EX POST EVALUATION OF INVESTMENT PROJECTS CO-FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF) OR COHESION FUND (CF) IN THE PERIOD 1994-1999

FINAL REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TEN PROJECTS OBSERVED

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Major projects, as defined by art. 16.2 of the ERDF Regulation 2082/1993, reiterated in art. 40 of Regulation 1083/2006 and in the new draft Regulations, are a critical ingredient of Cohesion Policy. Successful major projects positively contribute to economic growth, social welfare and quality of life. Their significance in terms of capital costs, absorption of EU Funds, their visibility with the wider public, and the level of expertise required for their implementation call for their specific scrutiny.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the type, magnitude and timeframe of long-term effects of ten selected major projects implemented during the 1994-1999 programming period, and the mechanisms explaining the project outcomes. By putting together the case studies’ evidence, the evaluator has extracted some key ideas for policy learning and has derived meaningful recommendations regarding the causality chain leading to certain long-term effects of investments.

Evaluation questions

The conceptual framework underlying the study is organised along three dimensions of analysis addressing the following Evaluation Questions (synthesised under the “What”, “When” and “How” headings):

i. What long-term effects do these projects bring about? A distinction between effects on ‘Economic development’ and ‘Quality of life’ has been made. The former includes direct effects on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and endogenous dynamics of economic growth; the latter is used here as a synonym for social well-being and includes effects that are not captured by the economic variables, but affect social and territorial cohesion, institutional learning, environment and social happiness.

ii. When do long-term effects materialise and stabilise? Effects can stabilise a few years after the project’s completion, after a longer period, or may still need time to reach stabilisation.

iii. How do long-term effects materialise? The following possible determinant factors, which may have an influence on the generation of the project’s short or long-term effects, are identified: appropriateness to the context, project design, forecasting capacity, project governance and managerial response.

Finally, a fourth evaluation question asks which existing evaluation methods can capture a given long-term contribution for different types of investment in the fields of environment and transport infrastructure. It refers to the identification of the most suitable methodology that enables one to address and disentangle the ‘What’, ‘When’ and ‘How’ dimensions.
The Evaluation Questions are answered in this report by means of the large amount of evidence collected in the case studies¹.

**Overview of the selected projects**

The investment projects analysed are in the transport (road, rail, seaports) and environment (water supply, waste water treatment, waste management) sectors, across five Member States: Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain:

i. Port of Gioia Tauro (Italy);

ii. M1 Motorway (Ireland);

iii. Egnatia Motorway (Greece);

iv. Madrid Metro Line giving access to the Barajas airport (Spain);

v. Mediterranean Corridor (Spain);

vi. Water supply in the city of Palermo (Italy);

vii. Urban solid waste treatment in Northern Lisbon (Portugal);

viii. Solis waste treatment in Galicia (Spain);

ix. Waste water treatment in Ría de Vigo (Spain);

x. Dublin waste water treatment (Ireland).

Overall, these cases represent more than EUR 10 billion of investment and slightly less than EUR 5 billion of co-funding by the European Commission (EC). They were chosen on the basis of an objective selection procedure (taking into account geographical coverage, typology of infrastructure and size among other criteria) and because they were considered likely to provide interesting specific project narratives from which to draw effective policy lessons.

The EC co-funding ranges from EUR 44 million for the Palermo water supply project, to more than EUR 3 billion for the Egnatia motorway. As presented in the map below, most of these projects received financial contributions through the Cohesion Fund or the European Regional Development Fund, but some of them received financing also from the European Social Fund, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) budget and the European Investment Bank.

