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**The North  
Sea Region  
Programme**  
2007–2013



 **dsn**  
ANALYSES & STRATEGIES  
COOPERATION MANAGEMENT

INTERIM REPORT

# Added Value



**Sub-theme 2:** Transnational  
cooperation

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The preparation of the report was overseen by the Programme's Evaluation Steering Group, comprising representatives from countries and regions participating in the Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme and co-ordinated by the Joint Technical Secretariat.

This report is part of a series about the ongoing evaluation process of the Programme. In accordance with the ongoing approach these reports will be available one by one in the near future:

Institutional Capacity and Performance

- 1) Financial management and control setup
- 2) Programme structures
- 3) Application procedures and project development

Added Value

- 1) Programme impact and coverage
- 2) Transnational cooperation
- 3) Legacy

Publicity and Communications

- 1) Programme and project cooperation in communications
- 2) Programme visibility
- 3) Communications measures on project level

Disclaimer:

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## 0. Introduction

This interim report addresses programme bodies, project partners and stakeholders of the Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme (NSR Programme). The report is part of the “Ongoing Evaluation” which presents the main findings and recommendations regarding the topic “transnational cooperation - added value at the project / cluster level”.

In accordance with the evaluation questions formulated by the programme bodies, this interim report aims to:

- Assess and comment on the relevant measures and activities which were carried out by the projects and clusters in order to achieve the critical mass necessary for creating a strong environment for genuine transnational cooperation.
- Examine the extent of both the project’s and cluster’s true “transnationality”, as well as to shed light on how the project- and clustering approaches have influenced the potential impact of the programme in the long-term.

The report is structured in the following chapters:

- Transnational cooperation at the project level
- Transnational cooperation in cluster projects

The report focuses on the main findings (!) and recommendations (✓) of the evaluation process which are highlighted with symbols in the margin. In addition, opinions taken from online surveys and interviews give an impression of different perspectives stakeholders and projects have. The report summarises the findings and recommendations of the Ongoing Evaluation in an easy to read way.

This interim report is based on the main results from desk research and online surveys in which answers were given by 7 out of 10 projects’ lead beneficiaries as well as on 5 additional telephone interviews with projects’ lead beneficiaries of the NSR Programme. The report focuses on the general findings and recommendations with strategic relevance to both the improvement of the current programme period as well as to the next programme period 2014-2020.

More information on methodology and the evaluation model of the “Ongoing Evaluation” is provided in appendix B.



## 1. Recommendations at a glance

Please find below an overview of the recommendations of this report which are explained in detail in the following chapters.

- ✓ In the next programme period, the tasks of project officers in the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) should be broadened so that they each function as “Portfolio Managers” for specific programme priorities. The function of Portfolio Managers extends beyond technical project administration to not only include the facilitation of cooperation between projects within the NSR Programme, but also to encourage the communication of results to stakeholders from both the regional and European level. Moreover, Portfolio Managers should link concrete project results and their (anticipated) impact to the achievements of the NSR Programme strategy.
- ✓ The JTS should intensify the support for projects geared towards further developing skills for intercultural management. Accordingly, the JTS should strive to facilitate knowledge transfer between projects, provide resources such as learning material and training sessions, as well as develop a comprehensive overview of providers or a knowledge base accessible on the website.
- ✓ The JTS should act as a “door opener” which supports projects in actively promoting their results vis-à-vis the European Commission and other European organisations. Such a “strong voice from the North Sea Region” could help individual projects join forces and thus exert a stronger impact on policy development. The Portfolio Managers could play an active role in selecting and linking relevant projects and their results to ongoing policy discussions.
- ✓ The programme should promote and support the sustainability of projects embedded in transnational networks by sharing good practice on how to organise and ensure the transnational nature of the North Sea Region.
- ✓ The programme should continue with the established cluster projects in the next programme period by building on the successful implementation of a cluster facilitator.
- ✓ The JTS should also encourage the clustering of projects beyond the North Sea Region programme which are engaging in similar activities as part of other INTERREG and funding programmes.
- ✓ The programme should increase the opportunities for projects to learn from each other, transfer knowledge and to benefit from synergies both during the conception and production of outputs throughout their implementation phase. The Portfolio Manager could actively support the process of cross-project integration and knowledge exchange.

