

Interreg Annual Meeting 2016
Report from the online evaluation survey

The online survey for the evaluation of the Interreg annual meeting 2016 was launched on 15 June and closed on 30 June, receiving in total 57 answers.

Plenary sessions in the Charlemagne building

The great majority of respondents considered the meeting useful (88%¹) and stated that it had met the expected objectives (77%). Only about 12% of the respondents had a neutral opinion on its usefulness and on the achieved objectives for attending. The majority of people (61%) also considered that the outcome of the meeting could be used in the daily working activity.²

The presenters and facilitators were considered effective by the great majority of respondents with only a small number of respondents (5%) who did not agree on the statement. The feedback was positive also with regard to the method chosen to achieve the event objectives which received 77% of positive answers.

The presenters and facilitators were effective		
	Answers	Ratio
strongly agree	14	25%
agree	31	54%
neutral	9	16%
disagree	3	5%
strongly disagree	0	0%
No Answer	0	0%

The chosen method suited the event objectives		
	Answers	Ratio
strongly agree	13	23%
agree	31	54%
neutral	9	16%
disagree	4	7%
strongly disagree	0	0%
No Answer	0	0%

Which part did you like best?

A quite diversified range of replies was received on this question and is summarised below:

- **Second day:** the discussion of the second day around the future of Interreg is the part that encountered the highest number of positive feedback (30%), with the most positive appreciations evenly distributed between the **workshops** and **Roberta Capello's presentation** on the trends of territorial development in Europe beyond 2020.
- **Monday Morning Session:** 26% of the answers indicated that this session as the most interesting. In particular, within this overall percentage, positive appreciations were expressed for the **programme testimonies** and the presentation on **ESIF simplification**.
- Taken together, **project visits & networking** are the most successful elements of the meeting. The specific interest of project visits is often indicated in the opportunity for networking and having informal exchanges with the Commission's and the other programmes' representatives. In general, 'networking' emerges from the whole survey as the real added value of the annual meeting.

Which part did you like best?	Answers	Ratio
Second day - discussion on the future	17	30%
Monday morning session	15	26%
Project visits	13	23%
Networking	6	11%
Other	4	7%
Interactive voting	2	4%
	57	100%

¹ This percentage is calculated with a sum of the score for "strongly agree" and "agree".

² See Tables 1, 2 and 3 in Annex.

What is the one specific most useful outcome that was achieved during the event?

The answers received for this question were quite varied; however, they can be summarized around 3 main blocks:

- **Networking:** 39% of the answers highlighted the informal discussions with Commission's staff and other programmes' representatives as the most useful outcome of the meeting. In particular, sharing views and problems with other managing authorities and joint secretariats, creating new contacts, getting closer to Commission points of view and exchanging views with Commission representatives other than desk officers were indicated as particularly useful to get a better understanding of the issues affecting programmes every-day-life as well as to realise that other programmes share the same difficulties on subjects like, Simplified Cost Options, state aid, designation of authorities.
- 32% of respondents indicated the **discussions on the future and on the subjects treated in the Monday morning session** were the most outstanding. In particular, the answers show particular interest around ESIF simplification, open data platform and the programme testimonies (highlighted also as answer to other questions). Furthermore, the discussions on the future of Interreg held both from the academic perspective (Roberta Capello's presentation) and the workshop participative formula were considered as equally useful, although not enough time was devoted to listening to programmes' voices in the workshops.

What is the one specific most useful outcome that was achieved during the event?	Answer	Ratio
Networking	22	39%
Discussion about the future (Capello's presentation, the workshops)	9	16%
Monday morning session (open data platform, ESIF simplification, programmes' testimony)	9	16%
Project visits: the examples of good practices and of innovation projects	4	7%
Other	4	7%
No answer	3	5%
No specific outcome	2	4%
Practical and clear messages from COM, in particular that COM may be flexible	2	4%
Focus on results	2	4%
Total	57	100%

What do we need to improve?

11% of people who took part to the online survey confirmed that the meeting was fine both in terms of content and logistic organisation and there was no particular element to improve, while 12% did not leave any particular comment to this question. However, the majority of comments suggested some improvements to the logistic organisation (schedule and location) and the content and schedule of single sessions:

- **Schedule and location:**
 - Starting the event at 9:00 am on a Monday morning was not seen with favour by some participants as it obliged them to travel during the weekend. In particular, the schedule of the first day was quite tough (return to Brussels at 24:00) due to the long journeys required to reach the project venues and then the dinner venue in Bruges.
 - In a couple of comments Brussels is indicated a good location as quite easy to reach. At the same time, it is suggested that in the future the meeting is organised elsewhere to facilitate the attendance from a higher number of programmes and making the overall participation more balanced (¼ of participants were from the Commission).
- **Content and schedule of the sessions:**
 - In order to bring real added-value the **presentations** should be more diversified and concrete, give practical information, without repeating and showing obvious things. They should also be more connected with real implementation issues and programmes' problems.
 - Commission should be **more open to discussion/debate** and provide more straight-forward replies taking into account the **specificity of the audience** (experienced practitioners) they are addressing to. In particular, Commission should show more openness especially when programmes talk about the problems related to the designation procedure.
 - In order to have a more interactive conference touching the concrete issues or opportunities, the meeting **preparation** should be done **more in cooperation with practitioners from the programme**, giving *de facto* more voice and space to the programmes.

