

Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Grenzregionen (AGEG) e.V.
Association des régions frontalières européennes (ARFE)
Asociación de Regiones Fronterizas Europeas (ARFE)



TASK FORCE INTERREG

Evaluation of the questionnaire about the role of the People-to-people-projects for the European Border and Euro Regions

1. Introduction

The Task Force „INTERREG“ is – apart from the Task Forces „Cross-Border Health“, „External Borders“, „Culture“, „Water Management“ and „Schengen“, one of a total of 6 working groups of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and is responsible for the close supervision of all ETC-relevant questions of its members.

Since the implementation of the so-called People-to-People projects (P2P projects) is an important work for a large number of AEBR members, the concrete meaning of this kind of project for the Euroregions and Border regions, the start of the current promoting period 2014-2020 as well as the expectations in view of the time after 2020 should be researched into by means of a questionnaire.

It was already in the past, that the AEBR provided studies or position papers about the P2P-projects (*see among others „People-To-People projects“ – their importance and their contribution to the success of cross-border (INTERREG A) programmes*).

In the period of 22. July – 26. August 2016, AEBR members were asked to answer a questionnaire on the outlined area. A total of 90 institutions have been involved. A total of 40 completed questionnaires were received at the AEBR office.

Hence, the following evaluation offers a valid survey on the present P2P-relevant themes as, in the end, 45 % of the members actively participated in the response. The return rate for questionnaires are usually much lower and mostly amount to approx. 10-15 %.

2. Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire which is attached to this evaluation as Annex 1, includes in total 8 main questions, most of these questions have been amplified with completing additional questions.

The questions mostly have a closed character, i. e., they are primarily questions which have to be answered with "yes" or "no" or which have led to the groupings in certain response options.

Some of the complementary additional questions (*for ex. on the questions 1, 5, 7 and 8*) were drafted as open questions. The authors have tried to resume the transferred answers at the best.

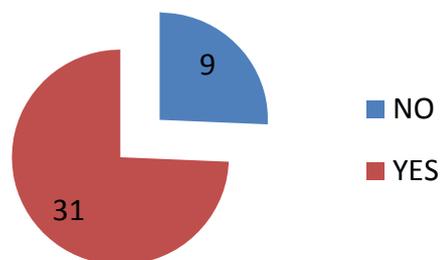
3. Evaluation of the questionnaire

Question no. 1:

Is your institution responsible for the implementation of P2P projects within your border region? (In this context, it is irrelevant if you are the lead partner or a project partner.)

A total of 31 replies were received. 31 of the respondents and thus more than 77 % indicated that their institutions are responsible for the implementation of the P2P programmes in their respective regions. Only 9 of the respondents and thus less than 23 % communicated That they do not have the appropriate skills or possibilities.

Is your institution responsible for the implementation of P2P projects within your border region??



In additionally, we asked for an information regarding the following question:

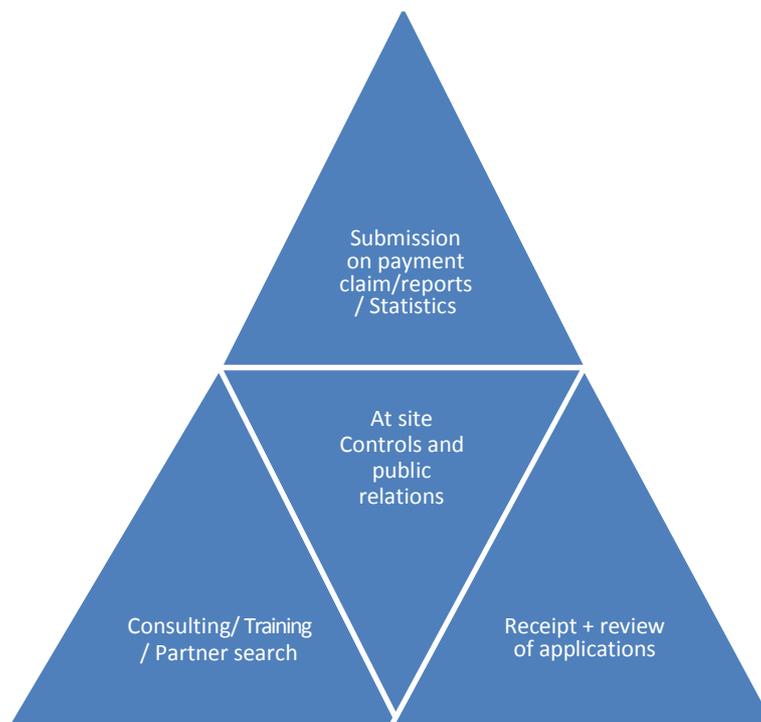
What is the significance of the implementation of the P2P-programme within your secretariat? I.e. with regard to the current number of funding programmes or projects that are implemented by you, and also with regard to the number of employees concerned.

