



Report on the outcome of the thematic and the regional consultations in the South-East Finland - Russia 2021-2027 Programme content development

Introduction

Following bottom-up approach, this report combines inputs received in the thematic consultations organized jointly for Finnish and Russian experts and regional stakeholders on 5 and 6 November 2020, as well the complementary discussions with the programme regions during the Autumn 2020. Four thematic online meetings were organised to consult the programme partners on Policy Objectives and Interreg Specific Objective identified for the South-East Finland – Russia 2021-2027 Programme, by the Programming Committee. In total 75 participants contributed to the discussion.

The last chapter of the report sums up conclusions of all four thematic meetings. In addition, complementary outcomes from the discussions with regional stakeholders that took place during Autumn 2020, are included.

On-line meeting agenda and methodology

In each session, the participants were introduced to the results from the regional stakeholder discussions and first conclusions of the draft territorial analysis, and their reflection to Specific Objectives and their potential inputs and justifications. During the group discussions the relevance of the Specific Objectives and their potential priorities to the regional needs and potential of their implementation were discussed.

Discussions were facilitated by the staff of the Managing Authority and TESIM expert, and supported by the Programme's Branch Office. The sessions were conducted in English involving both Russian and Finnish experts in the respective thematic sectors, and also, contributed by the regional stakeholders.

Overview of the participants in the on-line consultation meetings

Theme	Date of the meeting	Number of participants
PO1 "A smarter Europe"	5 November	21
PO2 "A greener low-carbon Europe"		20
PO3 "A more connected Europe"	6 November	20
ISO1 "A better cooperation governance Europe"		14

Policy Objective PO1

“A smarter Europe”

The specific objectives put forward for the expert discussions were:

- *Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies;*
- *Enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs.*

Research and innovation, uptake of technologies

During the discussion the thematic experts **agreed to prioritising the “research and innovation” specific objective** and noted the existing regional, interregional and international networks and clusters in the programme area which create sound basis for the further development. Also, universities and research centres located in the programme area ensured the capacity for research and innovation. At the same time, they also stressed that the focus of the programme has to be on the **uptake and commercialisation of the new advanced technologies by linking science and businesses**, so that the innovations and inventions do not rest in the drawers of researchers. Thus, strengthening the collaboration among the actors was emphasized. Also, the need for **transfer of new working models and processes** to the other areas (e.g. culture, social and health care) and to the society in general was raised.

Smart specialisation

The experts also brought to the attention the **specific objective related to the “smart specialisation”** stating that this approach could foster transformation of the SMEs to more sustainable models through the “real regional smart specialization”. Regional smart (or innovation) strategies have been developed in some regions, and there is need for support in their implementation.

Digitalisation

On top of the two specific objectives above, experts also stressed the need for the **digitalisation and suggested consideration of the relevant specific objective**, mentioning in particular the need for:

- Promotion of digital innovations and smart processes to increase productivity of new and traditional business, and not limiting them to ICT-related companies but users of ICT solutions, e.g. machinery, health care, construction etc. sectors;
- New services and products to ensure digitalisation of everyday life services, e.g. tele-working, keeping CBC contacts, health-related services, etc. in the conditions of pandemics and post-pandemic and other global phenomena;
- New digital products to boost the development of the service sector.

As to the specific activities under the Policy Objective 1, the experts suggested:

- Boosting entrepreneurial mindset both in youth, as well as in the existing entrepreneurs, e.g. internalization of businesses;

- Fostering creation of innovation eco-systems, including new players (e.g. students, cities) to foster development of smart areas;
- Linking science and business, bringing the latest developments in the research and labs to the business, support to co-creation activities (e.g. with final beneficiaries, 3-helix, 4-helix);
- Encouragement of companies to seek cooperation across the borders and see it as a possibility for expansion;
- Transfer of innovations to different areas of life affecting people in the border regions;
- Utilisation of the existing clusters (Cleantech, IT, life science) to boost the development;
- Promotion of creation and strengthening of clusters in the creative industries, e.g. among museums, health service providers, sports;
- Support to development of businesses in the rural areas;
- Promotion of the urban-rural interplay for synergetic and balanced development and economic growth in the border regions.

Policy Objective PO2

“A greener low-carbon Europe”

The specific objectives put forward for the expert discussions were:

- *Promotion the transition to a circular economy;*
- *Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.*

Transition to circular economy

This specific objective was mentioned as a priority not only by the experts on the Policy Objective 2, but also in the discussions on the Policy Objective 1, Smarter Europe.

Transition to a circular economy is seen as a way to **sustainability and increase in effectivity of production (sustainable life-cycle approach)**, however, at the same time it was also recognised that the **grounds for this transition need to be created first**, be they related to the strategic planning, change of the consumer and producer habits and behaviour, or to the development of the business models. The social factor related to the responsible consumption was mentioned as an important pre-condition for the transition to happen. Thus, the participation of the decision-makers and the NGOs in activities related to this specific objective is crucial.

