

# INTERREG EUROPE

## EU-wide public consultation report

### 1. Introduction

The INTERREG IVC programme successor for the programming period 2014-2020, called 'INTERREG EUROPE', is currently being shaped. Its objective is to help European regional authorities design and implement regional policies and programmes more effectively, in particular under the EU Structural Funds programmes for Investment in Growth and Jobs, but also, where relevant, under the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) goal. The programme aims to do so through enabling exchange of experience and sharing of good practices among relevant stakeholders from different European regions (see more information on [www.interreg4c.eu/programme/2014-2020](http://www.interreg4c.eu/programme/2014-2020)).

On 25 and 26 June 2012, a Programming Committee composed of representatives of the 30 Partner States participating in this cooperation programme was set up. Its roles are to discuss and reach an agreement on the overall objective, strategy, priorities and implementation modalities of INTERREG EUROPE. Since then, the Programming Committee met seven times. At their meeting in Vilnius in December 2013, the Programming Committee agreed on a final draft version of the Cooperation Programme and its accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report. In addition, the Partner States decided to undertake a wide public consultation on those two documents. This public consultation process was launched on 10 January 2014 and closed on 21 March 2014.

### 2. Consultation process

#### 2.1 Consultation at programme level

According to Article 5 of the common provisions regulation (COM (2013) 246 final), the INTERREG EUROPE cooperation programme shall be prepared in accordance with the multi-level governance approach. Partners such as regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations etc. shall be involved in the programme development process.

The cooperation programme together with its Strategic Environmental Assessment were subject to the consultation of authorities responsible for environmental protection and of the public consultation as require in Article 6 of the Directive 2001/42/EC.

Several measures have been taken by the Partner States to guarantee this partnership principle. To start off, the Committee of the Regions as well as the European Economic and Social Committee were always invited to Programming Committee meetings and kept informed about their outcomes. Furthermore, two questionnaires had already been circulated in the course of October 2013 by the Partner States in order to get individual feedback with regard to the needs and expectations of potential programme beneficiaries as well as on the implementation modalities of their operational programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal.

Finally, the public was regularly kept informed of the different programming steps and advancements through a dedicated section of the programme's website [www.interreg4c.eu/interreg-europe](http://www.interreg4c.eu/interreg-europe).

All the above measures initiated and paved the way for the formal EU wide public consultation which was launched on 10 January 2014. On that date the final draft of the Cooperation Programme (CP) together with its citizen summary as well as the draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report

and its non-technical summary were put out to consultation on [www.interreg4c.eu/interreg-europe/public-consultation](http://www.interreg4c.eu/interreg-europe/public-consultation).

The publication of both documents was accompanied by an online questionnaire. This questionnaire (see annex 1) was put in place to allow the general public to respond to a set of 10 closed and open questions, with always the possibility to make comments. The set of questions covered both the Cooperation Programme document and the accompanying Environmental Report. A deadline of 21 March 2014 (i.e. 10 weeks after the launch of the consultation) was set for comments.

In addition, a stakeholder workshop was organised on 5 February 2014 in Brussels. The main objective of this workshop was to inform a selected group of Brussels based stakeholders on the programme strategy, objectives and proposed actions and to gather feedback and suggestions for the further development and implementation of the programme. Besides, an incentive to participate in the above mentioned online consultation was given. The workshop was addressed to three different target groups:

- a) Brussels based representative offices of regions who have been either involved in an INTERREG IVC Capitalisation Project and/or made use of Article 37.6.b of the Regulation 1083/2006. Indeed, those regions have valuable experience with regard to the new orientation of the future programme in terms of linking interregional cooperation activities to the mainstream “world”.
- b) pan-European organisations and networks either of European relevance as regards the target group and/or of thematic relevance for the four priority axes of INTERREG EUROPE;
- c) EU organisations, i.e. EC Directorates General responsible for the policy fields addressed by the programme, the Committee of the Regions and the European Social and Economic Committee.

The workshop was also recorded (audio/video) and made available to a wide audience on <http://www.interreg4c.eu/public-consultation-workshop>.