In summary, it can be said that the P2P – implementation has got a very high relevance for the offices of our members, whether it is with regard to the number of employees involved or regarding the quantities of P2P projects supported.

Furthermore, the respondents stressed the great importance of the ETC – and in particular the INTERREG – A programmes, which they have for the cross-border activities of our members.

The high relevance of P2P programmes for the offices can also be deduced from another additional question, being part of this first object of investigation. Concretely, we wanted to know:

What are your responsibilities within the implementation of the P2P programme? Please mention the applicable process steps (e.g. receipt of applications, review of applications, approval, settlement). Are there further tasks that you fulfil (e.g. consultancy on content-related qualification of applications, project partner search, trainings, coaching, etc.)? If this is the case, please state the corresponding tasks.



The above graphic shows the tasks which have been indicated by all institutions. It becomes apparent that the P2P implementation by the members of the AEBR requires a complex and comprehensive support from the first consultation to the financial reporting. This work cannot be done without the corresponding „Manpower“ in the offices.

To find out if there is also an „additional need“ for P2P projects, we wanted to know from the respondents who do not yet deal with P2P:

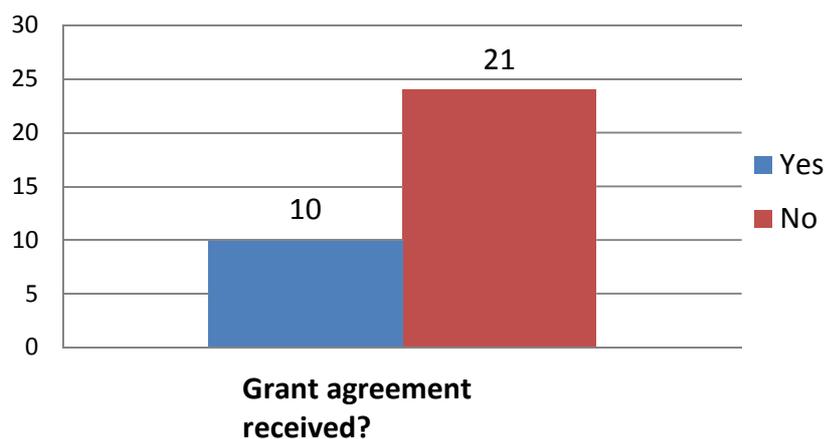
Would you be interested in implementing P2P projects within your programme area?

The answer to this was clear. Almost all respondents confirmed this as they obviously see a high added value in the P2P implementation. Here, the „broad geographic spread“ of the interested parties is worth mentioning. The implementation of the P2P projects up to now concentrates, as is known, especially on the central and middle European area. However, representatives from the following regions also expressed the wish to implement this type of project: Sofia-Region, Saar-Mosel, Scheldemond, Ostrobotnia, Nord Karelia, Alsace, Gnpaect.

Question no. 2:

Have you or the lead partner already received a grant agreement or a grant approval for your joint P2P application?

A total of 31 replies to this question were received. Only 10 of the respondents and thus only 32 % indicated that they have already received a grant agreement for their P2P umbrella project application whereas 21 of our members and thus less than 68 % answered that they are still waiting for a corresponding decision for their INTERREG V A - application.

