

In view of populating the app, ESCOOP staff members delivered a set of training activities addressed to mapping groups, called Interest (Pol) detectors selected in each target area to detect and map tourism services, historical, cultural and natural heritage and of social and health services for persons with special needs. Pol detector, after the training, started working on the mapping of resources and experiences existing in the target areas and in other main touristic routes departing from them to other touristic areas of partner countries/regions, related to accessible tourism, adding references to sites of naturalistic and cultural interest (included in the UNESCO heritage and with other forms of acknowledgment) and information on services. The mapping activities focused on facilities and services useful for tourists with special needs.

The app, currently (July 2023) launched only for Android, is available in 5 languages.

Lastly, the project entailed a component for the establishment, start up and testing of the Cross Border Destination Management Organisation for A&S Tourism, aimed at setting up DMOs in the partners' territories and at acting as a leading institutional instrument of the tourism policies and strategies at both local and cross border level. The DMOs were created by modelling on the Local Action Group model for most of the partnership, also entailing staff training and capacity building activities. The DMO is set up to be operational through project funds and, after the end of the project, through own funds.

Lastly, the project partners organised and implemented educational tours around the programme area by involving all territorial stakeholders of the network and of the target groups at the local level.

During the interview, the partners indicated that there were some territorial differences since Italy is more experienced in accessible tourism, of which the Albanian and Montenegrin partners benefitted in terms of enhancement of skills and knowledge.

By the end of the project the Lead Partner confirmed that all outputs have been reached.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of new products, services and pilot or demonstration projects realized	Cross border Network for Accessible & Sustainable Tourism	1	1
	Strategic Action Plan of the Cross border Network for Accessible & Sustainable Tourism	1	1
	Multimedia and multilingual technology system: Web platform and APP	1	1
	Cross border DMO for A&S Tourism	1	1
Number of valorized sites	Valorized sites for people with special needs.	5	5

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation? Also here investigate territorial differences.

As for most of the projects, the partners faced difficulties mainly due to Covid and to the restrictions on the tourism sector, which hampered the overall project implementation and the testing phase. In relation to the project activities, the partners organised on-line meetings and all the activities have been implemented on-line as far as it was possible. However, the lockdown restrictions caused the delay in the investments: the workers were not allowed to work intensively and in group as was initially predicted and the infrastructures were finalised later than initially planned.

The level of expenditures was generally high, the LP confirms the 95% at project level of certified expenditures by the end of the project. The partners faced difficulties at the beginning of the project with the pre-financing procedure and the LP asked for budget changes which took long time to be approved. After the approval of the change, the management proceeded smoothly. However, the partners report that the FLC process is too slow in Albania.

In addition, the Lead Partner outlined that the level of pre-financing for IPA countries is very low: the 10-15% of budget pre-financing not sufficient compared to the needs of the partner from Albania and Montenegro.

The interviewed contact person within the Municipality of Gravina reports that local administrations such as the municipality face some difficulties in accessing to and managing such projects because of language barriers, while they also lack internal administrative and financial management skills, which forces externalisation of services and hampers long lasting effect of competences developed under the project.

6.2.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

The project achieved the following main results:

- Improved management of the Cross border A&S Tourism, through the instruments of the Cross Border Network for Accessible & Sustainable Tourism and the DMO for A&S Tourism;
- New, innovative and improved Cross border A&S Tourism products and services, such as the Web Platform, the app, and social and health services for people with special needs;
- Improved skills of public and private stakeholders in the tourism field of the target areas, with regard to accessibility and sustainability, also through the transfer of specific know-how related to the reception of travellers with special needs.

Also, the activities resulted in the creation of 10 travel itineraries per each target area.

The actions were planned to lead to the adoption of the Strategic Action Plan tested by the Cross border Network for A&S Tourism, currently available on the project website⁵.

⁵<https://past4future.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/sites/past4future.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/files/2022-05/Strategic%20Action%20Plan%20of%20the%20CB%20Network%20for%20A%26S%20Tourism.pdf>

According to the project Final Report, the cross border cooperation allowed partners and stakeholders from the target areas to:

- connect the 4 sub-regional local hospitality systems into a single cross border community tourist destination;
- convey a unitary image of the local areas as a sustainable and accessible community tourist destination, capable of offering customized services to tourists with special needs, on an international level;
- enhance and promote the natural and cultural heritage of the area in a systematic way, by steering the development of local tourism towards international strategies based on accessible and sustainable tourism.

The LP confirmed the fulfilment of all the target indicators by the end of the project.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common action Plans for the smart management of tourist destinations to be adopted by the public authorities of the Programme area	Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans	78	78
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	61	61
	Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements	0	0
	Number of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements	5	5
	Number of trained persons	145	145

For what concerns potential contribution to the pre-accession process of Albania and of Montenegro, the Lead Partner believes that the project supported Albania in further alignment with the EU requirements in the fields of social and accessible tourism.

What is the added value of your project?

The project was identifying solutions for accessing tourism sector and sustainability of tourists with disabilities to expand demand for tourism agencies and tour operators. According to the results of the interviews, thanks to the project the activities related to the promotion of sustainable and accessible tourism were expanded also to Albania and Montenegro, which allows the partnership to further collaborate on how to increase access in the tourism structure in the programme areas.

In particular, the Albanian stakeholders signed an agreement for setting up a DMO, which is still operational, and the same happened in Montenegro

Another important added value is the number of jobs created, which had impacts also on the economic development of the target areas.

The relations among the partners also produced spillover effects in other sectors and projects (for example ESCOOP started working with the involved municipalities on the topic of energy).

The interviewed Italian partners believe that activating accessible tourism paths is easier if it is based on public-private collaboration, which is the main added value of the project. However, the pilot actions are limited in size and larger public investment projects are needed.

6.2.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The durability of the project results can be ensured thanks to the training activities that targeted tourism operators and tourism sector stakeholders, aimed at expanding the touristic offer to address the needs of people with special needs. This also included the creation of 10 travel itineraries per each target area.

The partners applied for the capitalisation project PAST4Future Plus, which was approved and finalised in May 2023. The follow up allowed the partners to further develop the results of the project and to promote the results of PAST4Future through a 4-day event in April 2023 in Bari on the topic of accessible tourism. The event also allowed stakeholders such as companies and tour operators to gather and discuss on how to limit obstacles and difficulties for tourists with special needs.

In addition, after the capitalization events, an NGO from Montenegro applied to join the network.

Furthermore, after the end project, the Municipality of Andrano (located in Apulia Region) was involved and set up a widespread hotel and sports facilities for people with disabilities.

ESCOOP has also opened a branch in Shkodra to renew its interest in operating in Albania.

For what concerns the operability of DMOs, the interviewed partners stated that their sustainability is ensured by national funds.

6.2.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

The Italian partner Municipality of Gravina reported that their entity was facing difficulties linked to language barriers.

Box 2 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Project progress reports
- Interview with LP Ministry of Finance and Economy (Albania) on 18th July 2023
- Interview with project partners ESCOOP - European Social Cooperative (Italy) and the Municipality of Gravina (Italy) on 24th July 2023
- Project website: <https://past4future.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/home>

6.3 CIRCE (SO 2.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

The present case study report has been developed thanks to the information gathered from the project Application Form, the Progress Reports, the web-survey launched in May 2023 and the information collected during the interview with the project Lead Partner Fondazione Apulia Film Commission and the partner Film Centre of Montenegro.

6.3.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 1st Call for Standard projects

Starting date: 01.04.2018

Ending date: 31.03.2021

Duration: 36 months

Overall budget: 831 540.00 Euro

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 484 408.60 Euro

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	Apulian Film Commission Foundation	Italy	Bari	407 590.00	400 562.15 (98%)
PP	Film Centre of Montenegro	Montenegro	Cetinje	153 000.00	137 828.25 (90%)
PP	Qendra Albanian National Centre of Cinematography	Albania	Tirana	182 100.00	178 128.26 (98%)
PP	Molise Region	Italy	Campobasso	88 850.00	79 816.63 (90%)
AP	Ministry of Culture of Montenegro	Montenegro	Podgorica	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Ministry of Culture Republic of Albania	Albania	Tirana	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Tourism (MIBACT)	Italy	Rome	n.a.	n.a.

6.3.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

Even if it is globally recognised that cultural and creative sectors are key strategic resources to rely on for territorial promotion, digital revolution has threatened the survivor of cinema, creating a significative gap in Albania and Montenegro that need to be filled. By contrast, Apulia Region has invested in recent years

important resources into a Creative Cluster aimed at promoting the development of the cultural sectors, focusing on cinema as a resource for mass acculturation and territorial enhancement, by supporting also a process of digitalization.

Project partners gathered under the common objective of valorising the target territories at the audio-visual sector, strengthening relations and increasing collaboration between them and the main stakeholders from the audio-visual sector, such as festival promoters.

The overall objective of the project CIRCE is to improve conditions for the growth of the cultural and creative industries belonging to the audio-visual sector, which can foster the valorisation of cultural heritage in the involved areas, by implementing cross border initiatives able to build a bridge among the involved regions and gather key actors in new creative productions.

The project was born on the impetus of pre-existing relations and willingness to cooperate between Italian and Albanian partners, who in 2013 signed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at implementing joint activities and co-financing common initiatives supporting coproduction and distributions of respective audio-visual works produced by the professionals of the two countries.

Specifically, the Lead Partner had the idea of putting in place projects that would meet real needs not only at the local but also at the regional level. This approach was complemented by the willingness to experiment together with Albania and Montenegro.

The project builds on the results of the project ArTVision (Interreg IPA Adriatic 2007-2013) that was led by Apulia Region and that promoted innovation in interactive and inter-institutional cultural communication among all Adriatic and European countries.

How was the partnership set up?

The partners were already familiar with each other from previous collaboration opportunities, and the partnership was set up with the idea of displaying technical partners: project partners are public sector institutions whose primary role is the development of local and regional policies to foster the development of cultural and audiovisual sector.

Circe includes also 3 associated partners, belonging to the public sector. Indeed, associated partners involved and supporting project implementation are: the Ministry of Culture of Montenegro, the Ministry of Culture Republic of Albania and Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Tourism (MIBACT).

6.3.3 Project implementation

As per Application Form, the project outputs are:

- Joint cross border production platform
- Network of Film Festivals in the cross-border Region
- Capacity building for enterprises operating in the audiovisual sector
- Action plan to transfer the Italian tax credit policy to IPA countries

Among the planned activities, the project developed and produced a cross border Web Series articulated in 9 episodes on the topic of voyage, shot in the three countries. The series was developed by gathering ideas through an international call for under-35 directors, then selected by a cross-border commission.



Source: CIRCE Project, cinema hall of Vlora in May 2022

Also, CIRCE established two Cineport Hubs in Albania, by equipping two cinema halls owned by the respective Municipalities with the most advanced digitalized technology. An agreement has been signed between ANCC and Municipality of Vlora and Gjirokastra, in which there had been no working cinema since 1990, entrusting cinemas management to ANCC for at least 10 years and enabling the return of annual cinematic calendars.

On the Montenegrin side, actions concerned the investment for a mobile cinema package to arrange film screenings all around Montenegro, thanks to a high-level quality projector, accompanied with mobile screen and sound system, which can be easily set up

in many outdoor & indoor places. The owner of the investment is FCM.

Finally, the project implemented capacity building actions to enhance skills and competences of operators the audiovisual sector to foster the creation of a cross-border community and the development of new creative business model. Moreover, the project intends to strengthen cooperation with sector agencies and regional authorities involved in promoting initiatives to enhance their planning and administrative capacity for the development of creative industries and for promoting locations and local resources.