### Dissemination of public consultation notice

The dissemination activities related to the launch of the public consultation could be summarised as follows:

First phase – launch of online public consultation:

- A special sub-page was created on [www.interreg4c.eu](http://www.interreg4c.eu) website with all the details about this process (<http://www.interreg4c.eu/interreg-europe/public-consultation/>), including a summary of the programme’s main features and links to the relevant documents for consultation (the Cooperation Programme and the Environmental Assessment Report). The questionnaire for gathering feedback was created using Google Forms and was embedded on this page. A news (figure 1) on the homepage of the website ensured front page access to the consultation.

#### EU public consultation on INTERREG EUROPE

Posted on 10th January 2014 | Category: Programme

The interregional cooperation programme 2014-2020, called ‘INTERREG EUROPE’, is currently being shaped. A public consultation on the draft programme is running from 10 January until 21 March 2014. All interested individuals and organisations are encouraged to complete the online questionnaire to provide their feedback on the draft cooperation programme. Read on to find all relevant programme documents as well as the link to the questionnaire.

Figure 1: news announcing public consultation open 10/01/2014

- *Direct mailing to stakeholders.* On 10 January 2014 an e-mail announcing the official launch was sent to around **4000 recipients** inviting them to fill in the online questionnaire. The recipients were subscribers to the INTERREG IVC newsletter, partners and lead partners of

INTERREG IVC projects, organisations identified as Managing Authority or Intermediate Body of 2007-2014 operational programmes, contacts of other European Territorial Cooperation programmes, thematic and regional desk officers of the European Commission's DG REGIO, as well as the programme's national representatives in the Programming and Monitoring Committee.

- *Social media announcements.* On 10 January 2014 the news was shared on INTERREG IVC social media channels on Facebook and Twitter. The news was shared as well on the RegioNetwork group on Yammer (20 January 2014). The posts were subsequently re-tweeted (Twitter) and liked and shared (Facebook) by various international or national institutions (European Network for Rural Development, @Danubeconnects, @IrishRegions\_EU, @SmartEurope, @S3platform), programmes (Central Europe, Baltic Sea, INTERACT), projects (e.g; DANTE, Euro Montana, Move On Green) or individuals (see figure 2).