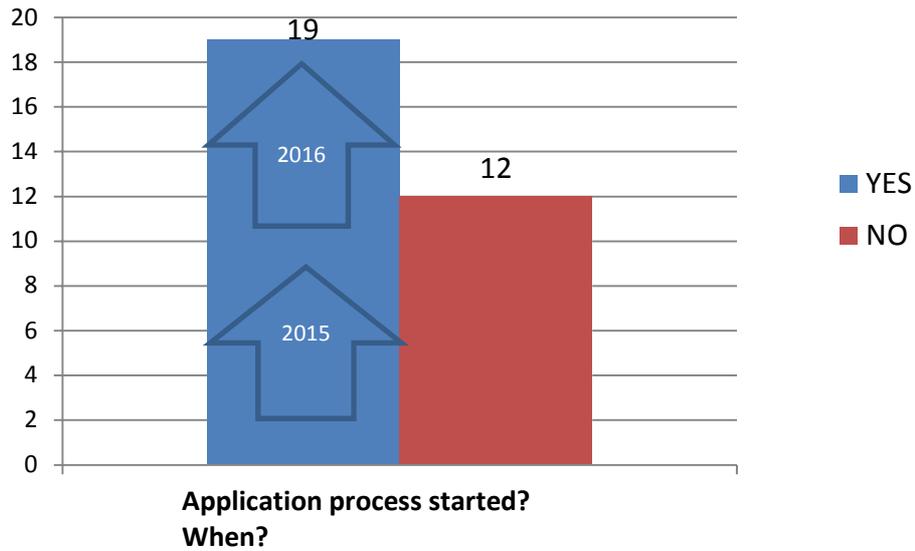


Question no. 3:

Have you already started to accept applications within your P2P fund? If yes, please also state the corresponding date.

A total of 31 replies to this question were received. Especially under consideration of question no, 2, the clearness of the answer is surprising because, although the major part of our members is still waiting for a grant agreement, 19 institutions and thus more than 61% of the respondents started to accept applications. Obviously, many members couldn't or didn't want to wait any longer with the P2P implementation, as potential P2P project leaders signalled a corresponding interest. Only less than 39 % and thus 12 respondents indicated that they haven't started yet with the application process..

Answers

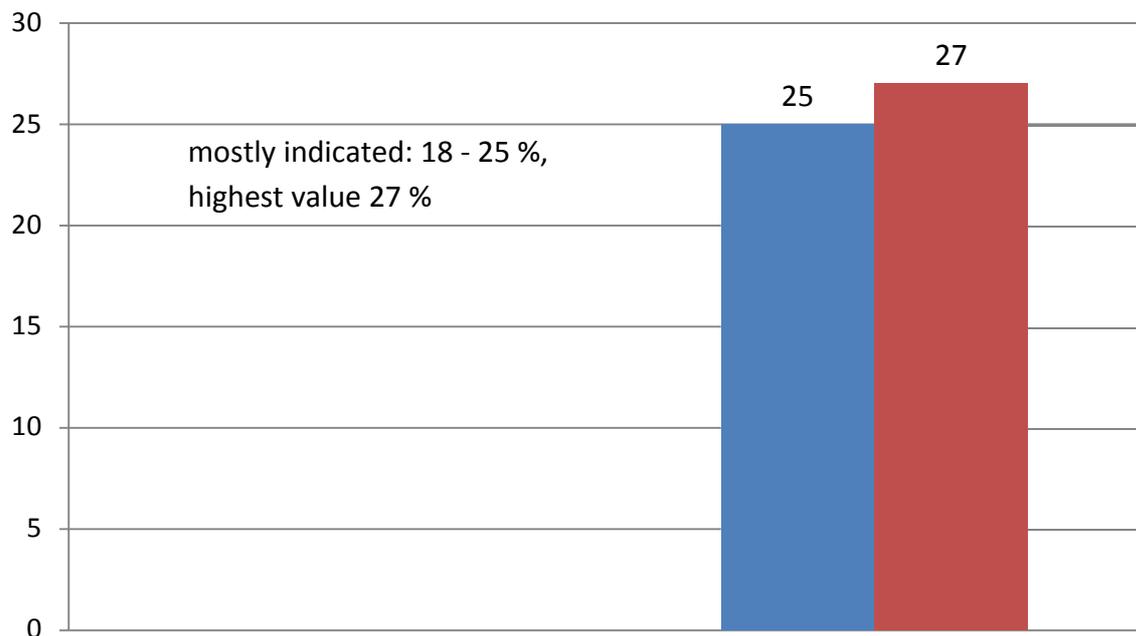


The first members have already started with the application process in 2015. It was communicated to us that the latest starting date was June 2016. The reason for this flexible approach can be - as already indicated - mainly the circumstance that the members do not want to risk a break in the cross-border encounters.