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LOCATION, INVESTMENT COST AND SOURCES OF FINANCING OF THE SELECTED PROJECTS

Country/Region: Greece / East Macedonia & Thrace, Central Macedonia, west Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly
Project title: The Egnatia Motorway
Sector: Transport – Motorway
Investment period: 1989-2005
Total cost: €7,053
EU co-financing rate: 14.7% (CF) 28.7% (ERDF) 0.4% (TEN-T Fund)
EIB contribution: 41%

Country/Region: Ireland / Border, Mid-East, Dublin
Project title: Dublin Waste Water Treatment
Sector: Environment – Waste water treatment
Investment period: 1995-2003
Total cost: €296
EU co-financing rate: 53% (CF)

Country/Region: Spain / Galicia
Project title: Urban solid waste management in Galicia
Sector: Environment – Solid waste treatment
Total cost: €275
EU co-financing rate: 36% (CF)

Country/Region: Ireland / Dublin
Project title: Dublin Waste Water Treatment
Sector: Environment – Waste water treatment
Investment period: 1995-2003
Total cost: €296
EU co-financing rate: 53% (CF)

Country/Region: Ireland / Dublin
Project title: M1 Motorway
Sector: Transport – Motorway
Investment period: 1994–2011
Total cost: €7,053
EU co-financing rate: 14.7% (CF) 28.7% (ERDF) 0.4% (TEN-T Fund)
EIB contribution: 41%

Country/Region: Italy / Sicily
Project title: Water Supply System in Palermo
Sector: Environment – Water Supply
Investment period: 1997-2004
Total cost: €120
EU co-financing rate: 37% (ERDF)
EIB contribution: 18%

Country/Region: Spain / Galicia
Project title: Integrated environmental regeneration of Ría de Vigo
Sector: Environment – Waste water treatment
Investment period: 1995-2000
Total cost: €173
EU co-financing rate: 69% (CF)
EIB contribution: 41%

Country/Region: Italy / Calabria
Project title: Port of Gioia Tauro
Sector: Transport – Port
Investment period: 1994-2011
Total cost: €418
EU co-financing rate: 13% (ERDF) 2% (ESF)

Country/Region: Portugal / Lisbon
Project title: Integrated Solid Waste Management in Northern Lisbon
Sector: Environment – Solid waste treatment
Total cost: €366
EU co-financing rate: 37% (CF)
EIB contribution: 41%

Country/Region: Spain / Madrid
Project title: Madrid Metro Line – Access to Barajas Airport
Sector: Transport – Subway
Total cost: €518
EU co-financing rate: 76% (CF)

Country/Region: Spain / Barcelona-Valencia
Project title: The Mediterranean Corridor
Sector: Transport – Railway
Investment period: 1993-2002
Total cost: €759
EU co-financing rate: 70% (CF)

Country/Region: Spain / Barcelona-Valencia
Project title: Water Supply System in Palermo
Sector: Environment – Water Supply
Investment period: 1997-2004
Total cost: €120
EU co-financing rate: 37% (ERDF)
EIB contribution: 18%

Country/Region: Spain / Galicia
Project title: Integrated environmental regeneration of Ría de Vigo
Sector: Environment – Waste water treatment
Investment period: 1995-2000
Total cost: €173
EU co-financing rate: 69% (CF)
EIB contribution: 41%

Country/Region: Spain / Galicia
Project title: Urban solid waste management in Galicia
Sector: Environment – Solid waste treatment
Total cost: €275
EU co-financing rate: 36% (CF)

Country/Region: Portugal / Lisbon
Project title: Integrated Solid Waste Management in Northern Lisbon
Sector: Environment – Solid waste treatment
Total cost: €366
EU co-financing rate: 37% (CF)
EIB contribution: 41%

Country/Region: Portugal / Lisbon
Project title: Integrated Solid Waste Management in Northern Lisbon
Sector: Environment – Solid waste treatment
Total cost: €366
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Project title: Madrid Metro Line – Access to Barajas Airport
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Note: Total costs of the project are expressed in EUR millions at 2011 price. Source: Authors
Development effects (“What”)

On average, the cases under review produced positive overall effects along the different dimensions explored. They point at uncontroversial direct contributions to economic growth and quality of life, while the strength of each type of effect can differ by sector (transport or environment) or project.

- **Direct welfare and economic growth.** Infrastructural projects not only trigger economic growth effects, in terms of real growth in GDP, but they also generate broader effects in terms of user welfare, for example through the provision of improved public services. As the Egnatia and M1 motorway case studies indicate, transport projects can produce important effects in terms of direct economic growth, mainly through travel time savings, resulting in productivity gains and induced effects on regional development. User welfare is more central for environment projects, such as the waste water treatment projects in Dublin and Ría de Vigo, which provided their populations with improved public services and increased value of use of public goods (such as cleaner sea water and beaches), to the benefit of residents and tourists. The typology of infrastructure also matters: for the two incinerators reviewed (in Galicia and Northern Lisbon), for example, business opportunities arising from side activities (particularly the sale of electricity and contribution to the market for recycled materials) are an important driver of direct economic growth effects, which can take place beyond the local level.