This activity also foresaw an online training week in the shape of 5 workshops, held in March 2021 where partners involved experts of the Italian Film Industry. This aimed at developing and promoting the local cinema expertise in the international stage as well as transfer the Italian good practices. The event was destined to partners from Albania, Montenegro and Molise but open also to all those interested in the subject.

The activity also planned and delivered three databases in form of production and location guides for Apulia Region, Molise Region, Albania and Montenegro, listing both audio-visual professionals and enterprises, as well as shooting locations. At the end of the project, the databases were completed and are available online⁶.

Lastly, this the project displays an action plan to apply tax credit policy to IPA countries (the tax credit is already in place in Italy), which was finalised and published in due time.

What output indicator does your project contribute to?

The project ended in March 2021 and the final report has been submitted and approved.

⁶ Albania: <http://nationalfilmcenter.gov.al/index.php/film-shooting-location-guide-in-albania/>
Montenegro: <https://filminmontenegro.me/>
Molise: <https://www.moviesinmolise.eu/>

After interview with the project Lead Partner, in July 2023 the level of achievement of the project outputs was as follows:

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Small scale investment to improve cinema distribution in Albania	5	15
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Enterprises operating in the audiovisual sector skilled within a cross-border initiative	10	20
Number of cross-border creative platforms.	Joint cross-border production platform	1	1

The data were validated in the project final report and in the interview in 2023.

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 influence the project implementation?

The Covid-19 pandemics allowed to carry out only the kick-off meeting in person, thus all other meetings, trainings, digital labs, workshops had to be carried out online. Moreover, there have been even some cancelled events (e.g., presentation of festival, website etc) since they could not be held in person because of restrictions due to the spread of pandemic.

On the other hand, Covid-19 turned out to be also an opportunity as it created the conditions for higher visibility on the web.

The Albanian partner had strong delays on the activities primarily due to the lack of funds. Albanian partners have difficulties in spending because of the highly centralised system. Albanian public entities do not have their own budget availability: the project contributions are received by the Albanian Ministry of Finance, so before the project partner has cash availability it takes a long and difficult process. Also, the prefinancing cannot be a solution because the beneficiaries are not able to spend it, as it is managed at the central level.

Along with these cashflow issues, there is also problems related to a slow FLC system, whose consequences are strong delays both in procurement process and project activities implementation.

This can potentially hamper the participation of Albanian partners in future projects, as they might be discarded due to this aspect that can slow down the project activities.

The LP suggests that a partial solution could be the reduction of the length of the reimbursement period. Another solution could be to separate the certification of the expenditures from the progress reports, as it happens in the CBC Italy-Albania programme in which the certification windows are multiple along the year.

The LP brings out the fact that the Programme could adopt the EU regulation 651/2014 that foresees that the audio-visual sector is exempted from the state aid regime. This would allow to create a fund for co-production in the programme area to ensure to scale up the results.

The Montenegrin partner notices that it is difficult to have institutions involved and engaged in the projects, as not always the importance of such projects is understood. Sometimes institutions lack the capacity of properly managing projects and their funds.

6.3.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

Although the project does not contribute directly to EC recommendations for Albania and Montenegro, it does indirectly tackle the need of setting up cross-border cooperation platforms and networks on cultural and creative industries.

The project results meet the Pillar 4 of the EUSAIR Action Plan, mainly in terms of support to: a) foster cultural heritage, creative cross border region. Furthermore, the project objectives are also aligned to the EUSAIR Cross Cutting issue “Capacity building”.

The project contains a capacity building action on tax credit, in order to pave the way to apply the Italian tax incentives policy for cultural and creative industries also in Albania and Montenegro, according to their legislation, and to allow enterprises working in audiovisual to sector to benefit from incentives and increase their job opportunities. The Lead Partner has worked on the preparation of a Memorandum of understanding and on the preparation of a Paper on Tax Credit, explaining the state of play and the relevant legislation in force in Italy, Montenegro and Albania.

Based on the interviews, the project strengthened cooperation with sector stakeholders in the programme area and increased the artistic quality of the operators of the audiovisual industry from Montenegro, Albania and Italy: capacity building actions also covered topics such as film commission functioning and legislation for favourable movie policy for Albanian and Montenegro staff and stakeholders.



Source: CIRCE Project, Panel at Podgorica Film Festival

The project achieved higher collaboration and interconnection of audiovisual sector stakeholders thanks to the network of regional film festivals that will enhance distribution of local art movies.

The interviewees agree on the fact that project results can be seen especially after the closure of the project: most of the series filmed under CIRCE took part, collectively or singularly, to a set of regional and international festivals.

Furthermore, CIRCE was selected for the Interreg 2022 annual event for showcasing the web series.

The latest data (July 2023) on the project result indicators are indicated in the table below. However, data need to be validated following all partners' final report (June 2021).

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Cross border networks in the cultural and creative fields	Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans	7	7
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	2	2
	Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements	0	0
	Number of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements	50	50
	Number of trained persons	100	92

As confirmed by the web-survey analysis, the main added values of the project are:

- Transfer and promotion of good practices, such as the tax incentive policy that the project wants to transfer from Italy to Albania and Montenegro.
- The promotion of international networks mainly in cultural and creative fields, also thanks to the activities implemented by the project that suppose the involvement of artists coming from the entire programme area.
- The ability of the project in facing common threats and obstacles, since CIRCE foresees to fill an important gap in the cinema distribution in IPA regions, allowing many people to have quality screenings and a cinema schedule during the whole year.

According to the Lead Partner, the project enabled the Apulia Film Commission to concentrate on talent scouting and on the support to emerging film directors (especially under 35) and minor entities from the audiovisual sectors, which often lack the needed funding and visibility to promote their work.

Also, the project supported Molise Region in paving the way for establishing a Film Commission, as it is the only Italian region not having one.

6.3.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The project was concluded and its main results are still visible: the project outputs and products just started their life cycle, such as the Web Series which have been disseminated and advertised in film festivals since 2021 and beyond, and the online platforms.

The project partners will keep the production and location guides operational. The Film Centre Montenegro has its own resources to ensure continuity for the next years, especially for what concerns the mobile film activities which, according to the 2023 interview, is currently being used for different festivals in the country. Furthermore, Montenegro activated a national fund dedicated to the audiovisual sector.

For what concerns the web-series, they are available on the LP Apulia Film Commission's website⁷ and, in July 2023, the LP informed that they are defining an agreement with Amazon Prime for displaying the web-series on their streaming platform.

⁷ <https://media.apuliafilmcommission.it/>

The project developed instruments and tools to increase visibility to both project products and the sector stakeholders. With these regards, the networks that were developed during the pandemics will help increasing visibility. Also, the results of the capacity building activities directed both to audiovisual sector operators and local and regional administrations will show their effects in the future.

For what concerns capitalisation, the partnership has already capitalised through CIRCE PLUS, which allowed to renew relations with the project partners. Also, the Lead Partner and the Film Centre Montenegro report that there is interest in presenting a new proposal on the upcoming Interreg South Adriatic call.

The LP is interested in continuing cooperation with Montenegro, possibly with the Creative Europe Programme (Media), but at the present day it is not clear whether Montenegrin partners will be eligible in the new programming period.

6.3.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

The Montenegrin partner notices that it is difficult to have institutions involved and engaged in the projects, as not always the importance of such projects is understood. Also, sometimes institutions lack the capacity of properly managing projects and their funds.

Box 3 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Interview with LP Apulia Film Commission Foundation (Italy) and Orange Public Management (LP Technical assistance) on 20th July 2023
- Interview with the partner Film Centre of Montenegro on 26th June 2023
- Materials received from the project partners
- Project website: <https://circe.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/>

6.4 EARPIECE (SO 2.2) - CASE STUDY REPORT

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 May 2023 and the information collected during the interview with the project LP DHITECH scarl and the partner Academy of Music of Tirana.

6.4.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 2nd Call for targeted projects

Starting date: 01.07.2020

Ending date: 30.09.2022

Duration: 27 months

Overall budget: 721 820.00

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 720 533.89

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	DHITECH High Technological District	ITALY	Lecce	248 535.00	248 503.32 (100%)
PP	Academy of Music	ALBANIA	Tirana	181 900.00	181 872.79 (100%)
PP	Conservatory of Music "Lorenzo Perosi" of Campobasso	ITALY	Campobasso	108 950.00	107 727.13 (99%)
PP	Association of Young Artists of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	114 736.50	114 735.72 (100%)
PP	Conservatory "Tito Schipa" of Lecce	ITALY	Lecce	67 698.50	67 694.93 (100%)

6.4.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

Puglia, Molise (Italy), Albania and Montenegro share a common historical music tradition. It runs on two principal cross lines: literate music and popular music. These two genres have often come in touch and produced exchanges, variations, reciprocal influences, in relation both to the repertoire and the musical instruments. These relationships define a common identity and suggest the opportunity for an in-depth investigation, especially in a period of considerable rediscovery of ancient repertoires made by young musicians, both in classical and popular world.

Despite the quite good investigation of ethnographic, historical and philological sources linked to the traditional repertoire, before the project there was not a structured approach that could provide correct tools and development perspectives. Moreover, in the academic world, traditional music is not really appreciated with the only exception of some experiments, especially in Eastern Europe (e.g., the Tirana Opera Theater). The project will aim at setting up an academic pathway.

In line with the S.O. 2.2 *Increase the cooperation of the relevant key actors of the area for the delivery of innovative cultural and creative products*, the project aims to provide a structured study method and an in-depth analysis of the techniques and the history of the most popular music instruments, especially among new generations.

The main objective of the project is to establish a network which aims to:

- study, collect, analyse and compare the artistic production of existing music repertoires, through the search, classification and fruition of the involved regions' music archive;
- create a new and unpublished shared and transboundary repertoire;
- promote new interregional music compositions.

How was the partnership set up?

The project idea was conceived by the Conservatory of Lecce, which also identified the partnership thanks to pre-existing relations. Then, the project coordination was assigned to DHITECH first of all because of its experience in project management and coordination, but also to in view of applying a scientific approach to understand cognitive and emotional processes linked to music perception by studying neurobiological responses.

As a matter of fact, an additional objective of the project is to understand the physical and psychological processes behind popular music listening. Also, this biological in-depth analysis was conceived to allow a widespread use of the expected project results, not only by the involved social communities but also by those outside the project. Another objective is an activity planning organized for permanent music formations in order to boost attractiveness of cultural assets, improving a smart and sustainable economic development.

6.4.3 Project implementation

The project's specific objectives are:

- *Historical evidence and new music archive*: the research carried out was related to the acquisition of a historical repertoire of great importance and to a survey of new compositions of high cultural content. The study of these sources has allowed a relevant recognition of the various forms in use in various cultural and social contexts in the various nations involved in the project. Among the elements of particular interest, the acquisition of important musical funds was mentioned, such as the Abbate Fund very important for the development of cultured music of popular derivation in the second half of the twentieth century. This fund as others implemented music scores are very important for deepen the study of the development of cultured music of popular derivation in the second half of the twentieth century. Also relevant was the commission for writing new music to reproduce in current times the identical social impact of the popular and cultured in the various reciprocal repertoire influences.