Climate change

Discussion on the specific objective related to the climate change showed the **great diversity of the topics** that are gathered under the umbrella of this specific objective, namely

- Changes (losses) in the biodiversity, their mapping and prognosis,
- Food safety and adaptation of agriculture,
- Promotion of the carbon neutrality and increase of the useful carbon (forests, green areas in the cities),
- Utilization of opportunities offered by digitalisation, e.g. to economize material usage.
- Climate change as an opportunity for new businesses.

Also, the planning aspect of the adaptation to the climate change was strongly put forward, both in relation to the business development, as well as in relation to the necessity for practical adaptation measures at local and regional level and regional assessments of the climate change effects.

At the same time the experts noted the relevance of the specific objectives addressing **biodiversity and sustainable management of water resources** suggesting that the measures related to nature protection measures in the sea, lakes, rivers should also be part of the programme strategy, especially in the areas with high tourism potential.

As to the specific activities under the Policy Objective 2, the experts suggested:

- Raising awareness and fostering responsible consumption for population and businesses;
- Data base of practices and technologies based on the circular economy;

- Utilisation of the existing Cleantech cluster to boost the transition;
- Local and regional planning to support climate change adaptation;
- Assessment of the climate change impact on the biodiversity, its mapping and prognosis;
- Assessment of the climate change impact on the businesses and development of strategies for adaptation;
- Adopting “green communication” and “do no harm” principles as horizontal approaches in the programme;
- Business models for SMEs, NGOs, other "small actors" in circular economy to enable actions in the field (incl. P2P)
- Water resources are one of the key strengths of the area and sources for innovations.

Policy Objective PO3

“A more connected Europe”

The specific objectives put forward for the expert discussions were:

- *Developing a sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent, secure and intermodal TEN-T;*
- *Developing and enhancing a sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility.*

TEN-T and access to TEN-T

As both specific objectives put forward to the experts refer specifically to the TEN-T network, this was the starting point of the discussion. The experts noted the while the programme area undoubtedly benefits from the TEN-T network and that strategies related to the development of the network are to be taken into account, they also concluded that they do not really see the further development of the network itself or access to the network as a task for the cross-border cooperation programme. It was rather suggested that the programme activities focus on the necessary improvements in related services and facilities at the regional and local level.

Sustainable, climate resilient, intermodal national, regional and local mobility

This specific objective in the PO 3 was acknowledged as the most relevant for the programme, in particular, in relation to **sustainable and intermodal regional and local transportation**.

Experts noted that the **recent developments** in the field of accessibility and mobility need to be taken into account when planning programme activities, for example, impact of the opening the Parikkala border crossing point to international traffic or the digitalisation of documentation for cargo traffic that has taken place in Russia. It was also noted that capitalisation on the results of projects already implemented has to be done, for example, making information from different monitoring tools available to wider public (road services, monitoring air quality, timetables, tariffs, rules, road conditions).

Climate friendly and climate resilient mobility was stressed several times, suggesting use of the **inland waterways** (e.g. Saimaa Canal or the initiative of connecting the Baltic Sea and the White Sea via inland waterways) and **archipelago of Gulf of Finland**; as well as development of the **cycling infrastructure**, in particular, linking them to the EuroVelo routes. Also planning, linking and promoting intermodal transportation is seen by the experts as a way forward to ensure sustainability and environmental friendliness of the transport.

The experts also saw a potential in joint actions related to the safety on boats and joint regulations for the actions of the ship-owners, as well as exploring possibilities for the border crossing facilities specifically for the sailing tourists using small crafts. Also, intermodal and quick access to the tourism sights for the cruise tourists was mentioned as an issue that deserves attention.

A specific need for the development of **mobility and accessibility in small and sparsely populated areas** was also raised, as it is a very important pre-condition for the well-being of people living there, as well as for their economic activity and competitiveness.

As to the specific activities under the Policy Objective 3, the experts suggested:

- Exploring possibilities for more efficient and safe flow of people of goods, including benefits related to digitalisation;
- Promoting of cross-sectoral networks (e.g. between SMEs relating to tourism and cargo transport)
- Exploring possibilities for interregional cabotage shipping;
- Promotion of use of environmentally friendly transport and climate resilient mobility;
- Exploring possibilities for easier visa procedures (e.g. electronic visas on border, no-visa visits for cruise ship passengers);
- Planning and promotion of intermodal transportation, filling in the missing links where necessary;
- Development of cycling infrastructure, in particular, linking it to EuroVelo routes;
- Development of infrastructure for water tourism, yachting, and recreation;
- Development of waterway services for sailing and related tourism by the SMEs and NGOs.