Complementary to the third question, our members were asked to give us the following information:

Please mention the percentage of project funding that has been bound in the projects received up to now.

Answers

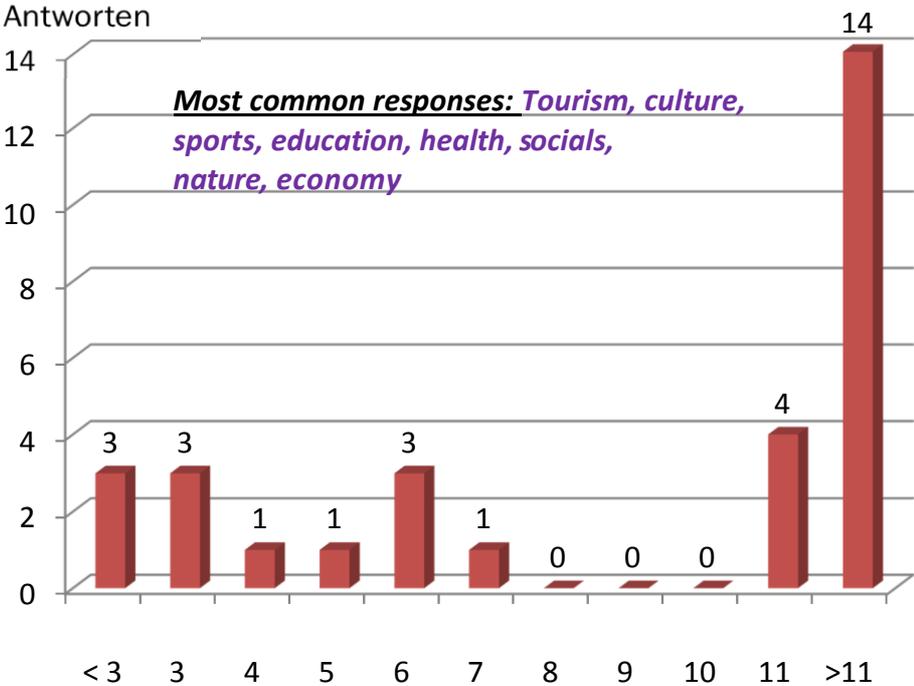


The consultation on the current allocation of funds showed a complex picture. There were members who thitherto haven't bound any project funds which, as is known, can be explained with missing grant agreements or a still outstanding start of the application process. However, most of the respondents' data are in the range of 18 - 25% of the planned project costs The best value was even 27 % of the available project funds.

Restrictively, it has to be referred to the fact that not all P2P umbrella projects have got identical duration. While the duration of the P2P funds for German-Polish Euroregions for example amount to more than 6 years, other regions sometimes have much shorter periods of implementation (of for ex. 36 months), which then again has considerable effects on the percentage utilization rate of the requested P2P budget.

Question no. 4:

In how many different thematic areas (e.g. sports, tourism, health and social affairs, etc.) may P2P projects be submitted to you? Please state the corresponding number and the concrete funding topic



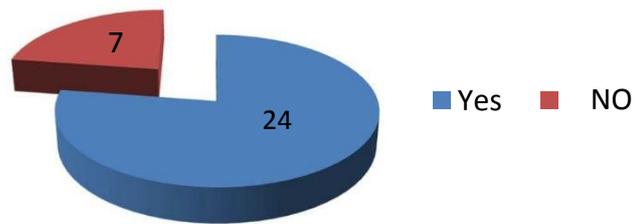
A total of 30 replies to this question were received. It is striking that the majority of the respondents rely on a high number of eligible topics for P2P projects. For instance, 18 respondents and thus a total of 60 % replied that they offer 11 or more subject areas for their P2P projects. Only 6 of the respondents, thus 20 %, indicated that they provide only 3 or less subject areas. The remaining 20 % conveyed that they dispose of more than 4-7 subject areas. The following 8 themes have been indicated as the most important subject areas: tourism, culture, sports, education, health, social issues, nature and economy.