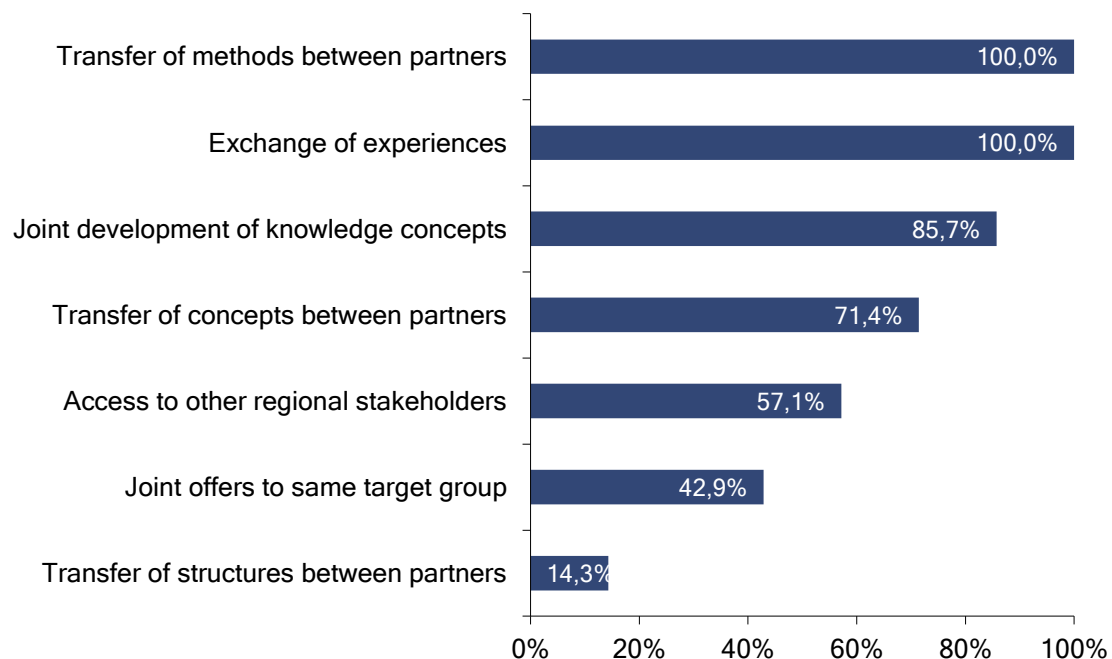
## 2. Transnational cooperation at the project level

The analysis of transnational cooperation at the project level focuses on both the added value of transnational cooperation for the projects themselves, as well as on how the North Sea Region Programme can foster the development of additional transnational cooperation.

### General findings



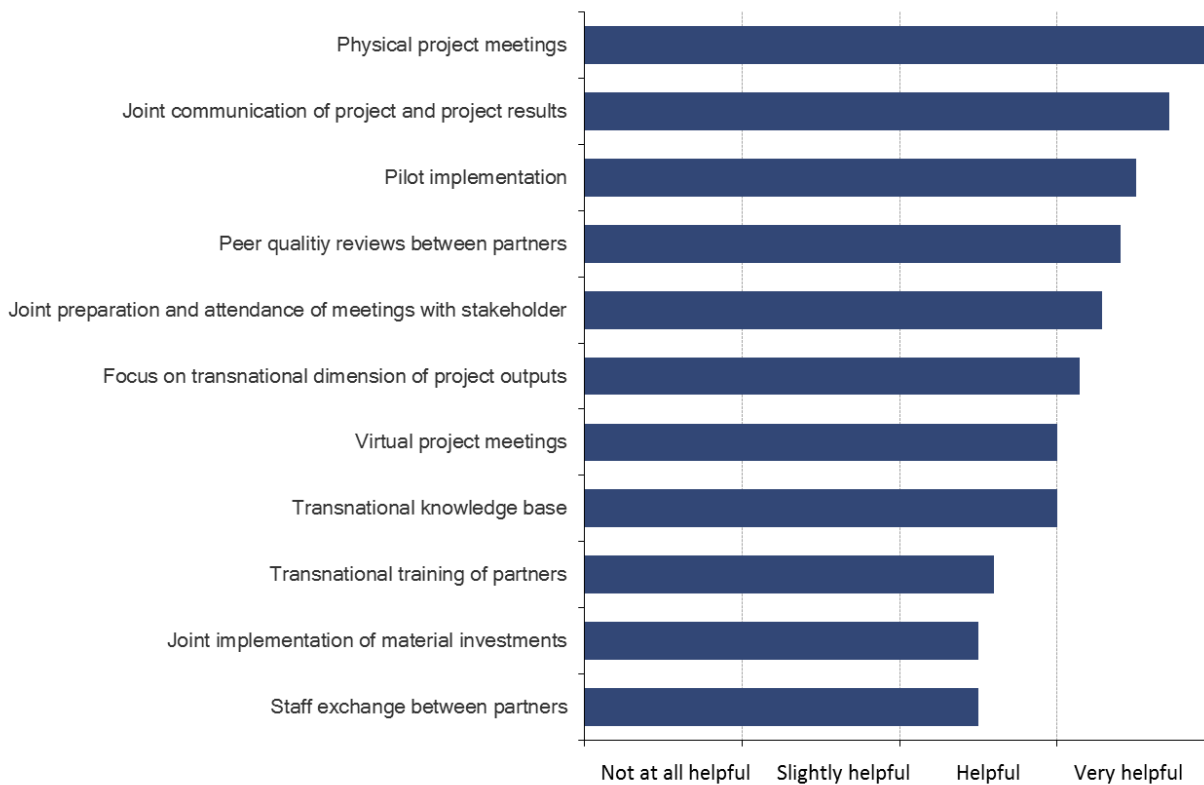
- Within the online survey the lead beneficiaries were asked to assess the transnationality of their project and the perceived added value of the transnational approach. All lead beneficiaries participating in the online survey view the extent of transnationality of cooperation within their specific project to be either strong or very strong. Therefore, both the transfer of methods and concepts between transnational partners, as well as the exchange of experiences and a joint development of knowledge concepts are perceived as the main added value of the transnational approach (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: What is the specific added value of your transnational approach? (Multiple selection possible)**