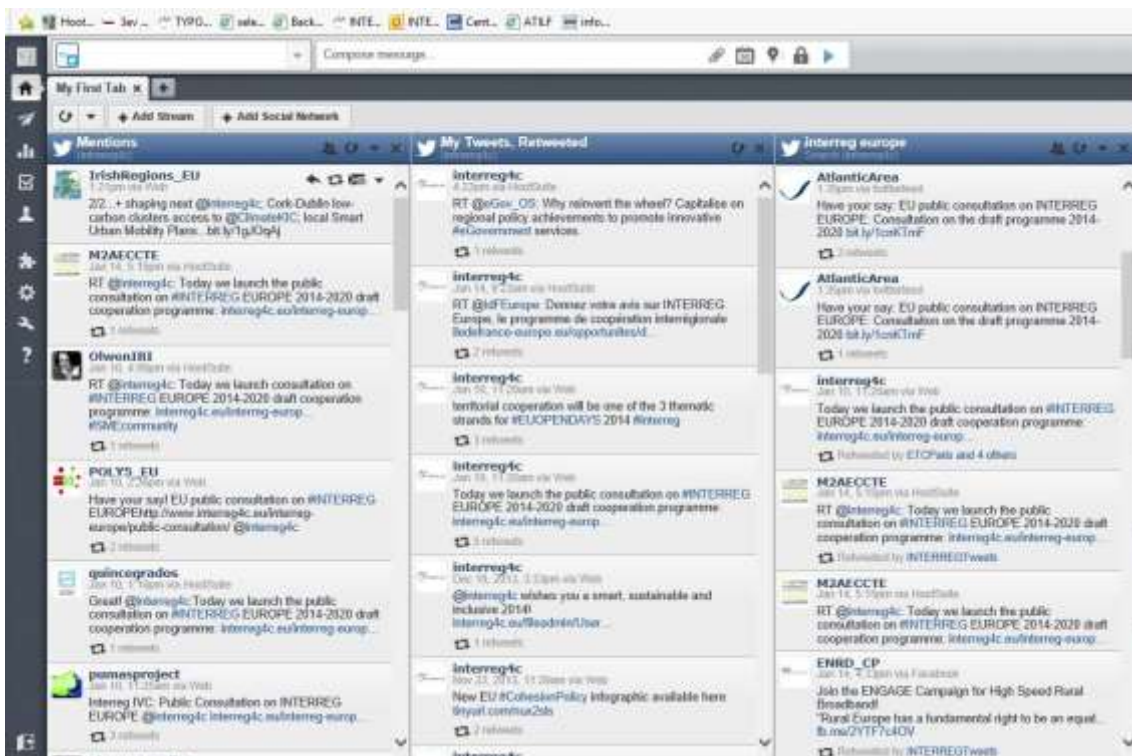


Figure 2: capture of some social media dissemination

- *Dissemination partners.* The programme had an agreement with the Committee of Regions to disseminate the consultation among its members on the programme's behalf. On 10 January, a news was posted on the Committee of Regions website, and a mailing sent to around 400 members of CoR platforms on EU2020 and EGTC, and to participants of the CoR Flagship Initiative Conference participants (around 1500 people). Other ETC programmes like URBACT, ESPON, INTERACT, and the transnational programmes were requested to disseminate the news. As a result, several ETC programmes (South East Europe, ESPON, Atlantic Area, Alpine Space) published the news on their website. Various shared the news on social media channels.

Second phase – dissemination around public consultation workshop in Brussels, 5 February 2014

- A specific presentation to incite participants to complete the questionnaire was made during the stakeholder workshop on 5 February 2014
- 10 February 2014: the event report page including complete video of the workshop (uploaded on youtube – 220 visits registered), presentations and link to the questionnaire was published on INTERREG IVC website (<http://www.interreg4c.eu/public-consultation-workshop/>)
- Regular updates regarding the event were posted on social media platforms (facebook & twitter)

Third phase – reminder about the end of public consultation

- A reminder mail informing about the deadline for the consultation was sent on 5 March (direct mailing as per first phase, news shared on social media).

### **Campaign results**

During the period of the consultation (10 Jan – 23 March), the web pages concerning INTERREG EUROPE, the public consultation and the questionnaire were in the top 10 visited pages of that period. Over 10% of the traffic alone was to the page <http://www.interreg4c.eu/interreg-europe/public-consultation/> representing over 12.000 page views. The page to the questionnaire was viewed over 2,800 times, resulting in 350 completed questionnaires from 31 countries (more details in section 3 below). It can be concluded that the communication campaign reached a wide but relevant target group, with a satisfactory conversion rate for completed questionnaires.

## **2.2 Consultation at national level**

Partner States organised national public consultations on the draft Cooperation Programme INTERREG EUROPE and its accompanying SEA report. In compliance with article 9 of the SEA directive, Partner States ensured that national rules for consultation process were respected and in particular that the relevant environmental authorities were informed.

Depending on their legal procedures:

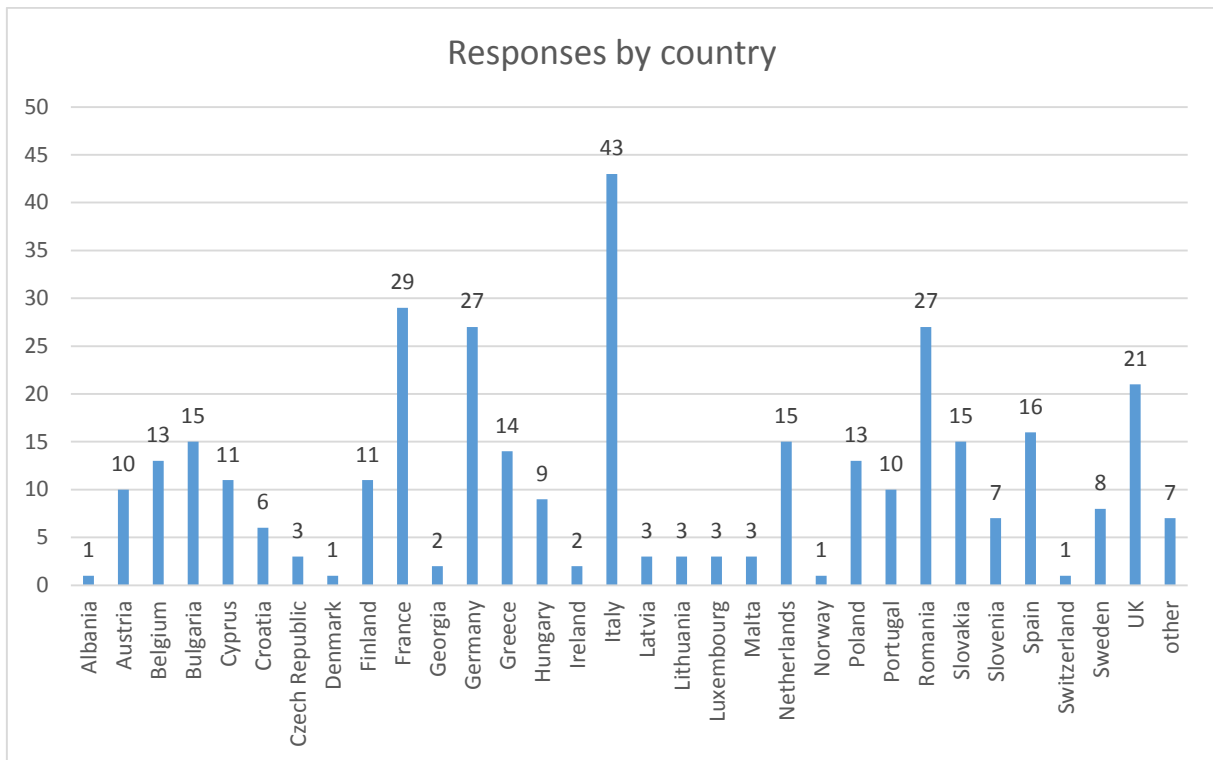
- All Partner States informed their relevant ministries and/or regional authorities about the consultation process and invited their stakeholders to complete the online questionnaire developed by the Managing Authority or send their comments through their relevant authorities. Programme documents and their technical summaries were made available on relevant national websites of relevant ministries. In some Partner States, programme documents were also translated into national languages (FR, HU, PL, SK).
- Several Partner States also included the announcement in national newsletters/ information bulletins (MT, PL, SI); others also sent a reminder during the consultation phase to the relevant stakeholders in their territories (ES, FR).
- A few Partner States went further by organising national or regional seminars (PL).