- *Artistic and creative production activities*: the various institutions involved have designed and created a wide range of events, conferences, concerts. In these contexts the direct knowledge of music, compositions and historical and musicological themes transversal between the various territories involved in the project was deepened. The definition of the contents of the various events by all the partners was particularly taken care of precisely to enhance the peculiarities of the repertoires of the various territories but at the same time to foster the idea of a cross cultural bridge. The participation in the events, in particular for the Three Nations Festival, of experts and performers from the various territories and the choice of transnational repertoires has further expanded the sense of community on the project.
- *Neuroscientific analysis applied to the popular and repertoires music*: a Dashboard available at <https://earpiece.dhitech.it/> was fully implemented. Data elaborated from the neuroscientific analysis are available through interactive graphs which enable to discover the reactions of testers listening the specific music chosen. Data obtained from the surveys administered to the testers were rendered from a visual point of view through infographs, which can be more explanatory than simple numbers and graphs. In order to facilitate consultation of the same, also in this case a support video guide has been created, which describes the sections of the platform and the use of the dashboard.

The project started with the recognition of the state of the art on regulations governing the intellectual property rights of the music in the 3 concerned countries. Then a study of repertoire for instrumental formations and popular repertoires was carried out, aimed at the identification of contact points in the four territories considered. The focus was on a specific type of popular music, the marches, for which the experts of the Lecce and Campobasso conservatories selected a series of pieces, which were examined by the other partners. Then the project partner carried out a study of the popular production for executive fruition and by the study of popular and national language elements in classical music.



Source: EArPieCe, neuroscientific analysis at the Conservatory of Lecce

The research activity was followed by a scientific component aimed at the identification of neurobiological brain results linked to musical perception, recognition and description: while the interpretation of musical information (such as melody, harmony, timbre, form) may depend on one's assimilated heritage (culture-specific), the actual processes associated with basic musical cognition differ between different cultural groups, also considering the in-group advantage given by the common geographic region. Thus, each project partner carried out a sensorineural analysis on selected tracks, by applying commercial methodologies and technologies, with the use of a

helmet that detects reactions to musical stimuli. This component was specifically aimed at investigating the musical response from people with different cultures, but living in the same geographic region, in contrast to past researches in which the focus was on the perception differences between social groups far for distance and culture.

The last project component entailed the organisation of traveling live music events, centred on the old repertoire and the brand-new compositions, to promote music as a concrete bridge of cultural communication. These live events were constituted by mixed instrumental groups of students and/or

professors from project partners' music institutions and involved local composers, conductors and musicians. Also, the project partners organised and took part to a multitude of conferences and other kinds of events.

As a pilot, the project foresees the creation of small interregional ensembles of popular music, chamber music or brass bands, able to create and perform old or new compositions created through this experience.

On the 21st of June 2022, the Three Nations Festival was organised and held in Lecce in the framework of the European day of Music, in which the EArPieCe ensemble performed.

EArPieCe contributed to the following programme output indicator, which was achieved by the end of the project:

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of cross-border creative platforms	Creation of Cross-Cultural Network around the Popular Musical Repertoires	1	1

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation?

The Lead Partner and the partner report that the project didn't have particular problems in its implementation. The Italian partner initially faced some difficulties, which were promptly solved.

Most of the issues were related to the Covid-19 pandemic: during the early pandemic phase, the activities had to be limited solely to the study part. However, after the restrictions were lifted and the situation globally improved, the project partners were able to organize various events and concerts, in particular the Three Nations Festival. These events were attended by a large participation of the general public, especially those in Albania and Montenegro which had suggestive locations.

Under the financial point of view, the partners reached the highest level of expenditures, even if the Albanian partner suffered for the delays in providing the certification documents from the national centralised FLC.

6.4.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

The project contributes to the S.O. 2.2's main expected result: *Increased structured cooperation and networking in the cultural and creative sectors*. According to the web survey, the project results are:

- Increased skills and competence of relevant actors in promoting innovative cultural and creative products
- More public-private partnerships in the delivery of creative products

Specifically, the project's results are:

- creation and dissemination of a specific and innovative music archives, in reference to the acquired musical repertoires;
- development of musical knowledge through training courses that reduce the gap between popular music and cultured music;

- creation of a cross-border and shared artistic production network;
- recollection of brain elicitations linked to listening of popular music;
- offering of a good quality music production and innovative content;
- setup of permanent professional groups with musicians.



Source: EArPieCe, Poster of the Three Nations Festival

The project addressed the following programme result indicator which, in July 2023, was fully achieved:

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Cross border networks in the cultural and creative fields	Setting up of a creative cross border production supporting the creation of cross border networks in cultural and creative fields, improving also the business sector linked to culture and tourism.	1	1

Also, the project contributes to the Pillar IV from the EUSAIR Action Plan 'Sustainable tourism', fostering ways for a better tourism management and the diversification of the tourism offer, including cultural and creative assets (traditions, music, history, etc.), while also being aligned with the EUSAIR cross cutting issue "Capacity building.

What is the added value of your project?

According to the Lead Partner, the cross-border cooperation achieved during the project was mutually fruitful for the whole partnership. The project allowed young musicians to interact with well-established professionals from the music sector. Creative cross border production enhanced the creation of a cross border network in cultural and creative fields, improving also the business sector linked to culture and tourism.

As indicated in the web-survey, the interviewed partners believe that the project's added value was particularly relevant to:

- Contribute to achieve common European objectives
- Promote and transfer good practices
- Promote international networks.
- Improve the level of know how of popular music in the citizens.
- Ensure a high impact towards the population.

6.4.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The project aimed at setting up a durable repertoire of popular music in the programme area, having filled a gap in the analysis of this kind of music.

Also, the formation of orchestras, ensembles and small groups will enable the prosecution, beyond the project duration, of the different research stages, new composition and orchestration, regarding the engaged repertoires, thanks to the continuation of the concert activities organized by the involved musical groups. With their own resources, as well as with future EU funds, partners will oversee the management of the different ensembles safeguarding the independence of small or medium size ensembles.

Furthermore, the creation of a neurobiological standard wants to pave the way to new and unpublished studies concerning the cross-culture musical perception. The creation of this neuroscience tool belongs not only to the co-involved territories, but also to those who want to further develop and extend this research to other territories.

The setting up of a music and musicological archive makes the project outputs available and consultable.

Following the end of the project, the partnership presented a capitalisation proposal, which is currently under evaluation. The Lead Partner and the partner reported that, for the time being, they are currently intending to apply only to Interreg South Adriatic.

In addition, the interviewed partner reported that Albanian universities showed high interest towards the project results and the studies implemented during the first phases of the project, and they will share and ensure sustainability to project achievements, at least in Albania. The topic of the study has been considered indeed very innovative for this kind of project and on this matter.

6.4.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

During the interview, the Lead partner and the partner reported no cross-border obstacles.

Box 4 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Project progress reports
- Interview with LP DHITECH Distretto Tecnologico High-Tech (Italy) on 27th June 2023
- Interview with project partner Akademia Muzika (Albania) on 1st August 2023

- Project website: <https://earpiece.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/>

6.5 WELCOME (SO 3.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

6.5.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 1st Call for Standard projects

Starting date: 03.04.2018

Ending date: 28.02.2021

Duration: 34 months 26 days

Overall budget: 909 249.32 Euro

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 733 328.57 Euro (81%)

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	National Interuniversity Consortium for Marine Sciences (CONISMA)	ITALY	Lecce	268 991.86	263 834.57 (98%)
PP	Municipality of Lecce	ITALY	Lecce	123 229.15	90 456.97 (73%)
PP	National Coastline Agency	ALBANIA	Tirana	121 363.60	71 593.66 (59%)
PP	University of Tirana - Faculty of Geology and Mining	ALBANIA	Tirana	154 357.53	79 888.41 (52%)
PP	Public enterprise for coastal zone management of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Budva	128 648.78	119 363.56 (93%)
PP	University of Montenegro, Institute of marine biology	MONTENEGRO	Kotor	112 658.40	108 191.40 (96%)
AP	Eco Partners for Sustainable Development	ALBANIA	Tirana	n.a.	n.a.

6.5.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

The main overall objective of the WELCOME project is to support the long-term marine litter management through the development of guidelines, the testing of a soft method for coastal dune consolidation using wood

marine litter and the increase of public awareness on sustainable development. Marine litter is a common problem for the whole Mediterranean Sea. In particular, due to the Adriatic water circulation pattern, marine litter is continuously travelling from Albania, to Montenegro, to Italy and back again.

Marine litter is mainly composed of plastics, but also of wood, metal, glass and other materials, which can float in large quantities and then settle on the seabed or on the coasts representing an environmental problem on a global scale.

The WELCOME project was created with the aim of addressing two common problems of the Adriatic coasts and the IPA countries, creating good practices in the management and prevention of marine pollution and reducing the erosion of coastal dunes with the use of natural materials. Specifically, the project intends to develop a soft method based on an art-driven reuse of wood marine litter to make anti-erosion coastal systems in a sustainable, circular economy-based approach.

How was the partnership set up?

The WELCOME project engages 3 competent research institutions (CONISMA, the University of Tirana, the University of Montenegro) and 3 experienced public authorities (Municipality of Lecce, the Albanian National Coastline Agency and the Public enterprise for coastal zone management of Montenegro).

The project Lead Partner, CONISMA, is a consortium of 34 Italian Universities which coordinates research and scientific activities in the field of Marine Sciences. In the project activities, CONISMA is supported from the scientific point of view by the University of Salento.

Thanks to the long-standing experience of CONISMA in EU funded projects, the partnership of WELCOME project has been created without difficulties. As a matter of facts, CONISMA had already collaborated with the University of Montenegro on previous initiatives and, additionally, could rely on a well-established network for the identification of partners with specific skills (e.g., Euromarine network).

The project also involves the major stakeholders, including local public administrations, owners of bathing establishments, fishery cooperatives, diving centres, marinas managers, voluntary groups and environmental organizations. Additionally, WELCOME increased the public awareness on marine litter topics as well as on sustainable development also applied to tourism through dissemination events for students, citizens and public administrations.

6.5.3 Project implementation

Project activities encompass: i) research on marine litter (including modelling) and marine litter removal from selected Italian, Albanian and Montenegrin beaches, ii) dune restoration, according to a well-defined methodology, iii) drafting of a marine litter plan in the frame of and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM).

Interventions are mainly localised in the following areas: i) Italy - Municipality of Lecce coastline, including the beaches between the marinas of Torre Rinalda, Siaggiabella, Torre Chianca, Frigole and San Cataldo, ii) Albania - Velipoja area, Kepi i Rodonit, Lalzi Bay and Durresi Bay and iii) Montenegro - Ulcinj Area, in the south-eastern part of the Montenegro coast.

The project is structured in 4 work packages.

The first one mainly concerns beach cleaning activities using practices that do not impact on the environment. Cleaning activities were carried out every 3 months, always with the same parameters and the same methods in the different portions of the selected beaches. The collected waste was then selected, weighed, and catalogued by type. Although the different sanded dunes of each of the countries have some specificities to be respected, the project developed a common protocol to monitor marine litter. In Montenegro well-known protocols to monitor marine litter already existed, while, for the Albanian partners, these practices turned out to be very innovative.

The project also prepared a scientific paper that summarises the data collected and suggests some measures that could be implemented, especially in Albania and Montenegro, to further protect the marine ecosystems.

The second work package focused on analysis and research activities. Project partners analysed the Adriatic Sea currents in order to gather information on the routes of marine litter.