Source: Online survey

- To strengthen the degree of transnational cooperation within the projects, the lead beneficiaries stated in the online survey that measures such as physical project meetings, the joint communication of projects and project results, a clear focus on the transnational dimension of project outputs, the joint preparation and attendance of meetings with stakeholders, as well as peer quality reviews between partners have proven to be most helpful (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Which measures have proven to be most helpful in strengthening transnational cooperation between partners in your project? (Multiple selection possible)**

Source: Online survey, mean values

- As a result of the Ongoing Evaluation it is observable that the willingness in the project consortia to continue with transnational cooperation after project completion is high. Accordingly, the majority of the projects participating in the online survey are keen to cooperate in the same consortia as part of a new project in the next programme period.
- The results also show that the involvement of the management board of partner organisations in cooperation is very limited in most cases. In the online survey some projects stated that the involvement of the management board largely depends on the size of the partner organisation – the smaller the project partner, the more likely it is that the management board is involved. In addition, the results show that projects tend to create a network of individuals rather than a network of organisations.
- Whilst the majority of the participating projects in the online survey aim to implement strategies or development plans at the transnational level, the minority aim to implement action plans. The projects' focus is on the strategy level rather than on operationalisation at the transnational level (strategies vs. actions).
- Within the online survey the lead beneficiaries identified the following obstacles and challenges for transnational cooperation within their projects:



- Intercultural management, which refers to the management of different languages, different backgrounds or different ways of thinking associated with project partners in the different Member States, is considered a main challenge for project managers.
- Another challenge is the up scaling of project results to a higher level by transferring the results from the project level to large or full scale implementation.
- The competition between organisations could pose a challenge or an obstacle to transnational cooperation within projects.
- Some lead beneficiaries experienced a tendency of some project partners to first focus on regional interests. In addition it is sometimes challenging to motivate partners from different countries to implement activities as laid down in the application.
- Some lead beneficiaries identified complex legislations and unique sets of standards within the Member States as an obstacle that impede the implementation of projects.
- Due to the complexity of the application process, the financial arrangements and the pre-financing funding principle, the integration of private partners into the projects is often challenging.
- Due to their limited knowledge on transnational cooperation, it is often a challenge for newcomers or inexperienced lead beneficiaries to develop the topic of their project in a transnational context.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations take up the findings above. They intend to solve the addressed issues based on both the feedback given by projects as well as on the desk research carried out by the evaluators.