- **Endogenous dynamics.** Channels of influence between infrastructure endowment and economic growth are also indirect, although to a lesser extent than the direct effects on welfare and economic growth. Economic growth was endogenously fostered by improving human capital (training courses were organised for workers at the Port of Gioia Tauro), increasing technological progress (through the installing of high-performance railway technology for the Mediterranean Corridor project or waste water treatment systems in the Ría de Vigo municipalities) and promoting organisational change (such as the incorporation of an international engineering firm within the ‘Egnatia Odos’, the Greek agency in charge of the Egnatia motorway’s management). Environment projects record slightly lower levels of endogenous growth effects than transport projects.

- **Social cohesion.** Social cohesion effects are generally side effects, but they can reach significant magnitude if appropriately exploited. An exemplar illustration is given by the Madrid Metro Line: by offering quality and affordable public transport between Madrid centre and the Barajas district, the project provided better access for inhabitants (mostly immigrants or with limited resources) of the less developed neighbouring area.

- **Environmental effects.** Unsurprisingly, environmental projects bring about positive environmental effects, although their full achievement is hampered by various operational difficulties. One recurrent feature of environment projects, for example, is
the fact that they often depend on further investments (a new waste water treatment plant needs to be built in Vigo to address the capacity and treatment problems affecting the existing plant, and a new incinerator plant has been planned to solve the capacity problems of the waste incinerator in Galicia) or behavioural changes (such as improvement in waste sorting behaviour by householders in both Galicia and in Northern Lisbon), to have their effects reach their full potential. Transport projects also produce positive environmental side effects, particularly when traffic is shifted from car to rail (as in the Madrid Metro Line and Mediterranean Corridor projects).

- **Territorial cohesion.** Transport projects are more relevant as far as territorial cohesion is concerned. In particular, this is the case with the Egnatia motorway, which connects different regions of Greece to each other and to the Balkan countries. Other projects produced some positive effects on territorial cohesion, even if this objective was not a top priority: the new Madrid Metro Line, for instance, ensures cohesion between Madrid and a relatively peripheral area.

- **Institutional quality.** Institutional learning effects are overall low and they are even lower for environment projects. This is probably due to the fact that major infrastructural projects are big, but are location-specific and not part of a network. They offer little opportunity to be compared with benchmarks, and as such to trigger learning mechanisms, unless institutionalised forms of learning accompany them. There is evidence that some learning effects at institutional level took place in the case of the Egnatia and M1 motorways (through the establishment of the ad hoc agency ‘Egnatia Odos’ and the adoption of the innovative Design-Build contracts respectively). The solid waste treatment project in Northern Lisbon is the environment project with the most favourable institutional development. As a pioneer project, it contributed to the development of regulatory capacity of institutions in the waste sector.

- **Social happiness.** Effects on social happiness effects can take place by reference to expectations or to subjective perceptions of wellbeing, which are not captured by other dimensions. These effects are relevant both in negative and positive terms, with no real difference between environment and transport projects. They are barely related to project performance along other dimensions (for example, there is little connection between the level of social happiness and environmental effects for environment projects, or effects in terms of territorial cohesion for transport projects), but they can be influenced by proactive measures (e.g. awareness-raising campaigns, as with the Northern Lisbon solid waste treatment project). They can have important consequences for projects, especially when they give rise to organised forms of stakeholders’ “voice”: to mention one example, local stakeholders influenced the

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1 In charge of the implementation and management of the Egnatia motorway project.
2 Design-Build is a type of Public Private Partnership, whereby the public authority appoints a concessionaire to Design and Build a piece of infrastructure.
Mediterranean Corridor design by requesting additional stops and changes to the rail route.