Question no. 5:

Are your implemented P2P projects (partly or fully) invoiced on the basis of lump sums or on the basis of the real costs? (Please cross the options "yes" or "no".

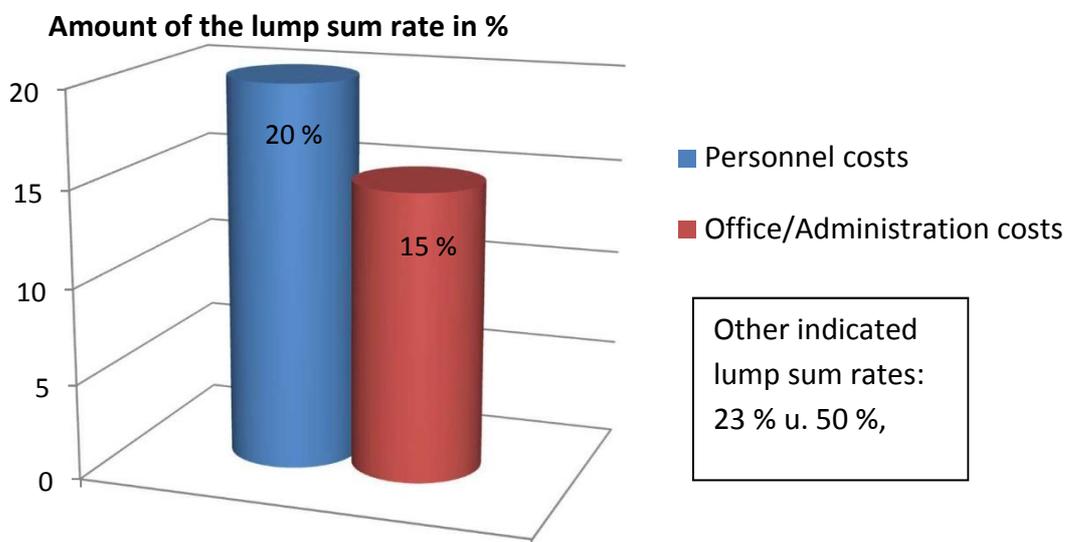
All in all, 31 replies to this question were received. 24 of the respondents, thus more than 77%, indicated that there is the possibility of invoicing on a lump sum basis within the P2P projects they offer. Only 7 respondents and thus less than 23 % communicated that the P2P invoices are exclusively effected on the basis of actual costs.

Are costs invoiced on a lump sum basis?



Complementary to the fifth question we asked for the following information:

*If lump sums are applied, we kindly ask you to state the corresponding percentage.
Furthermore, please let us know which type is applied.*



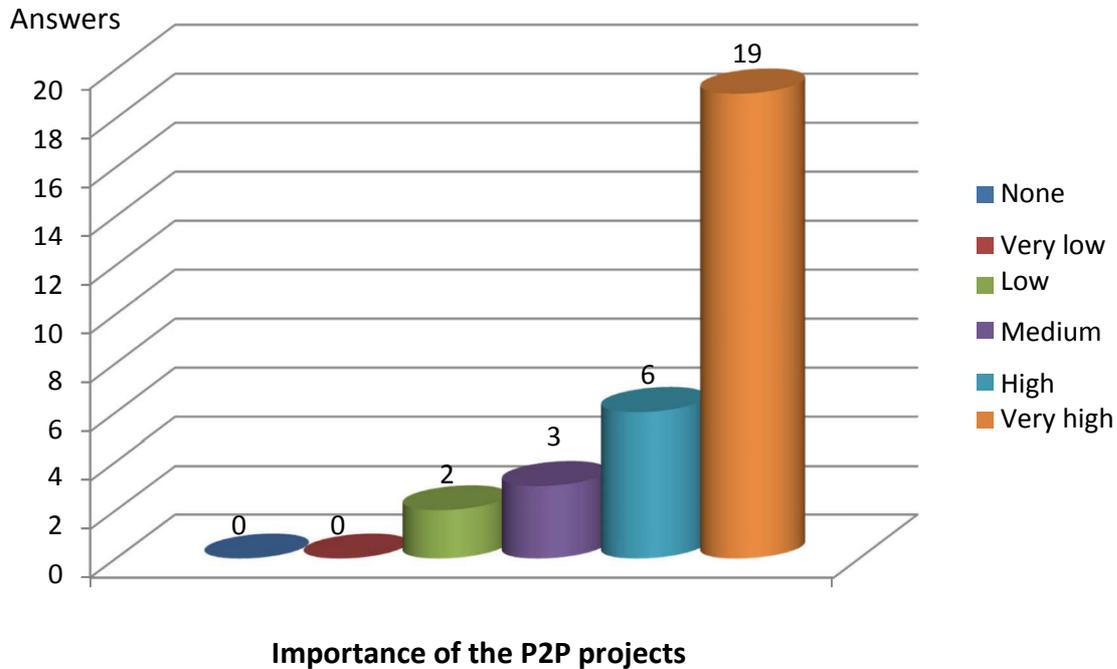
The evaluation of the received replies revealed that there are mainly lump sums on personnel costs as well as on administration costs. In addition, both lump sums are in close relationship, as office and administration cost are mostly set as a fixed percentage of personal costs. While, in most cases, the lump sum for personal costs corresponds to a share of 20 %, the amount of the lump sum for office costs is often 15 % of the value of the lump sum for personnel. Only two