## **3. Results of online survey**

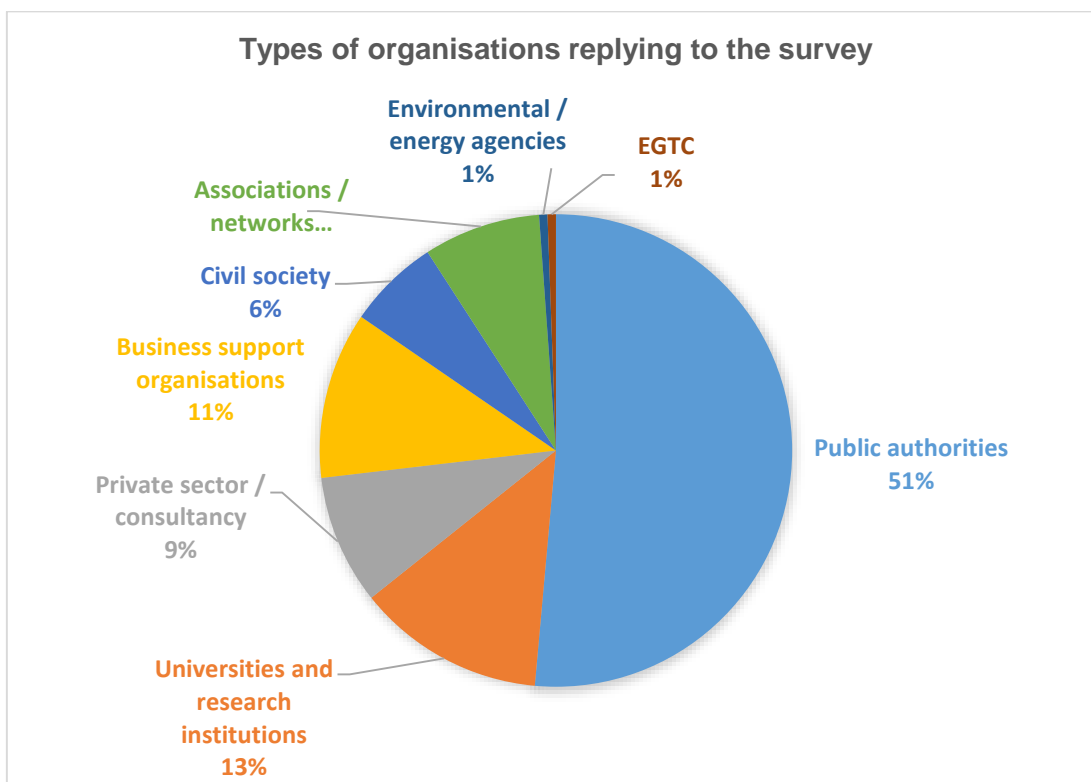
### **3.1 Overall features**

The online survey was completed by 350 individuals and organisations, coming from 31 countries (including Albania and Georgia). These contributions led to more than 500 individual comments. Answers to these comments can be found in annex 2 of the present report.

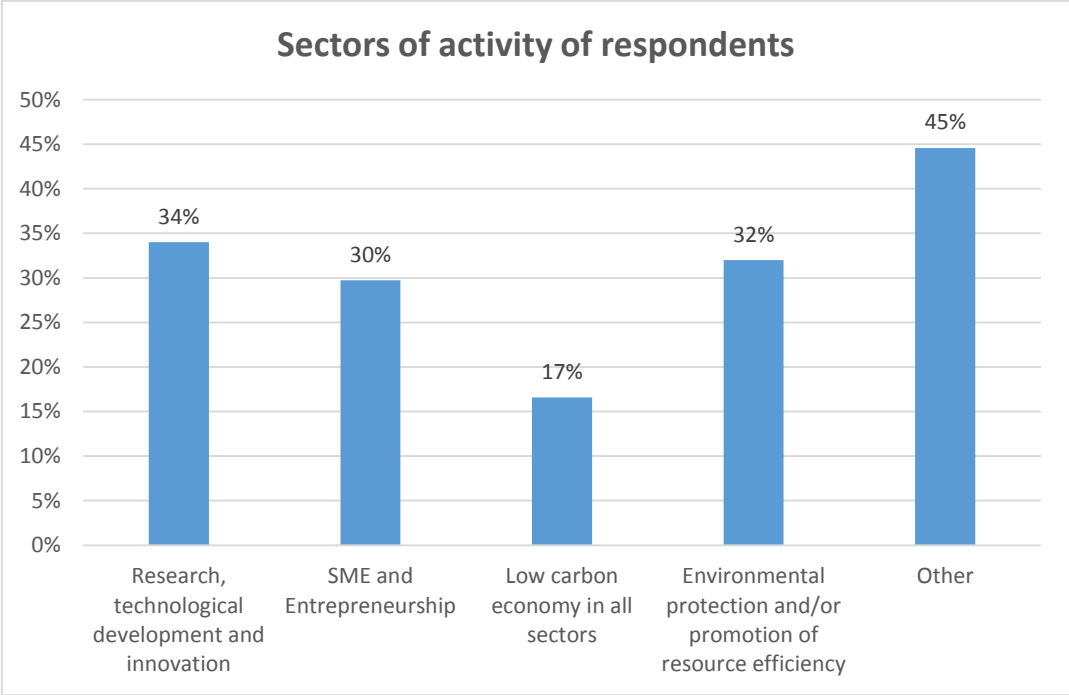
As reflected in the graph below, Italy was the most active country followed by France, Germany and Romania.