**In the next programme period, the tasks of project officers in the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) should be broadened so that they each function as “Portfolio Managers” for specific programme priorities. The function of Portfolio Managers extends beyond technical project administration to not only include the facilitation of cooperation between projects within the NSR Programme, but also to encourage the communication of results to stakeholders from both the regional and European level. Moreover, Portfolio Managers should link concrete project results and their (anticipated) impact to the achievements of the NSR Programme strategy.**

In the current programme period the projects of the North Sea Region Programme contribute to four thematic priorities (building on our innovation capacity, managing our environment in a sustainable manner, improving the accessibility of places in the NSR, promoting sustainable and competitive communities). The project officers of the JTS are organised in line with these priorities – each priority is managed by one project officer who is responsible for the priority and functions as the contact person. In the next programme period, the individual thematic scope of each project officer





should be made more visible to (potential) projects and stakeholders, as this would allow for more direct contact to the appropriately specialised staff member at the JTS. In addition, the tasks of project officers should be broadened so that they function as “Portfolio Managers” for specific programme priorities. The function of Portfolio Managers extends beyond technical project administration. With their detailed and specific knowledge on both the strategy and results of single projects, they can actively facilitate synergies and cooperation between project activities within the NSR Programme. In addition, they can promote and encourage the communication of results from individual projects within the four specific priorities between stakeholders from both the regional and European level. As “thematic specialists”, the Portfolio Managers will gain detailed insight into the projects, their thematic area, their results and (anticipated) impact. Thus, Portfolio Managers can ultimately link concrete project strategies and results to both the specific aims of the NSR Programme strategy and to the level of achievement at the programme level.



**The JTS should intensify the support for projects geared towards further developing skills for intercultural management. Accordingly, the JTS should strive to facilitate knowledge transfer between projects, provide resources such as learning material and training sessions, as well as develop a comprehensive overview of providers or a knowledge base accessible on the website.**

The results of the online survey indicate that intercultural management plays an important role within the management of the projects’ partnership. Intercultural management poses a challenge for project managers as it requires bringing together different languages, different cultural and technical backgrounds and different ways of thinking into one single project.

The programme should raise awareness of the fact that intercultural management is a challenge and that relevant knowledge and skills are of key importance to the successful management of transnational projects – not only for the lead beneficiaries but also for all project partners involved. In the next period, the programme should intensify the support of projects with regard to improving intercultural management and facilitating knowledge transfer between projects. This could, for example, be done by providing adequate learning material and training sessions, by creating a comprehensive overview of training providers within the field of intercultural management or by implementing a knowledge base on intercultural management accessible on the website. Other and newer technical possibilities geared towards supporting projects in intercultural management also include online webinars.

Having said this, however, the capacity of the programme to support such measures is not only limited, but the measures themselves also insufficient to replacing first hand experiences made during the project implementation phase. Nevertheless, the programme should continue to work on building an appropriate basis for achieving excellence in the management of transnational projects in the North Sea Region.



**The JTS should act as a “door opener” which supports projects in actively promoting their results vis-a-vis the European Commission and other European organisations. Such a “strong voice from the North Sea Region” could help individual projects join forces and thus exert a stronger impact on policy development. The Portfolio Managers could play an active role in selecting and linking relevant projects and their results to ongoing policy discussions.**

As stated in the telephone interviews it is hard for projects themselves to facilitate contacts with relevant organisations at the European level. Thus, in order to promote transnational topics from the North Sea Region, the JTS could assist in connecting the programme’s projects with key organisations at the European level such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Investment Bank, the Committee of the Regions and other relevant organisations. By doing so, the NSR Programme can not only improve its visibility at the European level, but can also demonstrate the added value of transnational cooperation and increase the awareness of the NSR Programme and its participants in Brussels. The JTS could achieve the latter by aggregating the results of various NSR projects which could then, for example, be presented as exemplary results of the NSR programme during thematic events (see clusters) in Brussels. If this is successful, the NSR Programme could heighten its influence on EU policy and thus benefit the NSR Programme substantially. The function of the JTS as a “door opener” for NSR projects at the EU level should be integrated into the general communication strategy of the NSR Programme. The Portfolio Managers of the JTS could take an active role in selecting and linking relevant projects and their results to ongoing policy discussions.



