Territorial Cooperation projects 2007-2013:

Reporting Template

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INTERACT hopes this tool will contribute to “Sharing INTERREG experiences” and encourage other Community Initiative programmes to share their skills and knowledge with INTERREG stakeholders through INTERACT.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the tool

This document sets out a suggested reporting template for territorial cooperation projects. The rationale for developing a common template is threefold:

- At a project level, the availability of a common template should help **project leaders** to produce progress and final reports by highlighting the inputs required from different partners.
- At a programme level, a common template should make the **sharing of information on projects** easier and ensure that good practice lessons and experience can be shared and disseminated more effectively and widely.
- A common template should also make easier the understanding of **programme performance** and enable comparisons to be made with other territorial cooperation programmes.

The multiplicity of different approaches to preparing territorial cooperation project reports makes it difficult for the benefits summarised above to be realised. A strong case therefore exists for encouraging those responsible for the implementation of territorial cooperation projects to adopt formats that are more closely aligned with good practice in terms of structure, contents and presentational style.

It should be stressed that the template hereby proposed is intended for use at a project rather than programme level. The template has been designed in a way that should make it suitable for both progress and final reports. Some flexibility is of course needed since there are limits to the extent to which a common approach to reporting on a territorial cooperation project can be applied across the board. Each project is unique and although there are aspects where a common approach to reporting is appropriate, there are also aspects that must be tailored to the particular circumstances of the projects concerned.

Programme managers who already have their own reporting template may find the model useful as a checklist of points to be covered. Likewise, those who do have a template may find the suggested model useful as a starting point to drafting a document to suit the specific requirements of their projects.

1.2 Territorial cooperation reporting procedures

The reporting arrangements for territorial cooperation projects follow the overall Structural Funds model:

- **Progress reports** consisting of two documents – an activity report and a financial report - are submitted on a biannual or otherwise agreed basis.
- **Final report** – it is envisaged that this will be submitted shortly after a project comes to an end and before final payment is made.
- **Other project reports** which can be submitted by project managers on an ad hoc basis, for example if there is a need to obtain permission for a fundamental change in the project activities/aims. Other types include information and publicity reports.

The basic territorial cooperation project reporting framework is summarised in the chart below:

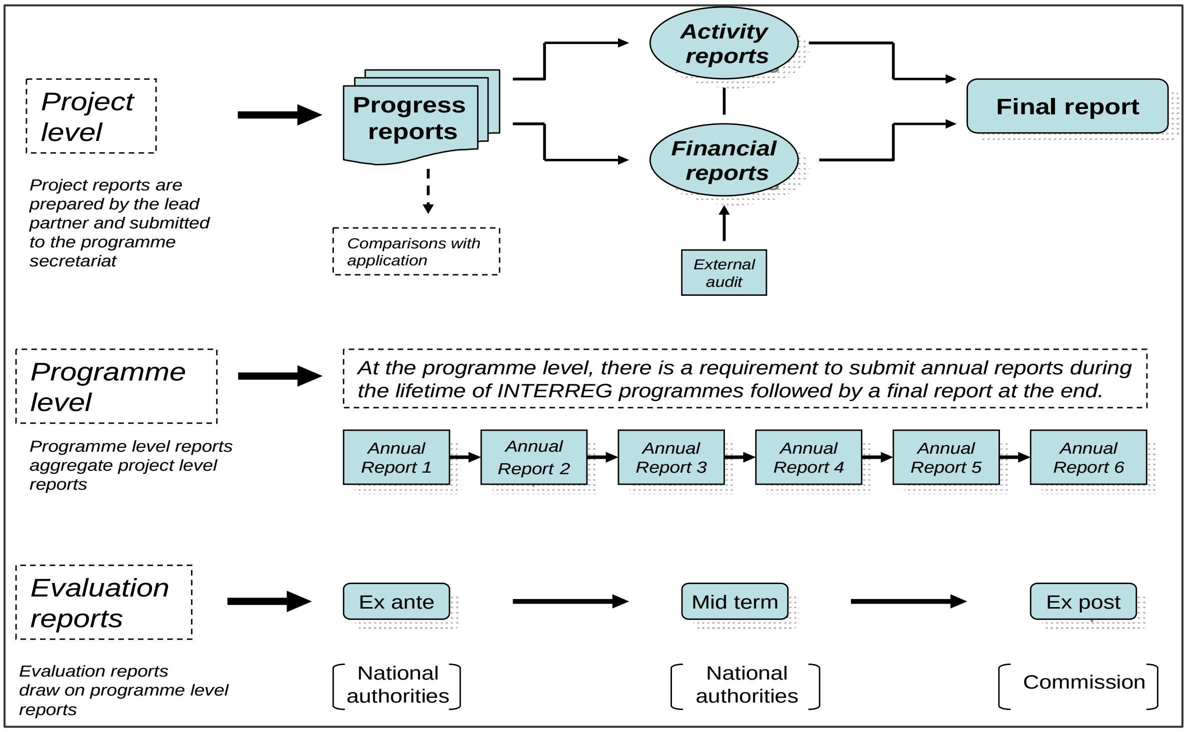

Figure 1 - Reporting framework for territorial cooperation projects

At a project level, progress and final reports serve several key functions. Firstly, they are important as a means of demonstrating **accountability**, i.e. justifying the grant made available to support project activities, and of triggering periodic payments.

Secondly, project reports are a way of **monitoring project activities** and providing a means of communication between partners during the course of a project's implementation. Finally, once the project has ended, the final report provides a way of **disseminating the outputs** to a wider audience.

Progress and final reports generally provide a description of project activities, the outcomes achieved and the extent to which these are in line with objectives as set out in the application form, how well implementation procedures have worked, etc. However, whereas progress reports describe project activities that are still underway, final reports look backwards on activities that have been completed and place more emphasis on describing outcomes.

Project reports feed into the territorial cooperation reporting system at a programme level and are combined to provide a vital source of information for Managing Authorities and the European Commission on how well a programme is performing. They are also used in mid-term and ex post evaluations to provide feedback on what a programme has achieved lessons to be learnt from experience, future priorities, etc.

1.3 Good Practice Criteria for Reporting

Criteria for determining what constitutes a good practice template for territorial cooperation project reports are needed. In general terms, these criteria might include:

- Adopting a **clear and concise style** of writing that is appropriate to the target audience.

- Ensuring that all the **key issues** about a project are addressed with, in particular, not only a description of what was done as part of a project but also an analysis of what the project achieved and how this contributed to territorial cooperation aims, etc (see below).

- Identifying **lessons** to be learnt from a project and including dissemination plan in the final report so that the benefits can be shared more widely.

These and other pointers to good practice in project reports can be derived from INTERREG III templates and project report examples (reviewed in more detail in Section 3).

There are also other sources of guidance. For example, good practice guidelines for reporting were developed by DG Regional Policy as part of the MEANS exercise and these are often included in the terms of reference for studies and projects.[1]

1.3.1 Key issues

Project reports should enable the outcomes of territorial cooperation-supported activities to be understood and assessed. Key issues - defined in a number of Commission publications – that should be assessed in relation to any project or programme are:

- **Relevance -** the extent to which the project's objectives/outcomes are pertinent to the needs of the target group and, more generally, the territorial cooperation programme.

- **Efficiency -** how economically the financial inputs are used and converted into outputs and results, as well as the wider question of how efficiently the project is managed.

- **Effectiveness -** the extent to which the project's objectives are achieved and contribute to achieving specific and general objectives of the programme.

- **Impacts and added value** – the impacts attributable to a project and in the case of territorial cooperation, the added value of adopting a transnational approach to tackling an issue.

- **Sustainability** - the extent to which project outcomes may be expected to last beyond the period under review.

The relationship between these key issues is summarised in the following figure:

[1]. There are six MEANS ('Methodes d'Evaluation des Actions de Nature Structurelle') publications and these include suggested quality standards for evaluation reports. With some modification, these standards can be applied to other types of reports including INTERREG project reports.