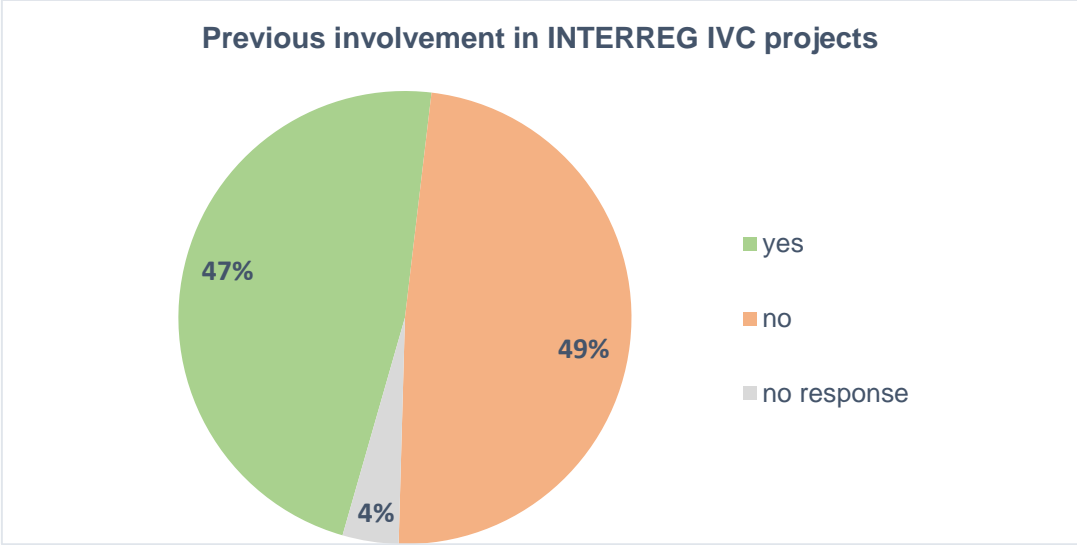
Public authorities represent more than 50% of the respondents, followed by universities and research institutions (13%) and business support organisations (11%).



Respondents are involved in at least one of the four main areas addressed by the programme. However, 45% of them also deal with other topics, such as the agro-food industry, civil engineering, employment and training, farming and forestry.



It is interesting to point out that half of respondents were involved in an INTERREG IVC project (47%).