Interreg Specific Objective ISO1

“A better cooperation governance for Europe”

The specific objectives put forward for the expert discussions were:

- *People-to-people action for increased trust;*
- *Institutional capacity of public authorities to manage macro-regional, sea-basin and other relevant territorial strategies.*

People-to-people activities

This specific objective was seen by the experts as an opportunity for cooperation among different actors, be they part of an organisation or an informal community. It was also stressed that **rules for the participation and project implementation procedures need to be lighter** compared to the projects of higher financial volume. Also, the need for more **training and capacity building** of the actors that could potentially start cooperation under this specific objective was stressed by the experts.

As to the areas of cooperation, a wide range of them were mentioned, including

- Youth cooperation in sports;
- Local development to address the local specifics and small local brands;
- Culture to encourage shifts in society and as driver for positive change;
- Social issues, health, quality of life;
- Education, new competences, including language learning;
- Support on micro entrepreneurship.

It was a general agreement that the ‘people-to-people’ cooperation has to be a separate priority in the programme rather than a horizontal approach.

Institutional capacity of public authorities

Not only experts discussing ISO 1, but also experts in the other meetings stressed the need for closer cooperation of the local and regional administrations, joint planning and strategy-building activities that can serve as a basis for activities to be implemented under other policy objectives. Local strategies, involvement of citizens to ensure sustainable development agendas, exchanges on the good and transferable practices, as well as testing of new ideas and experimenting by implementation of pilot actions were named as the activities that could be supported under this specific objective.

Conclusions from the thematic discussions

Conclusions for the programme strategy on Policy Objective 1:

- Agreement on the need to support the specific objective *“Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies”* with specific focus on utilisation of the technologies in businesses, services and society in general;
- Suggestion to consider smart specialisation as a tool for the growth and sustainability of the SMEs i.e., joining into one priority the specific objectives related to the “growth of SMEs” and “smart specialisation”;
- Support to digitalisation as a horizontal tool in all policy objectives supported by the programme.

Conclusions for the programme strategy on Policy Objective 2:

- Agreement on the need to support the specific objective *“Promotion the transition to a circular economy”* with specific focus on creating pre-conditions for it to happen;
- Suggestion to consider the climate change aspects related to the biodiversity and management of the nature resources as a priority for the programme based on its rich water resources, flora and fauna;
- Whereas activities related to development of local and regional strategies for adaptation to the climate change could be part of the activities supported under ISO1.

Conclusions for the programme strategy on Policy Objective 3:

- TEN-T network development and access to TEN-T are seen as the national level objectives, whereas the CBC should focus on facilitation of accessibility and mobility on regional and local level enhancing the facilities and services related to TEN-T.
- As to the infrastructure component for this policy objective, the preference of the experts was clearly in favour of further development of the cycling infrastructure, as well as the necessary infrastructure for the water transportation (e.g. development of small harbours, infrastructure for yachting) taking into account the green solutions and environment;
- Mobility and accessibility in small and sparsely populated areas could be considered as a priority for the programme;
- Whereas planning and cooperation activities among the public authorities could be part of the activities supported under ISO1.

Conclusions for the programme strategy on Interreg Specific Objective 1:

- People-to-people activities have to be a separate priority in the programme and allow for wide range of small-scale cooperation activities. Capacity building and lighter procedures for application and reporting need to be considered for such projects;
- Cooperation among the public authorities has to support joint planning and strategic thinking necessary for the implementation of all other objectives of the programme.

Complementary conclusions from the second round of the regional stakeholder consultations when not directly referred in the thematic discussions

- Programme thematic concentration is in line with the regional development funds allocated in Finland during 2021-2027 period. This is positive, as well as challenging factor to some extent, since the specific features of Cross-Border Cooperation Programme are seen essential and important to recognize;
- Prerequisites to support life-long learning taking into account vocational education, labour force development and empowered accessibility to the education for all population groups using digitalisation;
- When developing measures to enhance education and labour markets, their new forms and prognoses of the future tools are essential;
- Enhancing the digital skills and awareness of safe-coded behaviour of using internet;
- Large initiatives and ensembles funded by the national funding or European Union funds such as the cultural heritage sites (like Monrepos, Lake Ladoga and Lake Saimaa, Green Capital and Culture Capital awards) and construction sites (like canals) should be taken into account as a source of added value when preparing and implementing projects;
- Rural and sparsely populated areas need particular attention since their CBC related development has not been active enough;
- Scientific work needs to meet with business environment to move into more practical and concrete results;
- Enhancing SME activities are seen as a key task in the future as well as people-to-people small scale activities;
- The Green Approach is to be considered as a horizontal element in all activities that Programme funds.