Stabilisation of the project effects (“When”)

Overall, the majority of effects detected appear to have already stabilised, either in the short-medium (i.e. from 1 to 5 years after project completion) or in the long run (more than 6 years after project completion). However there are also significant factors which are not yet stabilised, mainly direct growth effects. For transport projects (e.g. Port of Gioia Tauro, Egnatia motorway and Mediterranean Corridor) more time is needed for these effects to stabilize. For environmental projects (e.g. solid waste treatment in Galicia and waste water treatment in Ría de Vigo) the stabilization of direct growth and environmental effects is linked to the consideration that future developments such as further investments or behavioural improvements are often expected to have an additional positive effect. As far as territorial cohesion effects are concerned, they have stabilised more homogenously in the long run. Effects on institutional quality, which are marginal for all the projects, tended to stabilise in the short run for environment projects (e.g. the development of new capacities for waste management among the Galician municipalities), and in the long run for transport projects (e.g. learning capacities within the Regional Consortium of Madrid Transport, the metropolitan transport agency). Finally, social happiness is an effect that has temporal horizon patterns that are essentially project-specific. In any case, the evidence suggests that a five year lag from completion is the minimum required time to see significant stabilisation of effects.

Development drivers (“How”)

Determinant factors of project outcomes relate to the way the project interacts with the context, the technical features of the project, the capacity to predict future trends, the division of roles and responsibilities and the managerial capacity to react to unpredicted events. Some of these factors (appropriateness to the context and managerial response) generally positively contributed to the projects, regardless of the sector of intervention; another factor had an on-average negative effect (project governance). The infrastructural sector matters in particular as far as project design is concerned, with positive scores recorded on average for transport projects and negative scores for environmental ones. More details on the development drivers are presented hereafter.

- **Appropriateness to the context.** Projects generally adapted to their context rather than influencing it. They provided appropriate solutions to population or users’ needs (e.g. the new incinerator plant in Lisbon to cope with the closure of the existing landfill) and reflected different socio-economic and political factors (the expansion of the Madrid metro network resulted from higher mobility needs and growing air traffic at Barajas airport). In turn, context influenced project design by imposing constraints in terms of time (as with the implementation of the waste water treatment projects to comply with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive⁴ by the end of 2000), space

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⁴ Directive 91/271/EEC.
(archaeological discoveries led to changes in the Egnatia motorway alignment) and budget (limited regional resources prevented implementation of the best project option in Ría de Vigo).

- **Project design.** Project design is a weak point of environment projects, which was adversely affected by time constraints (deadlines imposed by EC Regulations), forecasting mistakes (regarding the population trend in the case of Palermo) as well as social pressure (municipalities of the Northern Lisbon sub-region pushed for spreading the solid waste treatment facilities around different areas, with negative economic and environmental consequences). On the face of it, transport projects (particularly the Port of Gioia Tauro and the Madrid Metro Line) are generally characterised by more efficient and flexible designs, reflecting the strategic vision underpinning them.

- **Financial sustainability.** Mechanisms to ensure financial sustainability are an integral part of project design. In general, the projects reviewed did not incur financial difficulties. During the investment phase, some projects incurred cost overruns which were covered through additional national public funding. During the operational phases, projects used different combinations of operating revenues (tariffs) and other sources of funding to cover operating and maintenance costs.

- **Forecasting capacity.** Good forecasting can be very important for deciding on an appropriate design or setting adequate tariffs. For environment projects, demand was the main source of unpredictability with resulting under-capacity (as in the solid waste treatment project in Galicia). In one occasion (Madrid Metro Line), optimal forecasting capacity was achieved through a comprehensive system of controls implemented during construction and operation.

- **Project governance.** Governance had a decisive and on average a negative influence on project performance. The two main ingredients for an effective governance structure are: a clear distribution of responsibilities between stakeholders contributing to project development, and adequate mechanisms to integrate the views of a larger set of stakeholders. Environment projects appeared to be specifically vulnerable to social pressure: municipalities and Non-Governmental Organisations in Northern Lisbon succeeded in influencing the project design and, indirectly, its performance. By contrast, transport projects showed a better capacity to either withstand pressure (e.g. managers of the Egnatia motorway gave little initial consideration to stakeholders’ opinions) or integrate it without disrupting the project’s constitutive features (as demonstrated by the inclusion of municipalities in the decision-making process related to the Madrid Metro Line project). Some transport projects provided cases of good practice regarding effective distribution of responsibilities translating into an appropriate legal form (e.g. the establishment of a dedicated commercial publicly owned company, like the ‘Egnatia Odos’).