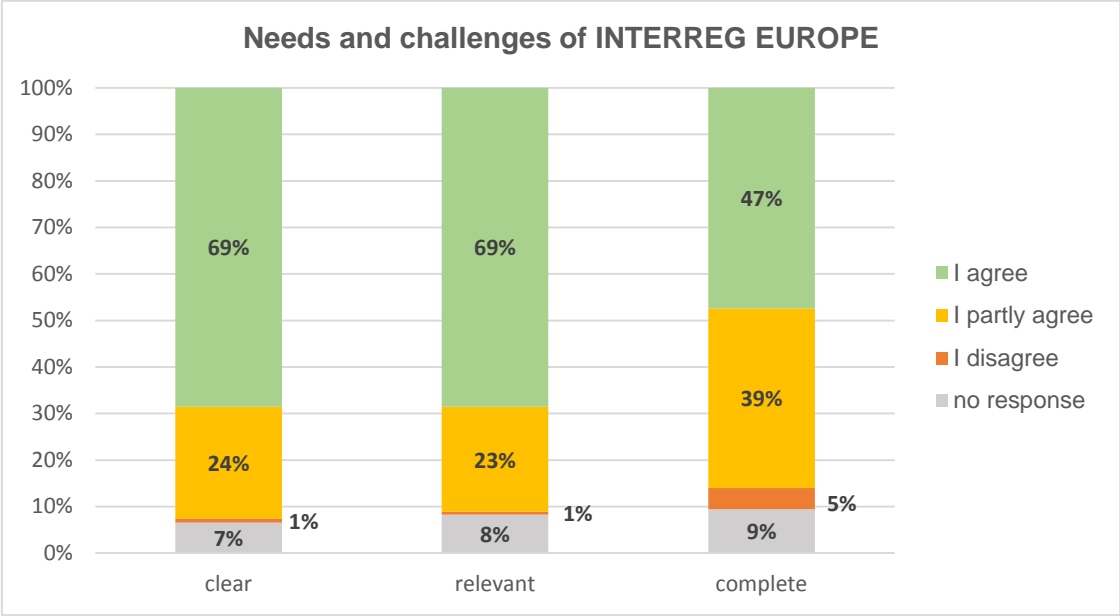


The on-line survey addressed the content of the Cooperation programme, section by section. This report illustrates the replies to each question, following the structure of the survey.

**3.2 Needs and challenges (section 1 of cooperation programme)**

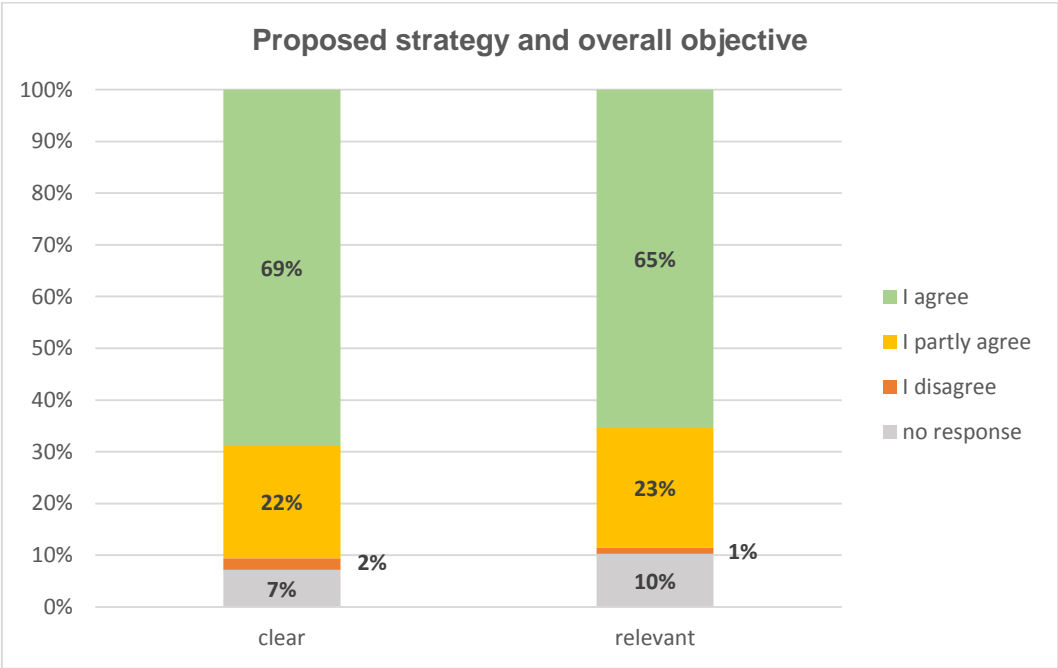
The needs and challenges addressed by INTERREG EUROPE are regarded as clear and relevant by 69% of the respondents. However, only 47% of them consider those needs and challenges as complete.

In particular, some respondents regret that certain issues (e.g. demographic change, climate change ICT) are too briefly tackled in the needs and challenges. Others consider that no enough emphasis is put on specific territorial characteristics (e.g. rural areas, coastal regions, mountainous regions).



**3.3 Strategy (section 1 of cooperation programme)**

There is a general overall agreement on the clarity and relevance of the programme strategy and its overall objective. Only 1% of the respondents do not confirm the relevance of the strategy, and 2% have a negative judgement on its clarity.