Source: WELCOME project, University of Montenegro (Field activities)



Source: WELCOME project, University of Montenegro (Lesson in elementary school "Veljko Drobniaković" in Risan-Kotor)

Furthermore, a portion of the marine litter collected during the beach cleaning activities (in particular wood, residues of Posidonia and other algae) has been re-used to create architectural / artistic installations to be placed at the foot of the dune to block beach erosion. These installations should have taken place in all three countries, even if Albania did not complete the actual installation. The installations have been completed both in Italy and in Montenegro, despite various delays due to bureaucratic procedures.

Lastly, the project carried out various dissemination activities. Awareness-raising activities were carried out in schools, with the aim of raising the awareness of young people and children on these issues. The project organised recycling lessons at schools, especially in those located in coastal municipalities. The activities involved all school levels, from childhood to high school, mainly elementary and middle schools.

What output indicator does your project contribute to?

Project main outputs refer to:

- development of a cross-border marine litter plan in the frame of Integrated Coastal Zone Management⁸ to enhance and safeguard cross-border water landscapes;
- launch of pilot projects on Italian, Albanian and Montenegrin coasts to demonstrate the artistic reuse of marine litter to develop anti-erosion defence systems.

According to the information collected during the case study interviews, the two selected programme output indicators reached their target value.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Products and services, pilot and demonstration projects	Beach cleaning operations (54) Restored Dunes (6)	63	108
Number of users involved (in pilot or demonstration projects).	Cross-border ML management plan and legal framework for the ML issue	6	6

With regards to the indicator “Products and services, pilot and demonstration projects”, the project achieved a value of 108 on a target of 63. These refer, in particular, to the beach cleaning operations and the activities related to the dunes restoration.

On the contrary, the LP faced some difficulties in providing a value for the indicator “Number of users involved (in pilot or demonstration projects)”. In facts, the value foreseen in the project application form (6) was initially referred to the “users” of the “Cross-border Marine Litter (ML) management plan and legal framework for the ML issue”. In this case, they considered the “users” as the project partners (thus, the value of 6). While, if considering the number of users involved in the project activities (on a larger perspective) the indicator could reach a value of over 5000 units (e.g., Number of trained persons 2971, participants at project events 1895, general public about 600, higher education and research 18, education/training centres and schools 38, interest groups including NGOs 28).

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation?

One of the main factors that hampered project implementation was related to the reporting and certification procedures. These criticalities are particularly evident for the Albanian partners, for which reporting and

⁸ <https://paprac.org/iczm-protocol>

certification procedures faced some delays. Also, one of the Albanian partners faced a delay caused by the lengthy procedures for opening a dedicated bank account.

Conversely, with regard to the Montenegrin partners, the reporting and certification procedures worked very well.

Also, Covid-19 represented a major risk for the project implementation. However, despite some delays, the project was able to deliver the foreseen activities.

6.5.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

Based on the answers provided with the web-survey by the LP, the project created better cooperative conditions among the authorities implementing water strategies in the area. Additionally, the project increased awareness on environmentally friendly practices and sustainable development.

The table below shows the target and achieved value of the result indicator selected by the project.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common Plans enhancing and safeguarding water landscapes (including marine ones).	Common marine litter management plan	I	I

According to the information collected during the case study interview in 2021 and 2023, the result indicator selected by the project “Common Plans enhancing and safeguarding water landscapes (including marine ones)” reached its target value. However, the interviewed project partners note that an efficient common management plan should involve not only the administrative bodies of the programme area but also those outside the programme area, interested by the marine litter issue. Clearly this could not have been achievable for a project such as WELCOME, with limited resources and geographical coverage.

Nonetheless, the project has provided guidelines for the proper management of marine areas.

What is the added value of your project?

Based on the project application form, the project:

- promotes and transfers good practices,
- allows to face common threats and obstacles,
- promotes international networking.

In facts, WELCOME created a valid background for future research and monitoring activities, especially in the two IPA countries. Thanks to the data collected in the project, in 2020 the University of Montenegro prepared an initial report on the state of the marine ecosystem in the country. This represents a very important unforeseen and additional result since such kind of analysis was not available before the project. More specifically, the project allowed the University of Montenegro to implement some monitoring activities that were supposed to be carried out by the Montenegrin government in order to comply with the EU Marine Framework Directory (clearly, it is worth noting that, since Montenegro is not an EU member State, it was

not mandatory to comply with the regulation, although this represents a remarkable added value in view of the accession process of the country). Indeed, in 2019, the University of Montenegro started a complex activity of desk analysis of all legal documents related to marine litter in the country. Unfortunately, in that period there was no law for marine litter in Montenegro and no national legislation contains the term “marine litter”. Thanks also to the project, at the beginning of 2020, the country harmonised its national law with the EU Marine Framework Directive and it now has a Law on marine environment, with specific mention on marine litter.

Furthermore, during the last years, the University of Montenegro prepared a country estimation of good environmental status of the marine ecosystem. According to the analysis performed, the threshold value indicating the good status of marine ecosystem should not exceed the value of 20 and in Montenegro, the analysis provided a value of 600. Thanks to these analyses, the Ministry responsible for environment decided to create a National Monitoring Committee of marine ecosystem.

According to the Lead Partner, the main impact of the project is related to higher awareness on the issue of marine litter in Albania and Montenegro, especially at the local level thanks to the involvement of municipalities and local authorities, which play a crucial role in designing and implementing marine litter containment measures. In the view of the interviewee, while the creation of a legal framework in the two IPA countries is fundamental, to ensure effectiveness such standards need to be supported by the due financial instruments and, last but not least, by higher sensitiveness and awareness towards the problem of marine litter.

6.5.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The Lead Partner and the Institute of Marine Biology of the University of Montenegro took part to the capitalisation project WELCOME Plus, which was aimed at organising two workshops. The University of Montenegro applied to IPA Interreg ADRION call launched in 2023 with a proposal on marine litter.

Also, the LP CONISMA is already participating in other similar projects in the cooperation area (e.g., SEAVIEWS funded under the ADRION programme, which represents an advanced attempt to put together automatic pollution monitoring stations also in addition to the concept of marine litter). However, from the case study interview emerged that there is a certain risk of proliferation of initiatives, which often overlap, in the same programme area, in the same topic. This is a consequence of the Interreg objectives, that beneficiaries suggest to improve. For example, there is a proliferation of marine litter tracing apps, that have been implemented over the years. In order to capitalise and improve the work already done by other EU funded projects, such as apps developed by other initiatives, it could be envisaged to have, for instance, one single shared tool, or that coordination among projects is promoted by the relevant Managing Authorities.

Regarding the durability of the project results, the project elaborated a scientific paper that summarises all the data collected and suggests measures to improve marine ecosystem. The recommendations included in the paper could be used, especially in Albania and Montenegro, to further protect the marine ecosystems. Clearly, especially for IPA countries, to further develop monitoring activities, it is essential to rely on international funding instruments, but, especially for the case of Montenegro, the government is trying to implement beach monitoring activities with its own funds. The partnership relation will remain over the time and some project partners already expressed their willingness to collaborate in the future for similar initiatives.

6.5.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

According to the analysis of project documents and through the interviews with the project partners conducted by the evaluator, one of the obstacles was related to the very different level of awareness on the issue of marine litter between the Italian regions and the IPA beneficiaries.

Also, the fact that the two sides of the Adriatic Sea present morphological differences was an issue in the setting up and application of the WELCOME methodology.

Box 5 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Project progress reports
- Interview with LP CONISMA - National Interuniversity Consortium for Marine Sciences (Italy) on 4th July 2023
- Interview with project partner University of Montenegro, Institute of marine biology (Montenegro) on 23rd June 2022
- Project website: <https://welcome.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/home>

6.6 REHHUB (SO 3.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

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 in July 2023 and the information collected during the interview with the project LP and project partner National Energy Technological Cluster Scarl (DiTNE).

6.6.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 1st Call for Standard projects

Starting date: 15.03.2018

Ending date: 13.09.2020

Duration: 30 months

Overall budget: 744 800.00 EUR

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 681 006.77 EUR

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy	ALBANIA	Tirana	141 900	85 396.38 (60%)
PP	Barleti Institute for Research and Development	ALBANIA	Tirana	160 900	153 688 (96%)
PP	ENEA - Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development	ITALY	Brindisi	190 000	189 999.88 (100,00%)
PP	National Energy Technological Cluster Scarl (DiTNE)	ITALY	Brindisi	76 000	75 967.66 (100%)
PP	Municipality of Agnone	ITALY	Agnone	76 000	75 994.94 (100,00%)
PP	University of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	100 000	100 000 (100,00%)
AP	Albania Power Corporation	ALBANIA	Tirana	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Universiteti Marin Barleti	ALBANIA	Tirana	n.a.	n.a.
AP	ANCE Brindisi (National Association of Construction)	ITALY	Brindisi	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Regional Agency for Technology and Innovation	ITALY	Bari	n.a.	n.a.

AP	Municipality of Campobasso	ITALY	Campobasso	n.a.	n.a.
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6.6.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

The project was created to address the issue of energy demand and energy saving in public buildings, which represents a remarkable challenge for Albania and Montenegro, Molise and Apulia regions. With the exception of buildings constructed in the last decade, Albanian and Montenegro's buildings have no insulation.

In IPA countries, the project also wants to serve as a leverage to achieve the ambitious targets on the performance of energy in buildings set for Albania and Montenegro for EU integration.

For what concerns Apulia and Molise, the two regions have high electricity production but there is a lack of skills and knowledges in local public administration and in designers on best practices to carry out energy efficiency restoration taking into account local climatic factors and technologies adapted to the Mediterranean social, cultural and geographical context and to the specific typologies of users.

The main objective of REEHUB is to create a network of Hubs located in public buildings in each of the involved territories, aimed at the organisation of capacity building actions (main output) and the collection of educational and training materials for energy efficiency audit in the building sector. The Hub is meant to serve as a reference point, connecting experience with similar backgrounds (Mediterranean) as an "agora" where local policy maker can have open dialogues with building material industries, designers and green SMEs for the implementation of local energy plans.

The second objective is to implement a methodology of audit, according to EU standard (EN 16247-1 and 2), fitted to building renovation that pave the way for new solutions for passive houses in Mediterranean climes.

The REEHUB audit approach aims to reduce the lack of knowledge in measures methodologies, conduct inspections and ensure compliance, and is planned to be transferred thanks to multi-level capacity building programme. Also, the approach gives specific attention to new material according to circular economy principles. The ambitious result of REEHUB is to shift from old buildings to low-energy or zero-energy buildings by supporting public administrations through ad-hoc workshops to ensure the transfer of knowledge and of best practices.

How was the partnership set up?

Project partners had a pre-existing network, especially the Italian partners which were already connected through previous joint activities (the project was indeed born under the impulse of ENEA).

Also, the project builds on the contacts and the results developed by the strategic project Alterenergy - Energy Sustainability for Adriatic Small Communities, funded by the IPA Adriatic Programme (2007-2013), in which the Municipality of Agnone was one of the pilot areas of the activities.

The partnership displays scientific partners in each country (Barleti Institute for Research and Development, University of Montenegro and ENEA), while also presenting an institutional component (Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania) and partners in charge for networking and pilot activities (Municipality of Agnone and DiTNE).

The project partnership was set up with a majority of public entities, however the participation of the private sector is ensured through DiTNE, a cluster of public and private entities which connects and promotes interaction between academia, private and public organizations.

The project also includes associated partners, two from Albania coming both from private (Albania Power Corporation) and public sector (Marin Barleti University); three from Italy, namely: ANCE Brindisi (National Association of Construction), Regional Agency for Technology and Innovation located in Bari and the Municipality of Campobasso (Italy).