- **Managerial response.** Appropriate managerial response can palliate deficiencies in terms of design, governance or forecasting, but it entails costs. While in the transport
sector, managerial responses were less relevant, frequent or needed, environment projects offer different illustrations of effective managerial responses. Ría de Vigo provides a good example of an effective reaction adopted by Augas de Galicia, the regional body in charge of the project’s implementation: when some municipalities in Ría de Vigo proved to be inefficient in dealing with tender processes for assigning the management of the treatment plants, the regional body took responsibility for running the infrastructures, thus ensuring their immediate functioning.

- **Role of the European Commission.** Besides the already mentioned drivers, the role played by the European Commission on project development has been analysed. On different occasions, the Commission has intervened on either one or a number of drivers identified in the study. In some projects (generally environment projects, such as the solid waste treatment infrastructures in Northern Lisbon and Galicia), it was as a mere funding provider without going into the details of project design, management and implementation; in other cases (mostly transport projects, such as the Madrid Metro Line), it acted in a more proactive way, establishing closer relationships and undertaking discussions with the national authorities, and influencing the project’s features. Even when high levels of commitment were put in place, however, the Commission did not always manage to solve the pre-existing limitations of the national / regional governance structures (as occurred in case of the Mediterranean Corridor and the Port of Gioia Tauro). The European Investment Bank was also involved in the co-financing of three out of ten projects reviewed\(^5\) and in all cases it provided valuable support aimed at improving the project design.

These different drivers are deeply intertwined, i.e., before yielding development effects, they combine in different ways, generally through project-specific patterns. For example, the impact of vested interests on design can be more or less important depending on whether an adequate governance structure is able to assuage or integrate these interests, whether forecasting capacity can lead to the adoption of appropriate awareness campaigns preempting later disruptive effects, or whether managerial responses are able to minimise possible detrimental consequences.

One finding valid across all the cases reviewed is that design and governance are the two legs upon which a project stands. Appropriate forecasting capacity and managerial response are factors that can impinge on either one or the other, either positively by offsetting deficiencies, or negatively if they are wrong or insufficient, but usually they are less critical and have an indirect impact on project performance via design or governance. As to context, it is not only a set of constraints but also of opportunities giving rise to a vision underpinning a project’s adoption and development. A good vision proposing an appropriate articulation of constraints and opportunities and which is clear about what the project wants to achieve augurs well for future project developments.

\(^5\) The Egnatia Motorway, the water supply project in Palermo and Integrated solid waste treatment in Northern Lisbon.
Finally, a sector-specific story emerges, as environment projects turn out to suffer from deficiencies on different fronts (design, forecasting, governance) which account for comparatively weaker performance (e.g. endogenous dynamics or institutional learning). Reasons have to do with weak administrative capacity of the local / regional authorities in charge, and with the relative ad hoc nature of the projects that are implemented without necessarily being part of a wider investment programme.

**Lessons learnt on the methodology of ex-post evaluation**

This evaluation study developed and tested an innovative methodological approach for ex-post evaluation of investment projects⁶, which proved to be very effective in answering the “What”, “When” and “How” Evaluation Questions. The following methodological innovations distinguish this study from other comparable exercises:

- **Combination of perspectives.** The evaluation has been carried out on the micro (project level) and macro (including external systems, areas and sectors) dimensions of analysis; the perspective of both economics and other social sciences has been adopted in order to disentangle all the different types of development effects triggered by investment; a mix of quantitative (ex-post Cost-Benefit Analysis) and qualitative (personal interviews, documentary analysis and searches of European Commission, government and newspaper archives) techniques. All these perspectives are integrated in a narrative way, so as to develop ten case studies that read as project ‘stories’.

- **Focus of analysis.** The focus is not only on the projects’ effects but also on the causality chain leading to the generation of certain effects at certain points in time.