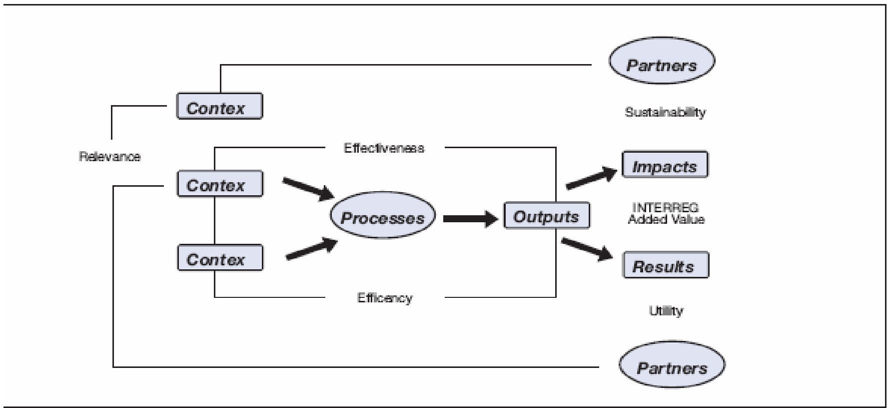

Figure 2 - Relationship between Key Issues

In the diagram, an important distinction is made between various types of project outcomes: 'Outputs' (e.g. research to investigate a problem, training courses, etc.), 'results' (benefits to the target group, e.g. training participants or the target group of a research report, e.g. policy-makers) and 'impacts' (the actions taken as a result of a project to address an issue, e.g. the effect of new policies to tackle a problem identified by research or improved performance of people who received training).

In most Structural Fund projects and programmes, the information needed to assess 'outputs' and 'results' can be relatively easily obtained. There are, however, far greater problems in assessing impacts.

1.4 Review of INTERREG III Reporting Practices

There are very different approaches to the way INTERREG III reports have been produced during 2000-2006 (this is less true of the way in which financial information is reported).

However, templates have been produced by a number of INTERREG III programme Secretariats.

1.4.1 Progress and Final Reports

We start with a critical assessment of INTERREG progress and final reports (together termed 'activity' reports). The review suggests that:

- Most reports focus on describing **project implementation processes,** i.e. how projects were/are being carried out, the nature of the activities, organisations involved, etc.
- Some INTERREG III activity reports concentrate much more on the **outcomes** achieve/being achieved. This is most obviously so where the project outcome itself is a research report (e.g. on problems relating to coastal conservation).
- There also are some examples of project reports that strike a good **balance between providing feedback on processes and outcomes**. However, the majority of reports reviewed tend to fall into the first category outlined above.

In most of the INTERREG III project reports reviewed, the emphasis is on describing project procedures and activities.

This information on activities and procedures is clearly helpful in assessing efficiency and demonstrating what has been done with INTERREG III subsidies but is of little value in its own right, unless linked to an analysis of the outcomes achieved by projects. There may be lessons that can be learnt where a description of the way a project was carried out helps explain what it achieved.

Amongst the project reports reviewed, there are several examples providing a good account of the outcomes achieved. The way in which this is done varies and depends on the nature of the project: in some cases, the final report is effectively the project outcome. For example, in several of the projects reviewed, the aim was to produce a research report or publication (e.g. on priorities with regard to coastal conservation) and the final report takes this form. In other cases (e.g. training courses for public authorities) the final report is necessarily confined to summarising activities (in this case, the training courses) but more information could perhaps have been provided on the number of beneficiaries and how the training helped them to perform in a more effective way.

The extent to which INTERREG III reports can examine project outcomes beyond the immediate outputs does, however, depends on being able to undertake research to investigate longer term ‘results’ and ‘impacts’. For example, where an INTERREG III project has involved the preparation of a publication or a training course, it would be helpful to know how useful these outputs have been and what effect they have had on the target groups. However, it may be beyond the scope of a project to conduct such follow-up research although the need for this could be highlighted in the final report.

Few of the reports reviewed provide a systematic comparison of the extent to which the outcomes achieved by projects back to their original aims. This is a shortcoming because it means that effectiveness (defined as the extent to which project aims are achieved) cannot be fully assessed.

The length and style of III project reports varies considerably. For example, amongst the reports examined for this assessment, the length of documents ranged from six to over 120 pages (in both cases these were final reports). Likewise, some reports contain executive summaries but others do not.

Compared with the good practice criteria set out in Section 1.3, it can be said that most INTERREG III reports provide a good account of ‘relevance, and ‘efficiency’. However, there is far less emphasis on assessing ‘effectiveness’, ‘impacts/added value’ and ‘sustainability’.

1.4.2 INTERREG III reporting templates

Most of INTERREG III programme Secretariats have produced reporting templates. Common elements include:

- In most cases, there is a requirement to provide an **executive summary**. Some templates simply state that this should be provided whilst others specify the contents and length as well.
- Most templates ask for the **project’s aims and rationale** to be summarised as a starting point for a description of the **activities** undertaken as part of the project and the **outcomes** achieved. The report-writer is then asked to compare the outcomes achieved with the project’s original aims as part of an assessment of its achievements (‘effectiveness’).
- In addition to these more or less standard sections in the templates, some ask for reports to include other subject, e.g. an assessment of the **added value of a transnational approach** to a project, **partnership working**, **plans** and **sustainability**.