6.6.3 Project implementation

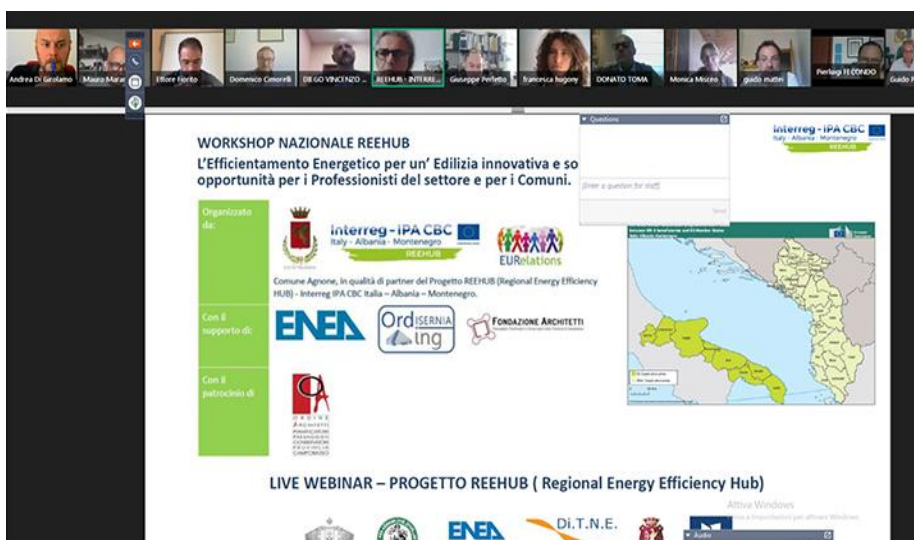
As per AF, project outputs are:

- Best practices of REEHUB Audit Methodology
- Capacity building actions for energy efficiency in buildings
- Roadshow for key stakeholders
- Set up of 4 Regional Energy Efficiency Hubs in the Programme area

The project enabled the set-up of 4 regional hubs (Tirana, Brindisi, Agnone, Podgorica) aimed at developing and disseminating materials, information, capacity building and training materials for architects, engineers but also to a broad set of audience that is interested in energy efficiency.

The partner ENEA developed a simplified methodological tool enabling public authorities to develop report for energy audit of different public buildings.

Public awareness events and training courses were organised for different target groups (municipalities, agencies' administrative officers, architects, engineers, school pupils). Each country carried out an online workshop in which the project and the methodology were presented.



Source: REEHUB Project, Online Workshop on Energy Efficiency

for improving capacity building of energy efficiency in public buildings.

The project is divided into 6 WPs. Apart from the WP Management and WP Communication, the project has 4 Technical WPs aimed respectively at: defining the Energy Efficiency HUB's main requirements and characteristics in the public local venues identified in the project, to be collected in the report on "Best practices for Public Local Administration"; organising and delivering Workshops

Workshops were organised tailor to the different target group in each region: Molise organized technical workshop to public administration and to public and private technicians; Albania to energy companies and SMEs that work in building and real estate sector and PA; Montenegro to academic world; organising public awareness and capitalisation by means of information, technical dissemination and practical education (road shows), that can ensure added value of energy efficiency solutions and make tangible results in all WPs; setting up the 4 HUBs (Tirana, Brindisi, Agnone, Podgorica).

In April 2021, at the end of case study interviews, all output were achieved, as illustrated in the table below.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of new products, services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	Best practices of REEHUB Audit Methodology	1	1
	Workshop in each country	3	3
	Road show for key stakeholders	3	22
	REEHUB set up	4	4

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation?

The pandemic affected the last stage of the project, as the training activities had to be conducted online and it was not possible to show the tools (for auditing and testing) in person. On the other hand, this also allowed more people to attend the online trainings.

However, despite the Covid situation, all outputs and deliverables were achieved even if in some cases they were delayed. In facts, the activities were smoothly carried out thanks to a very successful collaboration within the partnership. Also, pre-existing contacts and close relations among the Italian partners (especially those based in Brindisi) and other local public stakeholders helped a lot in facilitating activities.

Some difficulties initially arose because for some partners it was the first Interreg project (e.g. Montenegrin partner) and it was the first time MEI was acting as LP. For the Municipality of Agnone, some of the issues were related to the turnover of project managers inside the administration and to the political turnover, but they received strong support by the other Italian partners and managed to implement all activities, including the meetings and the final workshop. Once the Municipality identified an external consultant the problem was overcome.

Furthermore, there were consistent problems in the proposal submission phase: the system was not solid enough to allow multiple users at the same time (e.g. when the deadline was approaching). However, problems were solved at a later stage during project implementation, but also at the beginning of the project there were issues with the platform. Also, interviewees reported that the JS officer was extremely helpful to solve problems and was flexible to the needed extent during the pandemics.

For what concerns the Albanian Lead Partner, one of the main problems was the cash flow: the LP reported that the time between the delivery of the joint progress reports and the reimbursement was too long, sometimes even one year. Even if the Albanian Ministry had already contributed with its 15%, it was not possible to receive money from the Ministry to go further with the activities before the expenses were reimbursed. This caused major difficulties to proceed with payments and with the procurement of expertise.

The Lead Partner reports that this was not a problem under an Interreg Greece-Albania project in which the Ministry was partner (the expenses were reimbursed after 3 months from the progress report). The problem is common to all Albanian public entities.

In these regards, the interviewed partner reported that, for some internal reason and organisational structure, the LP was not able to smoothly transfer the money to the partners, even after this was certified and received.

The partner from Montenegro could rely on the revolving fund, enabling this partner to solve the cash flow issue. Thus, the Montenegrin partner was affected by this problem only in a lesser manner, furthermore it didn't encounter problems nor lengthy procedures in the certification of the expenditures.

Apart from the cashflow, there were no particular criticalities hampering project implementation.

6.6.4 Project results

The project created a transnational network of Hubs for the implementation of energy efficiency plans that can be discussed and explained with the local community.

The project also created, tested and applied an audit methodology for each location that takes into account local climatic factors and technologies.

The table below shows the target and achieved value of the result indicator selected by the project.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common plans for energy efficiency and sustainable energy production	Number of institutions adopting new and/or improved strategies and action plans	4	7
	Number of institutions applying new and/or improved tools and services	2	7
	Amount of funds leveraged based on project achievements	0	0
	Number of jobs created (FTE) based on project achievements	1	0
	Number of trained persons	50	117

According to the information collected during the case study interviews, the result indicators generally achieved their target and, in some cases, exceeded it. For what concerns the indicator on FTE, this was inserted with the aim of creating a technical energy auditor expert in improving energy efficiency in Public Building, however it was eventually not finalised under the influence of Covid-19 pandemics. It has been reached under REEHUB PLUS.

The results were homogeneous for each country and were equally achieved. Each partner had a different specific target (MEI: public administration; ENEA: students; University of Montenegro: engineers and architects).

Due to the pandemics, training activities had to be conducted online and it was not possible to show the tools (for auditing and testing) in person. However, this also allowed more people to attend the online trainings and enhancing the expected results indicator.

The project had strong impact also in remote areas: the Municipality of Agnone managed to successfully implement the activities and the webinars and trainings had high local participation and high interest from the public and from the sectorial associations.

What is the added value of your project?

The project, which is the only one approved under the SO 3.2 of the first call, clearly and directly contributes to the programme objectives.

Following the web-survey analysis, the main added value of the project consists in the:

- Promotion and transfer of good practices
- Promotion of international network.

As regards the promotion and transfer of good practices, it is worth to mention the role that Italy covered in the partnership as a partner. Indeed, being Italy rather advanced in this field, its contribution was extremely valuable in bridging the gap with Albania and Montenegro and contributed to the adoption of new policies addressing the nZEB directive⁹ for the improvement of energy efficiency in public buildings and to the adoption of new law for energy efficiency.

At the time of the first interview to the Lead Partner, back in January 2021, Albania was in the process of applying the new regulations for energy efficiency, which was eventually approved in February 2021 and started being operational in September 2021. The regulation sets the minimum requirements for energy performance for the public and private sectors buildings, which results in the identification of the typology of buildings that will be the target of interventions, and obliges municipalities to prepare local action plans for energy efficiency. REEHUB set the basis for this kind of interventions in the field and highly contributed to the policy level and to the EU integration process (EU recommendations on chapter 15 of the acquis requiring that Albania increases efforts in energy efficiency for buildings also from a legislative point of view).

IPA countries require higher training and capacity building for what concerns energy efficiency, and REEHUB went towards this direction.

⁹ Nearly zero-energy buildings Directive 2010/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, aims at promoting the use of energy from renewable sources in buildings, in order to lower their consumption and the amount of energy produced. This will increase the level of energy performance of both public and private buildings.

6.6.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

Project results were capitalised and replicated under its follow-up project REEHUB PLUS, which started in November 2020 and was approved under the same Programme (targeted call) with the aim of giving sustainability to the Hubs, that presents most of the partnership from REEHUB.

REEHUB Plus had a focus on capacity building instead of policy making: it allowed to conduct trainings in person (which was not possible in the last stage of REEHUB because of the Covid situation) and to work on new case studies. In the accession countries, in particular in Albania, the follow up project contributed to the development of training courses, students' involvement.

In Brindisi, REEHUB contributed to the definition of the one-stop-shop in form of an office providing information to citizens and to SMEs on energy efficiency tools and solutions, which was eventually set up in collaboration between DiTNE and the Municipality of Brindisi, and is now operational currently with own funds, with the plan to find sustainability with other EU funding lines.

There is willingness to apply for funding under different calls to implement the activities that were identified under REEHUB, such as energy efficiency infrastructures for public schools or similar actions that were identified as a priority under the project. Furthermore, MEI is already collaborating with ENEA under other projects that involve also the Albanian Agency for Energy Efficiency, specifically for the training activities of its staff. In 2021 the Agency was freshly set up, thus it didn't have capacities to participate as a partner within Interreg calls, however in 2023 the Lead Partner reported that the Agency is now mature enough to take part to Interreg projects as a partner.

The Albanian Lead Partner reports that the plan is to fund such interventions with EU funds (IPA) but also with national funds. In Italy the partners (in particular the Municipalities) should rely on Regional Operational Programmes in the programming period 2021-2027.

The partners are positive about the possibility of applying again for another project for Interreg South Adriatic programme, since energy efficiency is a programme priority also for other donors, especially regarding the Albanian Lead Partner which plans to build on results of projects funded by other donors (KfW, World Bank).

6.6.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

Cultural differences did not affect the project activities. Particularly, the fact that Italian language is extremely widespread in Albania facilitated many activities between Albanian and Italian partners.

As for administrative obstacles, interviewees believe that these were mostly related to the fact that the partners had different levels of governance, so it is not possible to compare their difficulties.

Box 6 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web – survey
- Interview with LP Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (Albania) on 20th June 2023

- Interview with National Energy Technological Cluster Scarl (DiTNE) (Italy) on 5th July 2023
- Materials received from the project partners
- Project website: <https://reehub.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/>

6.7 AWESOME (SO 3.2) - CASE STUDY REPORT

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 May 2023 and the information collected during the interview with the project LP CONFIMIALBANIA and the project partner Polytechnical University of Bari in July 2023.