**The programme should promote and support the sustainability of projects embedded in transnational networks by sharing good practice on how to organise and ensure the transnational nature of the North Sea Region.**

Maintaining the long-term sustainability of projects embedded in transnational networks in the absence of EU funding is an important issue for INTERREG programmes. For transnational projects and project consortia, in particular, it remains a significant challenge to organise activities in both a sustainable and transnational manner. For this reason, projects would benefit greatly from sharing experiences and good practice with other projects when it comes to the transnational organisation and coordination of legal entities, financing and organisational models, business plans and time schedules. There are obstacles related to all of these issues which require both in-depth knowledge and specific competences within the project consortia if they are to be overcome efficiently. One such obstacle relates, for example, to the ownership of results which tends to be important for SMEs, but often runs conflict with specific regulations. Thus, the programme should look to learn from successful projects which have been sustained over a long period of time and would do well to create a handbook of “good practices on sustainability” which could include practical solutions, templates, etc. and be made available to the individual projects. In addition, the programme plans to implement a “result tool” on the programme website during the next programme period which will make it possible for projects to share good practices regarding the sustainability of transnational cooperation.



### ***Opinions from lead beneficiaries and stakeholders***

Below you will find some opinions of lead beneficiaries taken from the online survey regarding the issue of transnational cooperation at the project level:

*“Sometimes language and different cultures are an issue. Otherwise the partners like working transnationally and see the added value of it.”*

*“It is challenging to manage so many partners from different countries speaking different languages and originating from a different background. Sometimes it is not so easy to streamline the different thinking and to get to a common understanding/solution. But this also provides many different views and ideas!”*

*“Within the project partnership intercultural management plays an important role. It helps to understand opinions/arguments of partners in foreign countries and to manage the project according to the different cultures involved.”*

## **3. Transnational cooperation in cluster projects**

The analysis of transnational cooperation at the cluster level focuses on trans-national cooperation and its added value for the cluster projects.

### **General findings**



- The programme’s strategic project approach is based on the clustering of projects on related topics. The main purpose of cluster projects is to improve the communication of project results in order to increase the visibility in specific thematic areas. In October 2011 the programme initiated the implementation of the first cluster projects. In total, the programme has implemented five cluster projects (see also Table 1 in appendix A). The duration of cluster projects is 18 months.
- According to the online survey and telephone interviews most of the lead beneficiaries actively involved in a cluster project stated that the cluster approach has strengthened the transnationality of their project.
- From the projects’ point of view, a key advantage of participating in a cluster project relates to the resulting increase in visibility of the projects and their results at a higher level which, in turn, also raises the awareness of politicians at the EU level. However, cluster projects can not only lead to a visibility increase at the political level, but can also become more visible and attractive to thematically relevant industries within a specific cluster project. In general, cluster projects provide the opportunity to transfer project results to a higher level.
- Challenges related to participating in a cluster project (again, from the projects’ points of view) are both the short duration and limited budget earmarked for cluster projects (especially compared with the “regular” projects of the NSR Programme). Besides the fact that projects within a cluster are often at different stages of implementation, it can – according to some lead beneficiaries of cluster projects – prove difficult to motivate various partners of already finalised projects to actively participate in a cluster project.



## Recommendations

The following recommendations take up the findings above. They intend to solve the addressed issues based on both the feedback given by projects as well as on the desk research carried out by the evaluators.



**The programme should continue with the established cluster projects in the next programme period by building on the successful implementation of a cluster facilitator.**

The results of the online survey and the telephone interviews show that the projects also participating in cluster projects are benefitted by their participation. Corresponding to the main purpose of cluster projects they benefit from the mutual communication of results with other projects active in a similar thematic area. Together, they were able to increase the awareness of stakeholders providing a broader perspective on strategic approaches and the impact of various projects. Based on this positive feedback from cluster projects in the context of the Ongoing Evaluation, the programme should continue with cluster projects in the next programme period. The cluster projects started in the second half of the current programme period, as the projects had, at this point, made significant progress and produced initial results that allowed for communication to stakeholders. The participating projects within a cluster are usually at a different stage of development, with some completely and others mostly finalised. The implementation of a cluster facilitator on the part of the JTS has been a key success factor for the progress of cluster projects. Thus, the JTS should also continue to implement the cluster facilitator when the cluster approach is continued in the next programme period.