members communicated that they have deviating lump sum rates of 23 % resp. 50 %.

This information leads, in reverse, to the fact that in the case of P2P projects so far only a partial but not a complete invoicing by means of lump sums is possible.

Question no. 6:

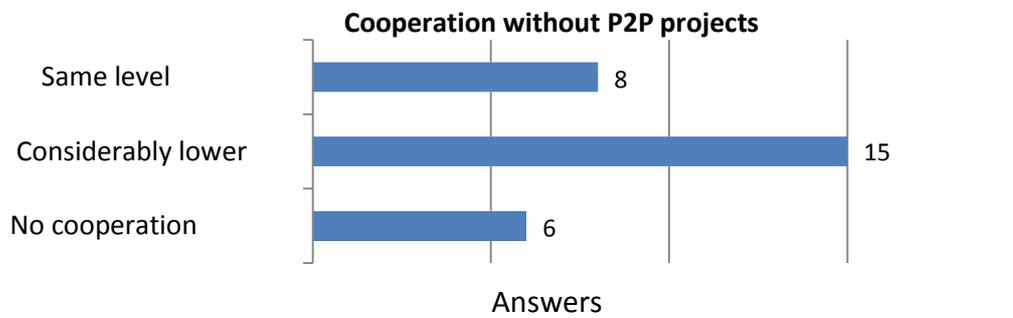
How important is the implementation of P2P projects for your border region? (Please use a rating of 1 – 6; i.e. "6 – very high" to "1 – very low/no importance").



A total of 3 replies to this question were received. The above-average relevance of this funding instrument for the border regions was nearly unanimously confirmed by the respondents. Thus, 25 of the respondents, ergo more than 83 %, ascribe a very high or high importance to the P2P projects. Furthermore, none of the respondents indicated that the P2P-projects have no or a very low effect on their individual region.

Complementary to the sixth question we asked for the following information:

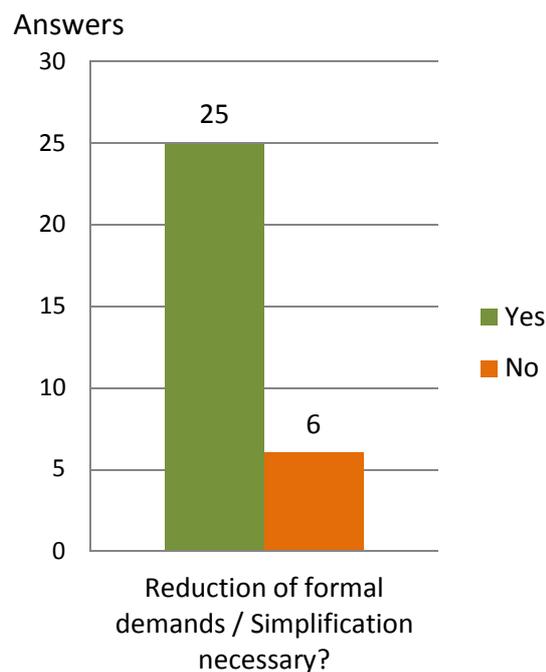
Please state what cross-border cooperation would be like in your border region without this funding instrument for the organisations (this means for municipalities, associations, clubs, schools, etc.)? Please use one of the following categories to describe this: "same level"/ "considerably lower" or "no cooperation would be possible".