6.7.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 2nd Call for targeted projects

Starting date: 01.07.2020

Ending date: 28.02.2023

Duration: 31 months

Overall budget: 706 936.09 Euro

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 519 251.86 Euro

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	CONFIMIALBANIA	ALBANIA	Tirana	185 422.80	75 837.79 (41%)
PP	Polytechnic University of Bari	ITALY	Bari	279 280.85	261 214.25 (94%)
PP	Innovation And Entrepreneurship Center Tehnopolis	MONTENEGRO	Nikšić	125 572.50	79 857.72 (64%)
PP	Molise Verso il 2000	ITALY	Campobasso	116 659.94	102 342.10 (88%)

6.7.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

The project aims at contributing to the implementation of the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2010) in the programme area, with an emphasis on nearly-zero energy buildings applied to public administration buildings.

AWeSOMe wants to tackle energy efficiency of buildings by taking advantage from the agro-vocational features of the programme area, turning a challenge into an opportunity: one of the main issues deriving from the agricultural sector is the disposal of agro-waste. The open-air burning, being a hazardous practice for the release of pollution particles, is one of the main techniques currently used. Instead, with a circular economy

approach, the project wants to promote the reuse of agro-waste as a green thermal insulating material by raising awareness on the existence of fully sustainable building materials, made of agricultural waste, and stimulating the development of new ones which, in addition to their thermal insulating function, have a low environmental impact. Specifically, the main goal is to spread best practices about the use of agricultural waste for producing bio-based building components with high hygrothermal performances.

In this sense the reuse of the agro-waste represents a challenge allowing for the production of zero kilometre (km0) building materials. Furthermore, considering that in the last years Albania and Montenegro are experiencing a steady increase in the construction sector, the final objective of the project is represented by the development of sustainable practices through public knowledge and professional expertise.

The main objectives of the project are:

- i. Improving the implementation of the Sustainable Energy Actions for buildings in public sector;
- ii. Enhancing skills on low environmental strategies as the use of agro-waste for efficient buildings;
- iii. Promoting the use of agricultural waste in building sector.

How was the partnership set up?

The project idea was promoted by the Polytechnic University of Bari, which already carried out several research activities on the topic, at the national and regional level, with the aim to focus on technology transfer and awareness raising.

The partnership was set up through the Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme networking channels and through pre-existing relations between Albanian and Montenegrin partners.

The partnership was originated with the aim to combine different competences: PoliBa brings in the technical and scientific experience, while Molise verso il 2000 (Local Action Group) brings its strong experience in activating stakeholders and target groups on the territory, as well as in the organisation of workshops and open labs. Technopolis is experienced on economic development and assistance to start-ups and innovation. The Lead Partner, being a trade association, facilitated the networking activities towards the enterprises. Lastly, the choice of having a Lead Partner with previous experience under Interreg was made to ensure the smooth implementation of the project.

6.7.3 Project implementation

The project first carried out an analysis of the state of the art of local agro-waste and of the regulatory framework in place in the three countries. Furthermore, a study of the main agro-waste available in the programme areas was carried out, taking into account their suitability to be used for the project purposes. Then, the project carried out the concept design and prepared guidelines to make energy efficient building components. This component included also awareness raising activities to promote the reuse of agro-waste and, as such, was targeting agricultural enterprises and farmers, as well as trade associations.

The project then implemented the prototypes (pilot actions) which were installed one in each region in buildings belonging to public administrations.

Lastly, open laboratories on self-building of agro-waste materials were organised and carried out to show potentials and advantages of the proposed technologies, and with the aim to put in place specific competences to allow agricultural enterprises to build the panels with their own resources.

The interviewed partners report that the 4 pilot actions were structured in the same way, with the identification of a specific building according to the peculiarities of each territory, to be treated with agro-waste materials: PoliBa, Molise verso il 2000 and Technopolis identified the pilot site at their premises, while CONFIMI signed an agreement with the University of Epoka to carry out the pilot in their building.

Different materials, different installation conditions, and different sites were proposed and tested in real time during the presentation of the pilot actions. The different choice of the materials is related to the availability of agro-waste material according to the peculiarities of the local productive sector. For instance, the pilot action in Albania was implemented with the use of rice straw insulating panels, while PoliBA used hulled and dust free straws, and Tehnopolis used an ecologic plywood made from the waste of various agricultural crops, such as baled soybean, wheat and hemp straw, and corn sorghum.

All pilot actions were presented between November 2022 and February 2023, and were followed by open labs with the involvement of students.

Following the installation of the panels, each partner monitored the walls using infrared cameras and other monitoring tools. From the point of view of the tools, all partners used the same technology (termocameras) to show the results of the pilot actions during the open labs.

The Lead Partner, due also to its nature of being an association of Italian enterprises in Albania, mostly involved stakeholders from the entrepreneurial sector.

The final event of the project took place on March 10th 2023.

In July 2023, at the end of case study interviews, all output were achieved, as illustrated in the table below, while the final progress report had not been submitted yet.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of new products, services, pilot and demonstration projects realized	Pilot lab on sustainable materials	1	1

Number of final users involved (in pilot or demonstration projects).	Network for the promotion of the green buildings	1	1
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Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation?

The project did not face financial problems related to the absorption of funds. The Lead Partner reports that it did not ask for an advance payment not avoid potential delays in relation to the payment schedule and thanks to the solid financial availability of CONFIMI.

Nevertheless, some delays were incurred because of the centralised FLC system in Albania.

On the other hand, the Montenegrin partner incurred in issues related to the set up of the new government and the activities were put on hold for a limited period.

The Lead Partner also reported that, due to the fact that VAT in Albania is not reimbursable (while in Montenegro it is), in order to increase the level of expenditures, they preferred to sign contracts with Italian suppliers, since then they produced invoices without VAT as foreign suppliers.

Also, the project established synergies with another project from the same axis, REEHUB, which aimed at setting in place skills for energy auditing in buildings. However, the interviewed partners report that, given the uniqueness of AWeSOME focus among Interreg Italy-Albania-Montenegro funded projects, spillover effect among projects was possible up to a certain extent. The partners report that it would have been interesting to have the possibility to be put in touch with projects with a similar focus, funded by different programmes.

6.7.4 Project results

What were the results and impacts of the project?

The main result of the project is the increase in the awareness of the involved countries about the adoption of innovative construction strategies necessary to achieve the energy savings required by the Energy performance in Buildings Directive (EPBD) 31/2010.

The result was achieved thanks to the involvement of both the employees of the interested sectors (technicians, construction professionals and farmers) and the major authorities of the partner countries.

The project prepared and will soon release guidelines and general recommendations, especially relevant for Albanian and Montenegrin stakeholders, to define good sustainable construction practices in order to increase building's energy performance in view of being nZEB (Nearly Zero Energy Buildings). In this sense the project contributes to the programme result "common plan for energy efficiency and sustainable energy production".

According to the web survey filled by the Lead Partner, the workshops have increased the expertise of the participants in adequately approaching the theme of energy saving and the use of the main strategies to achieve nZEB prescriptions.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the topic, the partnership involved a wide variety of stakeholders, namely public bodies, research sector, SMEs and big enterprises, citizens and communities, NGOs, media and Business support organizations.

All the partners achieved the envisaged results in due time, with no specific difficulties.

One of the difficulties that the project partners identified is linked to structural limits in terms of uptake of the project results: the interviewed Italian partner believes that the territory was not ready on the topic of reusing agro-waste, as the agricultural sector still have a narrow vision on waste reuse. On the other hand, the industrial sector turned out to be rather interested in the project outputs, so that it even contributed in the implementation of pilot actions.

In terms of contributing to the pre-accession process of Albania and Montenegro, according to the latest (2022) EC report of the EU enlargement progress, both countries are still in an early stage of preparation with regards to waste management, towards which the EU invites to increase efforts. Thus, the project tackles a shortcoming in which Albania and Montenegro are called to further work in the next years to meet EU requirements.

For what concerns the Programme result indicators, the project contributes to the following:

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Common plans for energy efficiency and sustainable energy production		1	1

What is the added value of your project?

According to the Lead Partner, the added value of the project is that it tried to incorporate agricultural waste with energy efficiency. Furthermore, the results of the project are not only environmental, but also economic, as it gives the opportunity to the agricultural sector to create profit not only from for instance from rice, but also from its waste, with an approach totally based on circular economy.

In addition, the Lead partner believes that the project created new know how for the Albanian society on waste management.

The Italian partner believes that the AWeSOME filled a gap, raising awareness on an alternative way to process agro-waste: the project allowed to organise a set of meetings in which it was possible to introduce such an important topic and to present it to institutional partners and other universities.

The Lead Partner also reported to have highly benefitted from the cross-border cooperation enabled by the project: thanks to AWeSOME, CONFIMI believe that both Albanian and Montenegrin partners could benefit from the high level of expertise provided by the Polytechnical university of Bari.

Furthermore, thanks to the variety of the partnership, the project allowed to test studies and to apply theory into practice.

6.7.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The Lead Partner applied to the call for small scale projects under Interreg South Adriatic, the proposal being under evaluation, in which part of AWeSOME partnership did not fully take part because of limited capacities in the closure phase of other projects. However, there is the intention to present a new proposal under the upcoming Interreg South Adriatic call for proposal, with a proposal that is planned to concentrate on extending the testing phase on other materials.

For what concerns durability of results, one of the outcomes of the project is that it set up a public location where all stakeholders (from school to policy maker to consumers and SMEs) can find tangible examples on how citizens can contribute to a sustainable growth aligned to circular economy principles: demonstrators and prototypes of technical solutions with bio-based building materials from agricultural waste will be kept at the pilot actions premises for future display.

For what concerns systematisation of the project results, what emerged during the study phase is that there is a lack of public infrastructure that enables the connection between enterprises and recycling sector. For this reason, the partnership signed a declaration of intent for future usage of project results. Nevertheless, the partnership attracted the interest from Apulia Region Department for Environmental protection, which is currently defining a new regulation on circular economy and expressed the interest to include PoliBa in technical working groups.

6.7.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

One of the obstacles faced by the Albanian Lead Partner is the fact that Albania has a law in place which prohibits the import of waste, signed 10 years ago after protests arise on the possibility of importing and dismantling chemical waste from Syria. As a solution, the Lead Partner imported waste processed as “finished product” instead of raw waste. Also, for this reason the Albanian pilots focused on the use of rice straw, which is easily retrievable in the country.

Another obstacle reported by the Italian partner is the fact that Montenegro and Albania have a weak regulatory framework on waste management and energy efficiency, which must go together to a lower level of awareness and interest towards the adoption of a circular economy approach: the Italian partner believes that the regulatory framework is more effective if it is developed with a bottom-up approach instead of top-down, as the legal and financial instruments cannot bring to the expected changes if the territory doesn't have a well-rooted culture of sustainability and circular economy. Nevertheless, the interviewee believes that some enterprises start conceiving circular economy as a profitable business for the future.

Box 7 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Interview with and Polytechnic University of Bari (Italy) on 4th July 2023
- Interview with Lead Partner CONFIMI (Albania) on 3rd July 2023
- Project website: <https://awes0me.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/>

6.8 ISAAC (SO 4.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

6.8.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 2nd Call for targeted projects

Starting date: 01.07.2020

Ending date: 30.06.2022

Duration: 24 months

Overall budget: 996 997.04 Euro

Expenditures approved by the end of the project (May 2023): 741 841.76 Euro

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	Technical Institute Foundation for higher education on mobility GE.IN.LOGISTIC.	ITALY	Taranto	419 776.10	340 062.63 (81%)
PP2	University of Salento	ITALY	Lecce	184 818.74	158 278.21 (86%)
PP3	Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture of Molise	ITALY	Campobasso	127 163.40	89 613.03 (70%)
PP4	University of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	148 356.00	83 526.98 (56%)
PP5	Albanian Institute of Transport	ALBANIA	Tirana	116 882.80	70 360.91 (60%)
AP	Customs and Monopolies Agency	ITALY	Rome	n.a.	n.a.
AP	General Directorate of Albanian Customs	ALBANIA	Tirana	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Customs Administration of Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	n.a.	n.a.