Although there is broadly similar subject coverage, the **format** of the reporting templates differs. For example, in one case *(INTERREG IIIB North Sea Region programme)*, the template has consisted of a list of questions that project managers were expected to address in preparing their reports and a fact sheet for summarising key outcomes. In several other cases *(e.g. INTERREG IIIB CADSES programme, INTERREG IIIB Western Mediterranean (MEDOCC) programme)* the reporting template was based on an Excel worksheet which was preformatted with space for text to be entered under various headings. Another template consisted of a series of Microsoft (MS) PowerPoint slides (*INTERREG IIIB Northern Periphery programme).*

In most cases, however, the templates simply describe the structure of the reports to be submitted with varying levels of detail with regard to the contents of the various sections.

The reporting templates reviewed also vary in terms of their emphasis on the quantification of **project outcomes**. An example of this is provided by one programme (INTERREG IIIB Baltic Sea Region) that has developed a standardised list of output indicators which project managers are expected to go through and complete, by inputting numbers where relevant (examples of the output indicators used are: the number of common spatial development visions, number of training courses and number of trainees, number of small-scale infrastructure investments and their amount. In total there are some 20 output indicators).

In most cases, however, there was less emphasis on quantification and a far less prescriptive approach to providing output estimates generally. There is a danger of trying to over-quantify project outcomes. The European Commission places considerable emphasis on the quantification of Structural Funds effects, especially 'outputs' and 'results'. However, whilst it is appropriate in the context of former mainstream programmes to quantify factors such as employment effects, the nature of territorial cooperation programmes, which often have far more 'intangible' outcomes means that this is often not possible.

Only one INTERREG III programme covered by this research (INTERREG IIIB Northern Periphery) adopted differing reporting templates/procedures depending on the **duration/value of projects**. In this particular case what are described as 'micro-projects' were not expected to submit progress reports. Instead, only one (final) report is required within three months of the project ending. It may well be that this practice is, in fact, applied more widely to smaller projects but is simply not made explicit in the guidance that is publicly available. In our view, it seems an appropriate arrangement if projects last less than a year or so because it avoids a situation where the very limited time available is diverted from project activities to report writing.

The **language** used for INTERREG III project reports was clearly an important issue since this influenced the effectiveness of efforts to communicate the outcomes to target audiences. Amongst the templates reviewed, none appear to require translation of documents into the different languages used in a programme area. Clearly, the desirability of having reports translated into different languages has to be balanced against the costs involved.

Most INTERREG III templates focused on setting out the format for progress and final reports. Some, however, also suggested that it may be appropriate for **other reports** to be submitted from time to time and define the circumstances where this applies. For example, in one case *(INTERREG IIIB Northern Periphery programme)* these circumstances were defined as where a project extension in time was requested; changes in project personnel, changes in co-financing commitments; the introduction of a 'new project implementation model', changes in the outputs/indicators or the partnership, and/or other problems or delays. However, most templates reviewed do not define the circumstances in which other reports were required in such detail.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the reasons, at least judging by the feedback to the consultations undertaken as part of this assessment, why reporting templates were not introduced by some programmes. In several cases this was because of the variety of projects and the view that a common approach to reporting was not feasible. In other cases, a common template was developed for all the EU programmes under the management of the public authority and it was not considered possible to make exceptions regarding how reports are drawn up.

1.5 Conclusions – Review of INTERREG III Practices

Overall, there are a number of conclusions to this assessment of INTERREG III practices:

Firstly, there has been a wide variation in the style and contents of INTERREG III project reports. However, the type of reports produced is strongly influenced by the nature of the project activities and outcomes. As such, while a common template is appropriate for many features of the reports, there is a need for flexibility.

Secondly, all the INTERREG III programmes examined had similar reporting procedures (biannual progress reports, financial reports, final report, etc.). However, relatively few INTERREG III programmes developed a common template for the contents and structure of project reports. Where templates have been developed, they vary in approach.

Finally, although progress and final reports serve different purposes, it is possible to adopt the same overall template for both documents. Indeed, this is preferable since an approach that is consistent over time in terms of structure and subject matter makes it easier to track the development of a project. The reporting template presented in the next section adopts this approach.