- The need for **more interaction** and more participative sessions allowing a more in-depth exchange between Commission and programmes is underlined by 9% of answers, highlighting also the little time devoted to real debates after the single sessions. A more rigorous respect of the schedule of the single sessions is therefore suggested.
- **Workshops**: some comments also underlined that too little time was devoted to a huge and important topic such as the future of Interreg. In one case, the overall exercise also defined as 'more irritating than useful' and the choice of the topics for the workshops 'questionable' as programmes have just started and implementation issues are felt as the most urgent.

What do we need to improve:	Answer	Ratio
Schedule and location	14	26%
Presentations: no added value, more diversified topics, and really connected to implementation and real programme problems	8	14%
No answer	7	12%
Nothing: it was a good event with nice atmosphere and good presentations	6	11%
Workshops: too little time for such huge topics	6	11%
Set up: more interaction and communication, more participative sessions with exchanges COM-programmes, improve the academic level; devote more time for discussion, keep a better time track and make the video messages shorter	5	9%
Commission attitude: more concrete presentations, more straight forward answers taking into account the audience (experienced practitioners), COM on real listening mode preparation of the meeting with programmes	5	9%
Other	3	5%
Attendance Level: Commissioner participation and COM high level representatives to deliver strong messages on post 2020	2	4%
	57	100%

Project visits

The general level of satisfaction for each of the project visit can be considered as generally good, as an average of 26%³ of respondents stated that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'⁴, taking also into account that the majority of people who took part to the online survey did not provide any answer to this question⁵.

The most recurrent positive comment was that project visits provided the opportunity for networking and informal exchanges with colleagues. As for the negative feedback, the following should be retained:

- Travelling to the project venues was too long, time and -resource consuming. In particular, the schedule of the project visit to NL-BE border was too ambitious and tiring as it included 3 visits.
- There was no time for Q&A.
- Visiting projects is not within the scope of the annual meeting as programmes and Commission are required to meet once a year to find solutions and work together on the current issues.
- None of the project visited was relevant for transnational programmes.

Some criticisms were addressed in particular to the Innovation project on NL-BE border, as one of the three projects included in the visit was led by a large company (impossible for most programmes) and another one was not representative of the majority of Interreg programmes because of the large budget received (7 million €). Furthermore, while the 'pilot plant' was an excellent example of good practice, the green training centre at Flemish-Dutch border is indicated as a bad example in terms of 'good results, durability, and effects'.

It is also interesting to note the suggestion that project visits should go beyond ETC and allow MAs and JSs to get inspired by projects funded within other EU instruments/policies.

As for the future, **89% of the respondents expressed themselves in favour of the organisation of project visits at the future Interreg Annual Meetings**. The possible themes suggested for future annual meetings are indicated in the table below.⁶

Specific themes suggested for future project visits:	Answer	Ratio
Themes showing European and CBC added value	5	19%

³ The average takes into account the three project visits.

⁴ See details in annex.

⁵ 24% of the meeting participants did not take part to any of the project visits.

⁶ 54% of respondents did not provide any answer to this question.

Innovation	3	12%
Transport	3	12%
Competitiveness, business participation (SMEs) in Interreg programmes, SME Innovation	3	12%
Other (safety, capacity building, flood risk prevention, projects involving small partners like NGOs, people-to-people projects, Integrated approach in projects)	3	12%
Projects related to transnational programmes	2	8%
Social innovation, inclusion, labour mobility/job creation	2	8%
Environment	2	8%
Tourism	2	8%
The "themes" are not that important, but the locations are: event to be organised every year in a different place in Europe	1	4%
	26	100%

Lessons learnt

On the basis of the result of the online evaluation survey and in view of the preparation of 2017 annual meeting, the following elements should be considered:

- **What to stop:**
 - Starting the event on Monday am
 - Avoiding too long travel time to reach other venues
- **What to start:**
 - Nothing in particular
- **What to continue:**
 - Project visits (outside Brussels, including a TN project)
 - Testimonials from the programmes, to be associated more to the preparation
 - Participative workshops, but with more time devoted to them and their exploitation

Annex

Plenary sessions in the Charlemagne building

This event was useful			Answers	Ratio
strongly agree			14	25%
agree			36	63%
neutral			7	12%
disagree			0	0%
strongly disagree			0	0%
No Answer			0	0%

This event met my objectives for attending			Answers	Ratio
strongly agree			16	28%
agree			28	49%
neutral			8	14%
disagree			5	9%
strongly disagree			0	0%
No Answer			0	0%

I will be able to use the outcome of this event in my work			Answers	Ratio
strongly agree			14	25%
agree			21	37%
neutral			18	32%
disagree			4	7%
strongly disagree			0	0%
No Answer			0	0%

Project visits:

Project visit on cross-border health project on the French-Belgian border: Level of satisfaction from 1 to 5 (1= not at all satisfied, 5=very satisfied)			Answers	Ratio
1			0	0%
2			1	2%
3			0	0%
4			7	12%
5			8	14%
No Answer			41	72%

Project visit on cross-border innovation products on the Flemish-Dutch border: Level of satisfaction from 1 to 5 (1= not at all satisfied, 5=very satisfied)			Answers	Ratio
1			0	0%
2			2	4%
3			4	7%
4			15	26%
5			1	2%
No Answer			35	61%

Project visit on Cross-border maritime safety project in the 2 Seas area (FR- BE- NL- UK) - Level of satisfaction from 1 to 5 (1= not at all satisfied, 5=very satisfied)			Answers	Ratio
1			0	0%
2			0	0%
3			3	5%
4			7	12%
5			6	11%
No Answer			41	72%