6.8.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

Italy, Albania and Montenegro are important trade partners to each other and national customs administrations play an important role in securing the movement of goods across borders and the international supply chains by preventing illicit trade in large volume freight and by facilitating the flow of legitimate commercial cargo. Accordingly, the improvement of inspection processes and customs controls is fundamental to address this dual need. Also, in the context of EU accession, the strong integration of the two candidate countries with the EU system led to an increase of the regional relevance as one of the main entry/exit points for the EU and EU-external trade.

The ISACC project aims to test and put in place procedures and instruments that can enable simplification, harmonisation and standardisation of customs procedures in view of a full transposition of the EU acquis to the IPA Countries. Also, the project aims at improving exchange of information and data to reach a full interoperability of IT systems, which would enhance the efficiency and performance of trade flows by reducing the cost of duplication and accelerating control processes.

The main objectives of the project are:

- *Creation of a solid network of customs stakeholders in the Programme Area.* The project aims to establish a solid network of public and private customs actors, who are involved in the design or fulfilment of customs procedures in the Programme area. Enhancing synergies among customs stakeholders will foster the exchange of best practices and support the identification of threats and potential similarities in the customs control procedures in view of harmonizing customs legislation and simplifying customs procedures in the programme area. It will furthermore support the identification of needs to be transposed at technological level in system and users' requirements for the development of the ISACC platform.
- *Creation of an interoperable hi-tech platform supporting the customs activities.* The project aims to determine a framework for data-harmonization and to ensure a high level of interoperability and coherence among existing IT customs systems for inspections and controls. These objectives will be achieved through the design and prototype of a hi-tech platform supporting the customs activities to be integrated with the technological systems already adopted by customs authorities of the three countries.
- *Reinforcement of custom servants and private transport operators' competences.* Through its capacity building component, the project aims to enhance the operational, administrative and technical/IT capacities of both customs servants and private transport operators of the programme area. On one side, capacity building actions addressed to customs servants aim to improve the overall technical capacity of their administrations, the cross-border procedures and their efficiency as well as the regional cooperation in the field. On the other, action is addressed to private operators aim to reinforce their digital skills to comply with electronic formalities and new technologies as well as their knowledge on customs procedures and controls to increase the quality, security and safety standards of goods traded.

How was the partnership set up?

The partnership partially derives from consolidated relations between the LP, the University of Montenegro and the Albanian Institute of Transport, which were established under other projects of the same axis (namely PORT and PORTS 4.0). The rest of the partnership builds on from the relationship between the University of Salento and the Italian Customs and Monopolies Agency (Associated Partner of ISACC), who had already joined forces under other research activities.

From such collaboration, it emerged the need for enhancing interoperability of the custom system between Italy, Albania and Montenegro (the Customs Agencies were already working together on a twinning), as well as the need to promote standardization of procedures, exchange and mutual knowledge of the staff, knowledge of the procedures for the two IPA countries.

The Lead Partner reports that the project generation was extremely lengthy, but it was facilitated by the fruitful and collaborative relations among partners.

6.8.3 Project implementation

The table below shows the achievements of the project output indicator.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Number of new products, services, pilot and demonstration projects	Information Technology (IT) platform for antifraud customs controls	1	1

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation?

The project faced problems related both to external and internal events.

Like all the target projects, ISACC started in full Covid period, and this affected the project implementation at all levels, forcing meetings to be converted in online version.

Furthermore, the project was slowed down by governmental turnovers that affected all 3 countries, including changes at the high levels of the Customs Agencies, specifically the turnover of directors, which delayed the project implementation.

Also, another problem faced by the project was related to the Memorandum of Understanding, aimed at strengthening cooperation within the partnership and at identifying pilot actions. However, as Customs Agencies have quasi-ministerial procedures, so the document would have been binding for them. Furthermore, the project objectives are depending on data exchange, which is an extremely sensitive issue especially for the EU (data sharing, in facts, is not automatic). All these factors resulted in reluctance in signing the MoU, which had to be renamed to Declaration of interest, as a way to underline the non-binding nature of the document.

On the other hand, there has been a very fruitful collaboration with the middle management level of the Customs Agencies, which had more flexibility, and the project partners were very successful in operating as a liaison with Customs Agencies.

The project was slowed down by the delays in the certification procedures and change of the FLC in Albania. The Lead Partner reports that the Joint Progress Report was closed in mid-June 2023.

In addition, in summer 2022 the Montenegrin government and its agencies were targeted by a hacker attack, which resulted in difficulties in data exchange: the Custom Authority was not able to share data for months, data had to be given via CD or USB after the release of a special permission.

6.8.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

The project results are the following:

development of an interoperable platform to support customs anti-fraud controls and inspection activities;

sharing best practices and produced technical contents for online webinars to improve the customs skills of officials and private operators;

analysis of the legal, administrative and technological state of the art to define needs, similarities and gaps to bridge in order to facilitate the procedural harmonization in the sector.

The project targets the programme result indicator “Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions”. The fulfilled result refers to the Memorandum of Understanding/Declaration of interest (of a non-binding nature) considering customs framework, project activities, purposes, outputs, partnership, synergies and potential future implications.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions	ISACC Memorandum of Understanding	1	1

What is the added value of your project?

In the context of expansion of trade flows among the three countries and in a situation of fast-changing EU regulatory requirements, the project contributed to the harmonisation and standardisation of customs procedures in view of a full transposition of the EU acquis to the IPA Countries, and it drastically improved the organisation of the customs system in IPA countries.

In addition, the project supported the accession process of Montenegro thanks to the organisation of technical webinars for custom officers and they were introduced to the legal requirements. Webinars are still available on the YouTube channel for future usage. The partners from Montenegro tried to build their capacities and they had full support from the Italian custom administration. Specifically, the Montenegrin partner reported that the project improved the Montenegrin the customs footprint systems.

Finally, what the interviewed partners strongly agree on is that the project created a strong international network of partners and stakeholders: in addition to the project full partners, the three customs agencies (associated partners) have actively contributed to the development of the outputs, and from the very beginning proved to be willing to take part in the pilot phase. Partners agree on the fact that, without such collaboration among Customs Agencies, which was reinforced through ISACC, the project results would not be achieved.

6.8.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

For what concerns the capacity building and training component of the project, all the webinars for the customs servants are available on the project's YouTube channel for future usage.

The partners report to have applied for a small-scale project, which is currently under evaluation, and it is focused on the usage of ISACC platform for customs inspections and fraud controls applied to a port scenario (the pilot is to be carried out in the ports of Bari, Bar and Durrës). The idea behind the capitalization was to study the possibility of extending the applicability of the platform to other systems (e.g., airport scenario, road transport...), as well as the use of the platform by other players, e.g., Police or Financial Police.

Another potential for durability is the e-platform itself, which is accessible only to the authorities because of security reasons. However, according to Declaration of interest, the period of usage was until 15 of December 2022 and it wasn't used after the end of the pilot phase, as it was not obligatory (as explained above, the Declaration is non-binding), and EU member Italy cannot share data after the end of the project. Yet, discussions are ongoing for a bilateral agreement between Montenegro and an Italian local customs authority, however this is reported to be difficult because of the issue of data exchange.

6.8.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

Following the analysis of programme documents and through the interviews conducted by the evaluator, it can be observed some obstacles related to the political and security dimensions, mainly regarding the sharing of sensitive customs data outside of the EU, as sharing of customs data is not automatic: while the partners report no major difficulties in sharing data from Albania and Montenegro to Italy, data cannot be shared outside the EU and the partners had to be very careful not to incur in legal violations.

Box 8 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Project progress reports
- Interview with LP Technical Institute Foundation for higher education on mobility
GE.IN.LOGISTIC. (Italy) on 21st June 2023
- Interview with project partner University of Montenegro on 4th July 2023
- Project website: <https://isacc.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/home>

6.9 SAGOV (SO 4.1) - CASE STUDY REPORT

6.9.1 Project identification

Type of project/call: 1st Call for Standard projects

Starting date: 01.04.2018

Ending date: 28.02.2021

Duration: 35 months

Overall budget: 655 950.25 Euro

Expenditures approved by May 2023: 596 431.40 Euro

List of project partners:

PP/LP	Name	Nationality	City	Budget allocated	Expenditures approved (May 2023)
LP	Cooperation and Development Institute	ALBANIA	Tirana	238 384.00	228 833.71 (96%)
PP	Apulia Region - Coordination of International Policies	ITALIA	Bari	213 750.00	211 309.22 (99%)
PP	European Movement in Montenegro	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	72 336.00	68 347.24 (94%)
PP	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy	ALBANIA	Tirana	65 793.25	35 342.90 (54%)
PP	Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs	MONTENEGRO	Podgorica	65 687.00	52 598.33 (80%)
AP	Ministry of Finance and Economy	ALBANIA	Tirana	n.a.	n.a.
AP	Italian Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport - Coast Guard Headquarters	ITALY	Bari	n.a.	n.a.

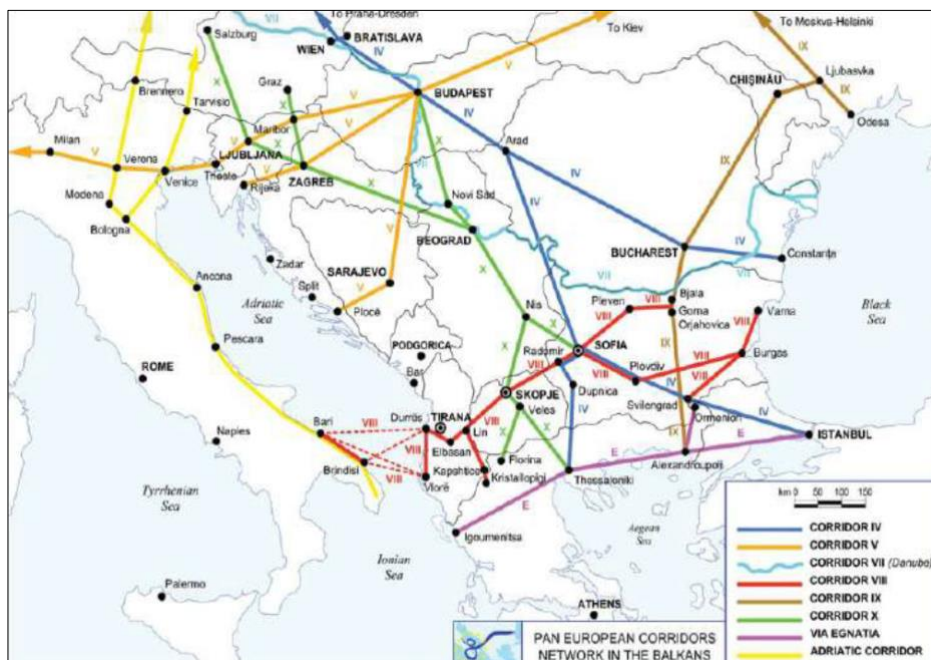
6.9.2 Project preparation

What is the project overall objective?