Reporting Template

2. Reporting Template

Suggested sections:	Explanatory notes:
Executive Summary There should be a short (2-3 page) summary of the key points from the report highlighting the main conclusions and recommendations.	*The executive summary for the final report should be suitable for public dissemination.*
Section 1: Résumé of project aims The first section should provide a résumé of the project aims and how progress towards these aims should be judged. These and other related issues are: • What are/were the project's aims and what was the rationale for adopting a transnational approach? • What are/were the critical success factors for the project? • What key performance indicators are being/have been used to enable the success of the project to be assessed? • How is/will the project contribute to the aims of the INTERREG III programme? It is important that progress reports comment on the continuing validity or otherwise of the original project aims. If circumstances change, there may be a need to amend the aims of a project. Progress reports should highlight whether this is necessary or not. Progress and final reports should explain what the critical success factors for the project are/were. This will help explain subsequent performance and the factors that influence it as well as, in some circumstances, providing the rationale for a trans-national approach. We suggest that key performance indicators are summarised in this section. If not pre-defined by the programme manager, the project sponsor should suggest appropriate performance indicators. A key factor in this respect is how the project will/does contribute to the INTERREG programme's aims.	*At the beginning of any report, it is helpful to summarise the project aims, critical success factors, key performance indicators, etc. This will provide a context for subsequent sections of the report.* *The summary should refer back to the objectives set out in the project's application form and grant approval letter. The extent to which project aims are/are being achieved is a critical input to an assessment of 'effectiveness'.* *It is important that performance indicators be also defined in this section. These should relate to the key issues of relevance (how the project will contribute to INTERREG aims), efficiency, effectiveness, impacts/added value and sustainability.* *If possible, some indicators should be quantified.*
Section 2: Description of Project Activities This section should explain what activities have been undertaken as part of the project's implementation. We suggest that the section is structured around the following questions: • What actions have been undertaken as part of the project during the period under review? • Have all partners made the planned inputs to the project? If this has not been the case, what is the explanation and what can be/has been done to rectify this situation?	*This section is designed to provide a description of the main activities undertaken (so far) as part of a project's implementation.* *These activities might, for example, include research into a problem/issue facing the programme area, exchange visits, training*

• To what extent has it been possible to adhere to the planned project timetable and work plan? • If there have been delays or other complications with the project's implementation, what effect – if any – has/had this on the achievement of key objectives and what can be/has been done to tackle these delays or complications? The description of actions should relate back to the application form and compare what was originally planned with actual activities. The key question is- Has the project implementation proceeded according to plan? If not, the report should explain why and what was/will be done to rectify the situation.	*activities, work on a publication, or joint projects of other kinds. Where appropriate, the number and type of beneficiaries should be specified.* *Depending on the nature of the project, it may be appropriate to provide a separate description for different work packages. In this case, there should be an overall summary.*
Section 3: Analysis of Project Outcomes This is probably the most important section of the report and should provide an assessment addressing the following issues: • What are the main outcomes (so far) from the project? • How do the project outcomes (so far) compare with the objectives set out in the INTERREG application form? • If the project has under (or over) performed against its objectives, why is/was this the case and what steps have been/were taken to rectify this? • How are/did the project outcomes contribute to the aims of the INTERREG III programme? • What has been the added value of adopting a trans-national approach to the project? If possible, the description of project outcomes should go beyond immediate 'outputs' and analyse the 'results' and 'impacts' (for a definition of these terms, see Section 3 of the accompanying guide). The analysis should make references back to Section 1 of the report – in particular the indicators - and compare the project's outcomes (so far) with its original or amended objectives. Ideally, this should be supported by the performance indicators for the project (again set out in Section 1). In addition to describing the project outputs, the report should explain how the project is contributing/has contributed to the aims of the INTERREG III programme. This should help shed light on the impacts achieved. The extent to which these impacts demonstrate added value will be evident through an explanation of the advantages of a transnational approach.	*In progress reports, the emphasis should be on describing the project outcomes achieved so far and the extent to which these are in line with the project's objectives.* *In the final report, the emphasis should be on looking back and reviewing achieved outputs.* *Assessing the extent to which the project outcomes demonstrate that the objectives set out in the application form have been/will be achieved is central to an analysis of 'effectiveness' (one of the Commission's key issues for programmes and projects).* *Performance indicators are needed and should be devised by programme managers – not prescribed in this template.* *Clearly, if there is under (or over) performance against key objectives, the report should provide an explanation of why and what steps will be/were taken to overcome problems.*
Section 4: Sustainability and Follow-Up The final report should consider what follow-up, if any, to a project is needed: • Is there a need to continue with the project beyond the INTERREG funding period to ensure that all planned	*Some INTERREG III reporting templates ask for questions relating to sustainability to be addressed in the final report on a project.*