- **Timeframe of the evaluation.** The time frame is exceptionally long since the projects under review were financed almost 15-20 years ago: this allows us to disentangle the effects generated in the long-term and to more easily identify the mechanisms which influenced such effects over the years.

The **ex-post Cost-Benefit Analysis**, in particular, provided a useful framework of analysis to disentangle the most crucial aspects of the projects’ ex-post performances and final outcomes. The study gave rise to significant methodological lessons concerning the use of the ex-post CBA and, more specifically, the following themes:

- The identification of the unit of analysis, which may be wider than the project that is the object of the initial financing decision;

- The appropriate time horizon to encompass the project’s mid-to long term impact;

- The selection of the most feasible and realistic counterfactual scenario against which to compare the project results;

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The estimation of project demand for the coming years;

The adoption of ad-hoc Social Discount Rates, which are both country- and time-specific (different rates to capitalise the past cashflows and to discount the future ones);

The identification and quantification of costs and benefits, with the objective of evaluating the long-term impacts, as opposed to short-term outputs generally quantified by ex-ante CBAs;

The application of the most appropriate Shadow Prices, which, if necessary, may also be region- or time-specific.

The lessons derived from applying the CBA methodology to the ten projects are of general interest and may guide any future ex-post CBA exercise at EU or wider level.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the evidence collected shows how the outcomes of development projects are the result of the frantic mishmash between incidental environmental, socio-economic, institutional and cultural circumstances and the managerial responses produced by the project. A set of specific conjectures on what can be construed as a ‘list of ingredients’ of success for public investment projects has been identified. First of all, successful investments are more likely to lie in a context in which entrepreneurialism, professionalism, managerial discretion and accountability to government are in place to encourage project ideas, select the most promising ones, and prevent the project from being exposed to some disruption, either during construction or operation. Appropriate incentives and accurate forecasting and monitoring activities can be important to favour the achievement of the project goals. Finally, the establishment of formal mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholders’ voices are listened to by project designers and managers can help to generate a sense of social pride and identity which, in turn, increases the likelihood of project success.

This ‘list of ingredients’ suggests a set of operational recommendations along the main phases of the project management cycle.

- **Identification and formulation: a systematic and consistent planning function.** At the initial phase of the project cycle there is a need to ensure that good ideas are generated while bad ones are discarded. Good project ideas are those underpinned by a clear and forward looking development vision and addressing a relevant social need. Innovation capacity within the public administration of the Member State, together with professionalism and high levels of technical competence should be ensured, in order to identify the most promising project ideas.

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7 For instance, a discussion is on-going at the World Bank on how to revive CBA as a necessary, even if not exclusive, tool for project evaluation (World Bank, 2011).
• **Design and selection: an investment in technical expertise:** The tools to be necessarily in place to develop high-quality feasibility studies and ensure good project design are the following: a solid but flexible technical design, an accurate demand analysis with a sound forecasting exercise, risk management plan and ex-ante Cost-Benefit Analysis; a framework to systematically inform and involve stakeholders in the project development; a specific assessment of the governance arrangements in place and of the changes to be made; mechanisms to ensure financial sustainability over the entire project life. Results of feasibility studies and cost-benefit analysis, assessed by an independent reviewer checking its quality and reliability, should be used to select and prioritise projects.

• **Project implementation: systematic monitoring and latitude.** The project life should be tracked and monitored. Specific attention should be paid to projects considered particularly risky. In cases where the monitoring process highlights significant deviations from the expected performance, corrective action should be recommended by the Managing Authority and taken by the beneficiary.

• **Closure: incentive schemes and learning.** After the project closure, systematic ex-post evaluation should be carried out by the European Commission, and the results made public. The ex-post evaluation should aim not only to assess the project effects, but also to identify and reward well-performing project teams.

The implementation of the recommendations put forward here would require joint action by the European Commission and Member States. In particular, the EC should carefully consider how to play an advisory role to the Member States in relation to the above challenges, particularly by contributing to adopt common approaches for project preparation and appraisal, promoting knowledge transfer and the sharing of good practices.

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8 E.g. concerning the distribution of responsibilities between different institutional parties.