**The JTS should also encourage the clustering of projects beyond the North Sea Region programme which are engaging in similar activities as part of other INTERREG and funding programmes.**

From the projects' point of view it is beneficial to facilitate the clustering of projects with similar strategic interests and activities from other INTERREG programmes and funding schemes. The exchange of common knowledge between projects from different programmes could help to facilitate innovation and broaden the transnational setting in specific thematic areas. However, such a clustering process does not intend to group projects belonging to different funding programmes at the organisational level, but is instead explicitly focused on creating links between projects active in similar thematic fields. With view to the forthcoming programme period, for example, this may relate to a topic that could involve NCP and INTERACT. Some NCP and INTERACT are characterized by a cross-programme perspective and could thus help to identify projects with a similar thematic orientation in other programmes. In order to initiate and build sustainable links with other programmes, selected projects of the NSR Programme could invite thematically relevant projects of other programmes to their events and vice versa, as so to initiate contact and get the ball rolling on the exchange of ideas. To make this process as efficient and successful as possible, the NSR Programme should investigate the willingness of other programmes to connect with the NSR Programme. The enablement of such connections to other funding programmes could be actively supported and promoted by the Portfolio Managers of the JTS.



**The programme should increase the opportunities for projects to learn from each other, transfer knowledge and to benefit from synergies both during the conception and production of outputs throughout their implementation phase. The Portfolio Manager could actively support the process of cross-project integration and knowledge exchange.**

Besides the implementation of cluster projects which focus mainly on the communication of already finalised results, potential to support “regular” projects during their implementation phase also exists. By initialising cross project reviews, joint project meetings and thematic workshops, the programme should foster knowledge transfer during both the conception and production of results between projects in the implementation phase. In this way the programme could help create synergies between projects during their project implementation phase. The Portfolio Manager of the JTS could take an active role in organising suitable platforms for knowledge exchange. The transfer of knowledge should, however, not be mandatory for the projects, but should instead function as an optional “support tool” provided by the programme to achieve added value during the project implementation phase.

#### ***Opinions from lead beneficiaries and stakeholders***

Below you will find some opinions of lead beneficiaries taken from the online survey regarding the issue of transnational cooperation in cluster projects:

*“Participation in a cluster project helped to lift selected project results to a higher level (e.g. the best practice guide) which will be distributed at high level EU events.”*

*“Results will be forwarded to new stakeholders and the visibility of the project as well as the results increases. Due to workshops and events of the cluster in different places with different participants added value for the project was created.”*

*“[Added value of cluster]: To create more awareness among politicians (EU) about the cruise sector itself as well as its added value to accessibility, job opportunities and economical potential in the EU. More visibility of the project and its results, new stakeholders addressed and new contacts made.”*



## Appendix A – Overview cluster projects

Name of cluster project	Partner projects	Theme	Priority	Number of partners involved							Timeframe
				BE	DE	DK	NL	NO	SE	UK	
Digital Agenda for the North Sea (DANS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creative City Challenge</li> <li>▪ Smart Cities</li> <li>▪ E-CLIC</li> </ul>	Digital Agenda – Local e-services	1	1	2	-	1	-	1	1	01/10/2011 - 31/03/2013
Maritime Transport Cluster (MTC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ballast Water   BLAST</li> <li>▪ CNSS   Cruise Gateway</li> <li>▪ Dryport   E-Harbours</li> <li>▪ Food Port   iTransfer</li> <li>▪ LO-PINOD   NMU</li> <li>▪ NS Frits   POYO</li> <li>▪ StratMoS   SUSCOD</li> <li>▪ TIDE</li> </ul>	Multimodal transport	3	1	2	1	1	2	-	1	10/06/2011 - 10/12/2012
WaterCAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CLIWAT</li> <li>▪ Aquarius</li> <li>▪ SAWA</li> <li>▪ CPA</li> <li>▪ C2CI</li> </ul>	Water and climate change	2	1	4	4	3	-	-	1	01/10/2011 - 31/03/2013
Energy Vision North Sea Region (EVNSR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build with Care</li> <li>▪ Innovative Foresight Planning</li> <li>▪ North Sea Sustainable Energy Planning</li> <li>▪ North Sea Supply Connect</li> </ul>	Renewable energy production	3	3	1	1	5	-	1	2	16/01/2012 - 02/07/2013
Low Carbon Regions (LOWCAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build with Care</li> <li>▪ Care North</li> <li>▪ North Sea Sustainable Energy Planning</li> </ul>	Energy efficiency and carbon reduction	4	1	3	-	-	2	-	2	02/01/2012 - 03/06/2013
Total				7	12	6	10	4	2	7	