outputs are achieved? • How sustainable are the project's outcomes likely to be in the medium/longer term? • To what extent is a follow-up to the project needed to maximise the longer-term benefits? Sustainability is a key issue for any project and in this context can be defined as the extent to which project outcomes are likely to last beyond the period when activities are funded by INTERREG. Some follow-up activities may be needed to ensure that all the desired project outputs are achieved and/or to maximise sustainability in the medium/longer term.	*The suggested points shown opposite are based on those contained in INTERREG III templates. An example of where follow-up to a project is desirable is where dissemination activities are needed to maximise the use of a publication or where a training programme or idea is piloted in an INTERREG–supported project and needs to be rolled out for more general use.*
Section 5: Financial Aspects Although financial reporting is a separate exercise, the final report on a project should address the following general questions: • Has the project been able to keep within its budget and still achieve the desired outputs? • To what extent has the project demonstrated financial additionality? Was the desired leverage of funding from other sources achieved? • To what extent do the project outcomes represent value for money, i.e. could more have been achieved with the same financial inputs or could the same outputs have been achieved with reduced financial inputs? The first question is straightforward and aimed at establishing whether there are/were any financial constraints on the achievement of a project's objectives. Financial additionality – the second issue – can be defined as the extent to which a project depends on public funding to go ahead and to achieve the desired outcomes. There are three possibilities: (1) without the funding it would not have been possible to go ahead with the project at all (full additionality); (2) without the funding, the project would have been delayed or proceeded on a different scale (partial additionality); and (3) the project would have gone ahead anyway as planned in the absence of public funding (deadweight). Other important issues are leverage (whether targets with regard to co-financing were achieved) and value for money, and the financial targets for ensuing periods (n+2).	*This section is not included in any of the INTERREG III reporting templates reviewed.* *However, in our view, progress and final reports should provide an assessment of general issues relating to project financing with appropriate cross-references to the financial reports.* *The questions listed in the suggested template should enable 'efficiency' and value for money (the relationship between financial inputs and project outcomes) to be assessed. These are key issues in any project assessment.* *It is likely that these issues can only be fully addressed in final reports although feedback on additionality and leverage should be possible at an earlier stage.*
Section 6: Project Management The report should provide a summary of the role played by the project leader and partners in managing the project's implementation: • Membership of the project steering group, number of meetings, issues discussed/decisions taken.	*Progress and final reports should provide a summary of the way in which a project is being/has been implemented.*

• Arrangements that are/were used to implement the project, key partners, etc. • The approach adopted to monitoring progress towards project aims and financial management. If appropriate, the report should highlight any complications encountered with project management, describe the steps taken to tackle them and the results achieved.	*Although a short description of procedures and structures is helpful, the emphasis should be on highlighting any problems that have arisen and the steps taken to address them.*
Section 7: Evaluation, Publicity and Dissemination Plan The last section of the (final) report should address questions relating to evaluation, publicity and dissemination of project outcomes: • Are there any plans to carry out an evaluation of the project? If yes, what are these plans? • What steps are being/have been taken to ensure that the project outcomes are publicised? • What approach is being taken to disseminate the project outcomes? There is no requirement to evaluate INTERREG projects except within the framework of a global ex post evaluations of the programme as a whole (this may, for example, involve assessing a sample of projects). However, for larger projects, it may nevertheless be appropriate to carry out an evaluation and the final report should indicate whether this is planned, the aims of such an exercise and what approach will be adopted to carrying it out. The other questions listed above relate to publicising and disseminating the project outcomes (Commission Regulation (EC) No 1159/2000 for the 2000-06 programming period, and Commission Regulation 1828/2006 for 2007-2013 programming period). Again, these issues should be left to the discretion of the project holder. Clearly, if these actions are relevant, there should be an appropriate financial provision in the project budget.	*This section is only likely to be relevant for final reports.* *This section will only be relevant to certain types of projects. For example, with a training programme, some form of evaluation (perhaps feedback from beneficiaries) is desirable. However, there is unlikely to be a case for publicising or disseminating the results.* *In contrast, having an effective dissemination plan is obviously important for a project where the output is a publication. Evaluation is likely to be less relevant in this case although some feedback to ascertain how useful the publication has been might be helpful.*

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