In addition to the identification of the relevance of P2P projects it was also important for the authors of the questionnaire to find out which consequences a loss of the P2P programmes would have on the existing relations of cross-border cooperation. A total of 29 responses were evaluated for this demand. 21 respondents, thus more than 72 % expressed the view that the cooperation would fall to a significantly lower level, or that no proper cooperation would be possible. Just under 28%, i.e. 8 respondents said they could maintain a roughly unchanged level.

Question no. 7:

Based on your experience up to now, do you think it would be necessary to lower the formal demands for P2P projects, or to provide simplifications for the applicants?



A total of 31 replies to this question were received. The overwhelming majority of the respondents expressed the desire for (further) simplification. For example, 25 of the respondents, almost 81%, said they would like to make the P2P projects more straightforward for applicants. Only 6 of the respondents - 19% - argued that the existing requirements should be maintained.

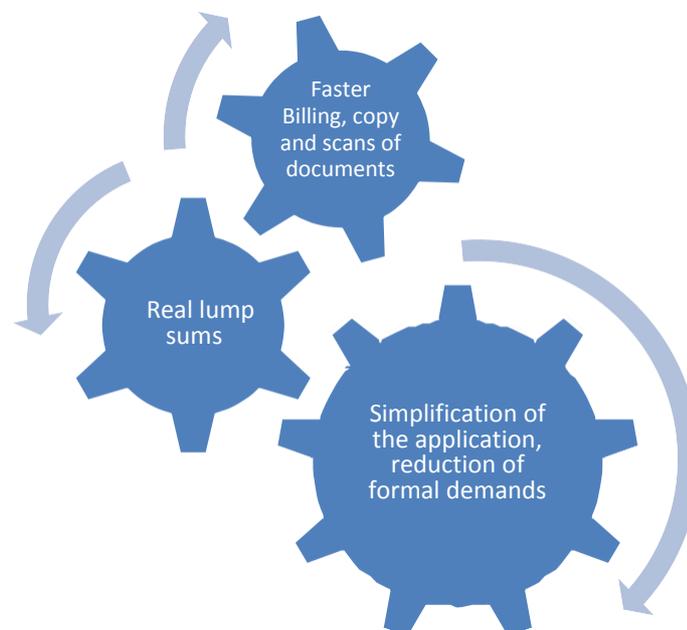
Restrictively, it must be supplemented by the fact that the framework conditions in the individual INTERREG program rooms sometimes differ quite considerably, so that the respectively applicable requirements for the lead partners of P2P projects are not entirely comparable.

In order to further qualify the answer to the seventh question, we asked the respondents for information on the following question:

If you consider a lowering of formal demands necessary, please let us know how (e.g. with regard to time or content) this could be achieved