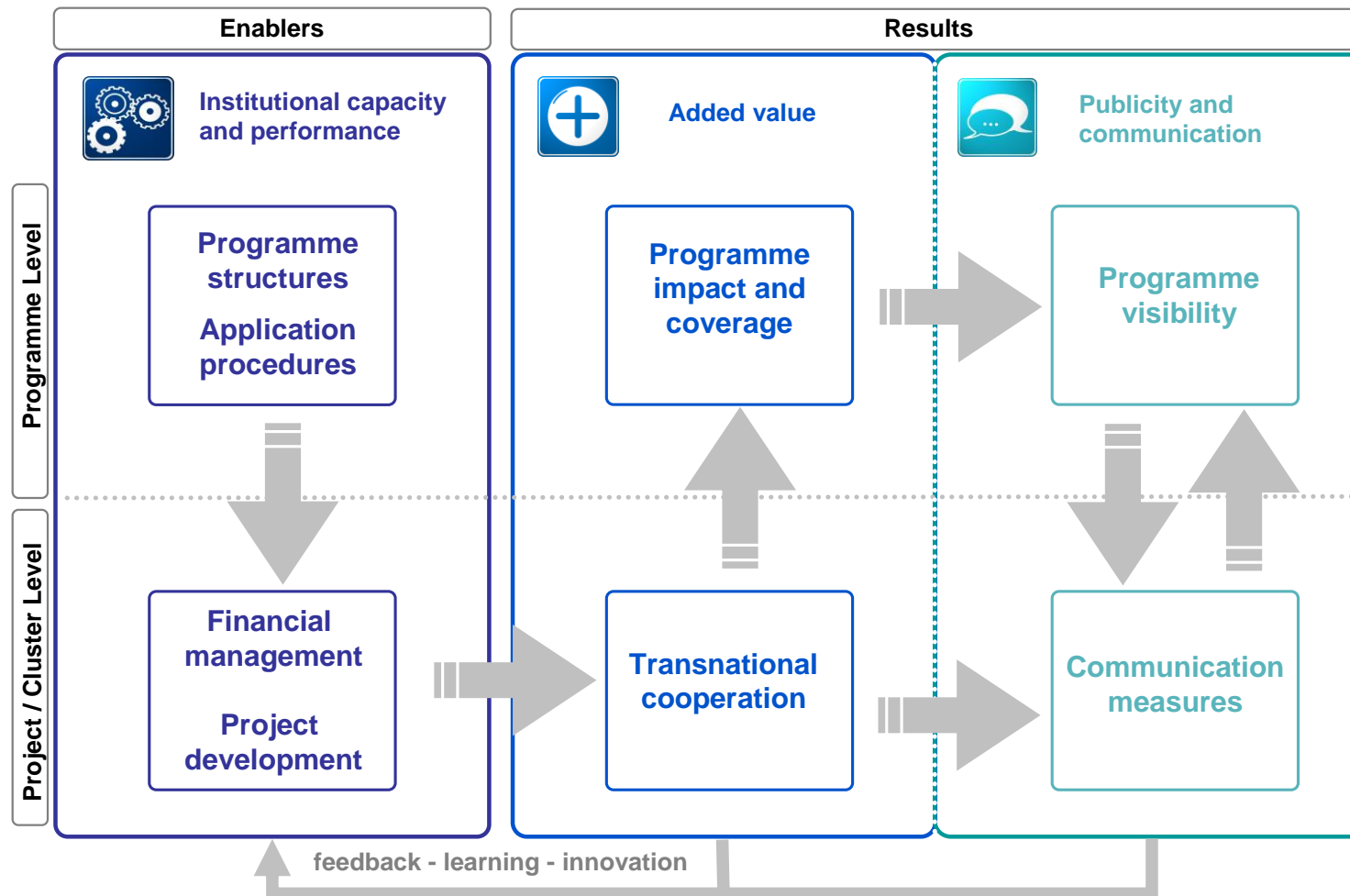
**Table 1: Cluster projects within the North Sea Region Programme**

Source: Annual report 2011



## Appendix B - Evaluation Model

The evaluation model adopts the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model approach as a starting point and applies it to the context of the programme evaluation. The key message of the evaluation approach is that any impact which occurs at the programme level is generated via the quality and effectiveness of the funded projects. This new paradigm focuses not only on stakeholders such as the Commission or regional administration, but also on the projects themselves as core customers of the programme management. Consequently, the programme should support the projects' work as strongly as possible, as so to enable them to manage their activities effectively.



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