The SAGOV project aims to enhance the maritime connectivity networks in the South Adriatic Area. The project has the ultimate goal of challenging national institutions to prioritize projects for the implementation of new maritime infrastructures, strengthening the connectivity between South-Adriatic countries.

The project idea stems from a lack of interoperability and connectivity in the field of maritime transport between the three countries. Indeed, especially Albania and Montenegro face many criticalities in the implementation of their connectivity transport policies. Most relevant criticalities refer to the high fragmentation on the two sides of the South Adriatic Area, the absence of well-structured regional and national policies concerning maritime transports, the low interoperability and interconnectivity transport systems. From the Italian side there is the need of further reinforce the coordination on transport policies from the technical point of view, as standpoint for the enhancement of trade relations among the three countries.

In order to achieve this major objective of a more sustainable and enhanced connectivity, the project developed innovative solutions and tools to be used by relevant stakeholders for the implementation, the monitoring and the planning of cross-border cooperation policies. Project approach consists in three phases: the technical phase, which provides the involvement of technical actors, the identification of geographical specificities and the project cycle management.



Source: Corridor VIII Secretariat

How was the partnership set up?

The partnership involves five partners, 2 from Albania, 2 from Montenegro and 1 from Italy. SAGOV benefits from the support of the Albanian Ministry of Infrastructures and Energy, the Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs of Montenegro, and the Directory for International Policies of Apulia Region. The involvement of the three public authorities from all 3 countries has been essential in order to implement concrete policies in the field of maritime connectivity.

The project also involves as associated partners, the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania (MFE) and the Italian Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport - Coast Guard Headquarters.

6.9.3 Project implementation

The most relevant activities realised during the implementation of the SAGOV project concern mainly the creation of tools and innovative solutions aiming at monitoring the flows of maritime transport in the Adriatic Sea, in order to boost connectivity in the South Adriatic area. However, the project also included intangible activities. The project organised several meetings, workshops and round tables with relevant stakeholders, with the aim of elaborating a maritime road map for policy development.

In order to implement the tools for monitoring maritime flows, the project involved technical experts from the Italian Coast Guard that, thanks to their long-term experience in the management of such monitoring systems, provided useful contribution for the technical development of the instruments. Besides, the project involved public authorities to support the implementation of the project and mostly, to increase the awareness on maritime transport issue. Thanks to this “political” involvement, the project elaborated a Trilateral Agreement – Memorandum of Understanding – namely a binding agreement according to which the three countries strengthen their cooperation to define efficient policies in the field of Connectivity Agenda. Furthermore, the project plan also foresees the implementation of a pilot transport connectivity initiative enabling the creation of the *Vessel Traffic Monitoring Information System* (VTMIS).

On the 18th of February 2021, during the *Adriatic Connectivity Forum*, the project presented the position paper “Where does TEN-T corridor VIII stand? Its future”. This marks the end of project activities. The Forum gathered representatives of both Italian and IPA public institutions (the Managing Authority of the Interreg IPA Italy-Albania-Montenegro Programme, Minister of Capital Investments of Montenegro and the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania). The event focused on the identification of possible opportunities in the South Adriatic Area that may arise from the Connectivity Agenda, in order to increase trade competitiveness and maritime safety not only in the specific Programme area, but also in the East-West route, that goes from the Black Sea to the Italian Adriatic regions, named Corridor VIII¹⁰, of which the segment within the Programme area is a crucial part.

What output indicator does your project contribute to?

The main outputs of the project are:

- Transport Connectivity e-platform with “Semaphore System”, which is an artisanal product in form of a tool for monitoring the flows in the Adriatic Sea area. The e-platform implemented by SAGOV aims at increasing the level of coordination and interconnectivity between Italy, Albania and Montenegro by supporting business development and growth.
- Trilateral MoU/Agreement strengthening maritime coordination in South Adriatic Area. The agreement is a binding document among the three countries establishing a cross-border cooperation on connectivity issues.
- A mature connectivity project prepared for access to finance enabling the creation of the VTMIS. The *Vessel Traffic Monitoring Information System* is a monitoring tool already implemented by the Italian Coast Guard and by Montenegro, while the Albanian partner was not aware of the existence of such an instrument. This tool allows technical experts in the field of maritime transportation to monitor maritime flows from the two sides of the Adriatic border within a radius of almost 60 km. This

¹⁰ Corridor VIII is a Pan-European Corridor, which has been not completed yet, including both roads and rail routes. This corridor goes from the Apulia Region to the Baltic Black Sea with the aim of ensuring major connectivity in this Area.

instrument will serve not only for granting more safety and security in the Adriatic Sea, but also to address critical issues related to maritime pollution.

The table below shows the achievements of the project output indicator.

Programme output indicator	Title of the project output	Target	Achieved
Products and services, pilot and demonstration projects	i) Transport Connectivity e-platform with Semaphore System	3	3
	ii) MoU – Memorandum of Understanding		
	iii) VTMS - Vessel Traffic Monitoring Information System		

By the end of the project the partners reached all the 3 planned outputs.

Which factors hampered or facilitated the project implementation? E.g., how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the project implementation?

The analysis shows that financial flow and certification of expenditures represent the main critical issues hampering project implementation. In particular, the project Lead Partner faced many difficulties in receiving the advance payments (the LP reports that receiving the advance payment from the MA took almost 9 months from the signature of the contract, and 2 years for the entire reimbursement). This bottleneck could be attributed to different factors, mainly to the delay of the procedures applied to pre-financing transfer from the JS.

Certification procedures have been very long and led to a late fund reimbursement. These criticalities are particularly evident for the Albanian partners, where certification procedures faced long delays. Conversely, regarding the Montenegrin partners, the reporting and certification procedures were very smooth. Despite the mentioned problems, by the end of the activities the project covered almost the 95% of the expenditures.

Apart from these technical criticalities, Covid-19 pandemic has also affected project implementation. Project activities have been modified (i.e. online meetings) and rescheduled. However, project partners managed to realise almost all the planned activities.

The fact that the LP is an NGO, rather than a public institution or a university, was reported to be a facilitating element for the project implementation, as it ensured the needed flexibility.

6.9.4 Project results

What are the results achieved by the project?

The project selected the programme result indicator “Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions”. The fulfilled result refers to the Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding/Agreements for maritime coordination in the South Adriatic, that is also one of the three project outputs.

Programme result indicator	Title of the project result	Target	Achieved
Agreements for cross-border passengers and freight sustainable	Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding/Agreements for	1	1

transport systems and multimodal mobility solutions	maritime coordination in the South Adriatic		
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What is the added value of your project?

The main added value of SAGOV is certainly related to the promotion of a common and coordinated governance of the maritime transports. The creation of the Transport Connectivity e-platform is a perfect example of this added value. Indeed, through this digital tool, the project ensures a more coordinated governance by providing tailored support and visibility to both projects and initiatives linked with connectivity themes. Through the creation of this platform and the involvement of multilevel actors and stakeholders, the project tries to establish an innovative mechanism of governance model. The main goal of SAGOV is indeed not to design transport policies, but rather trying to understand how the governance works in this specific field. Based on the project application form, the project:

- promotes a better governance;
- It allows to face common threats and obstacles;
- It promotes international networks;

However, the platform is also a useful tool to raise awareness on the state of the fragmented connectivity of the region and, therefore, on the need for future investments.

For these reasons the project allows to overcome common obstacles stemming from the lack of interconnectivity between countries/regions belonging to the Programme Area. Through the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding the three countries/regions are engaged in overcoming the obstacles related to the connectivity field in the South Adriatic Area. Indeed, in the trilateral Agreement is clearly underlined the importance of facing cross-border obstacles in order to increase economic growth, trade relations, citizens' welfare¹¹, for a better integration in the connectivity field.

It is fundamental to mention that the project led to a set of unexpected results, due to external conditions that affected the geopolitical situation in Europe and increased the strategic potential of the route.

As mentioned before, during the Forum held on February 2021, the trans-European corridors and the route of Corridor VIII at the time of the candidacy were at an embryonic state. However, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, lights were turned on the Corridor VIII being the sole route connecting the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea. Furthermore, the fact that the corridor transits through 4 NATO members, out of which two are EU member states (Italy and Bulgaria) and two are candidate (Albania and Montenegro), makes it a safer transport link and guarantees high security of the route. Thus, it started to raise attention towards future development of the route as an instrument for better connectivity and, thus, economic development of the region.

As an example, through studies and technical analyses, Apulia Region adopted a policy paper on corridor VIII within the project, which wasn't initially planned: the document was developed as additional project results even if not officially adopted from a political point of view with an official act, but is an important technical document.

¹¹ Memorandum of Cooperation between Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania, the Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs of Montenegro, and Puglia Region, p.2 https://sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/sites/sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/files/2020-05/2020-04-27_Trilateral-MoU-Signed_SAGOV_0.pdf

Since the project also considers the broader frame of Balkan Region, through its interest on the future of Corridor VIII, it also allows to develop international relations and to reinforce the existing one. As already mentioned, the final event focusing on the future of Corridor VIII and implemented in the frame of SAGOV project allowed the three partners to ensure higher visibility on the objectives of the project.

According to the interviewed LP and partner, the European Commission is aware of the relevance of the Corridor VIII also thanks to the lobbying activities undertaken by SAGOV partners, with specific regards to Puglia Region and Albania, in cooperation with Bulgarian and North Macedonian authorities.

The project partners, even after the end of the project, continued taking part to high level conferences and initiatives on Trans-European Corridors to raise attention to the Corridor VIII.

As a result, the Corridor VIII was inserted in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) map in December 2022 following the revision of 2021 map.

6.9.5 Durability and capitalisation potential

The durability of the project is ensured by the Transport Connectivity e-platform, hosted on the LP's website. Indeed, on the basis of the information collected through the analysis of project documents (i.e., application form), the development of the exhaustive mapping of transport connectivity in the South Adriatic area will serve as a basis for further initiatives in this geographic area. Through the purpose of a specific methodological approach and the gathering of information on maritime transport connectivity over the time, the e-platform will be the most relevant instrument of the project ensuring its durability.

The Lead Partner and Apulia Region have been the main actors of the process and carried out extensive lobbying activities at the European level, ensuring the high potential of the project follow up.

For what concerns capitalisation, the partners developed a follow up project, SAGOV Plus. The project was born with the aim to give a technical follow up to SAGOV, but after the events of early 2022 which impacted the strategic importance of Corridor VIII the project was beneficial for increasing awareness and raising attention on the project results at the institutional level not only in the programme area, but also beyond.

The LP reports that they are activating for applying under the Interreg South Adriatic programme.

Last but not least, with the approval of the Corridor VIII within the the TEN-T there will also be the opportunity to apply for infrastructure funds, mainly CEF.

6.9.6 Possible presence of CBC obstacles

Following the analysis of programme documents and through the interviews conducted by the evaluator, it can be observed some emerging obstacles related to the political dimension, mainly related to different governance systems. As a matter of facts, the main problems are related to the governance, especially on how the policy makers get together and operate. The problem is how actors manage to organise between each other. That is why the project focuses much more on the governance rather than legal and administrative issues. Indeed, the project has been implemented by considering the *Acquis Communautaire* as the principal legal guideline, enabling partners to operate in a specific legal framework.

The project did not face any particular internal administrative obstacles preventing its implementation

Box 9 Source of information

- Project application form
- Web-survey
- Project progress reports
- Interview with LP Cooperation and Development Institute (Albania) on 19th July 2023
- Interview with project partner Apulia Region - Coordination of International Policies (Italy) on 28th June 2023
- Project website: <https://sagov.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/home>