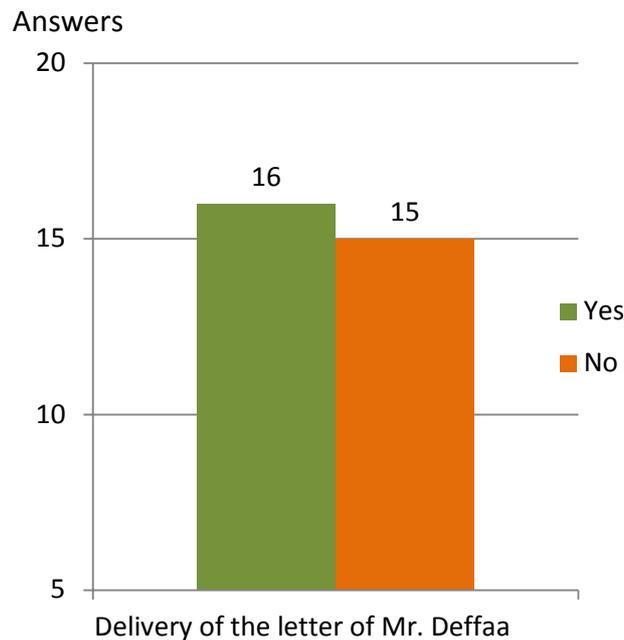
It can be inferred from the answers that in particular content-related facilitations - such as further simplifications of application forms – should be striven for. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the documentary check is sometimes too complex. Respondents, for example, expressed the desire to forgo the presentation of original documents, since these can also be provided by means of scans or copies. Furthermore, reference has been made to other promotion programs which have very low formal hurdles, e.g. the German-Polish Youth Office (DPJW) and the Creative Europe Programme. In addition, the respondents criticized the fact that the flat rates are not always such, since the corresponding amounts are in practice controlled by the certifying authorities or by a third auditor, so that the actual approach of a lump sum with regard to the simplification of procedures is de facto questioned.

Regarding the timing, many respondents would like to see faster reimbursements and point to the need for umbrella-project-related advance payments, which significantly increase the planning security for the many small lead partners of P2P projects, while also improving the attractiveness of P2P programs.



Question no. 8:

Has your Interreg Managing Authority forwarded the attached letter of the Director General of DG REGIO, Mr. Walter Deffaa, to you?



On 8 April 2016, Mr. Walter Deffaa, the former Director of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy, sent a letter to the administrative authorities of a total of 11 INTERREG cooperation programmes which provide for the implementation of P2P umbrella projects during the 2014-2020 funding period. The a. m. document is the attached to this evaluation (Annex 2).

The a. m. letter relates to the amount of the administrative costs, which, according to Mr. Deffaa, should not exceed the amount of 20% of the total volume of the relevant P2P umbrella project.

A total of 31 replies to this question were received. Only 16 respondents, i. e. just under 52%, said that they received the a. m. letter. 15 respondents said that they had not been provided with this document until the time of the survey.

In order to further qualify the eighth question, the authors of the questionnaire wanted to know additionally:

What has been the concrete impact of the above mentioned letter on your project implementation so far?

This question, which was addressed to the members who answered Question no. 8 with yes, gave a heterogeneous picture of the practical consequences. The fact that the administrative cost adjustment has been considered, has already resulted in first reductions of staff. According to the respondents, this fact also has an impact on the quality as well as the extent of consultancy services. Furthermore, the search for "saving potential" reduced areas such as

public relations. Overall, many of the affected members are concerned about problems with the administration of P2P umbrella projects, which has always been guaranteed to run smoothly. There were, however, also members who said that the letter did not affect them.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the survey clearly shows that the P2P programs and their implementation are of very high relevance for Euroregions and border regions. These sub-programs are already actively managed by a large part of our members. In addition, these projects also exert a very great influence on the border regions which do not yet have this funding instrument available.

In spite of delays in the start of the INTERREG V A programs 2014 - 2020 and the often lacking funding contracts for the umbrella projects of the P2P funds, a majority of the members have started to accept applications to meet the growing interest in cross-border encounters.

From the point of view of our members, "diversity is a good thing" for the P2P projects and the eligible subject areas. The importance of P2P projects for the quality of cross-border cooperation is estimated as very high. If P2P programmes were to be abandoned, trusting cooperation at European borders would be severely restricted.

Respondents also want to continue to rely on this funding tool but are hoping for further simplification and want a reasonable percentage of the administrative costs of the umbrella projects.



It is precisely under the impression of the current crises within the European Union (Brexit, refugee crisis, etc.) that successful models, as for example P2P projects, should be further strengthened. A picture of the EU-COM on the 25th anniversary of the INTERREG anniversary of last year is clearly showing this. The most important part of the birthday cake is the "level of trust building", which is known to be secured mainly by encounters. In the end, P2P projects are based on encounters and their complex promotion. They are therefore an elementary part of INTERREG's success story and the guarantee of a lived and successful European integration.

5. Annexes

- 1) Questionnaire P2P projects,
- 2) Letter of the EU-KOM / GD Regio dated 08.04.2016.