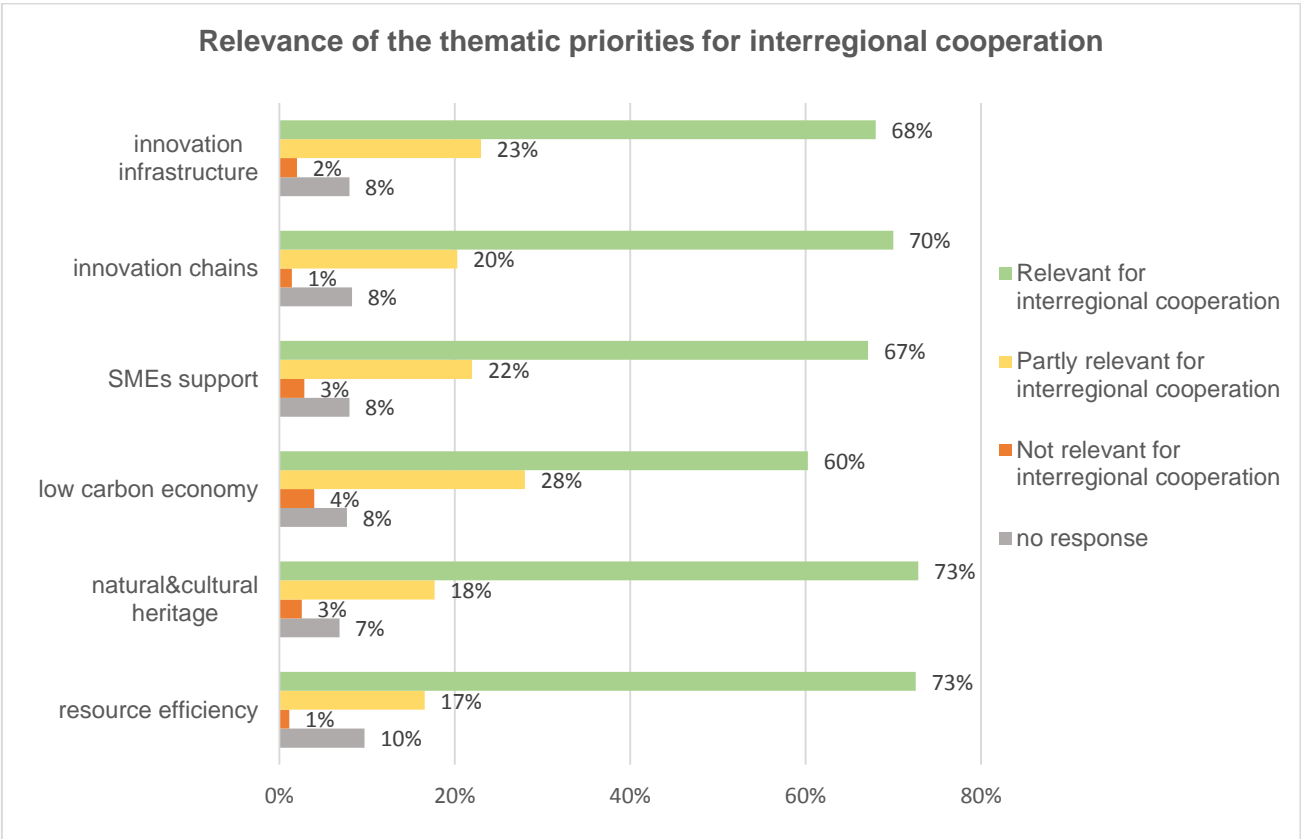
**3.4 Thematic priorities (section 2 of the cooperation programme)**



The graph below shows the responses related to the relevance of each specific objective of the programme. In general and as reflected in the answers provided for the general strategy, the majority of the respondents confirm the relevance of the thematic focus selected for the programme.

In particular, innovation, SME competitiveness, natural and cultural heritage and resource efficiency receive most adhesion from respondents (around 70%). Low carbon economy is still considered as relevant by more than 60% of the respondents.

In the comments, a few respondents regret that ICT was not selected as a Thematic Objective. A few others would have liked to see employment issues better represented.



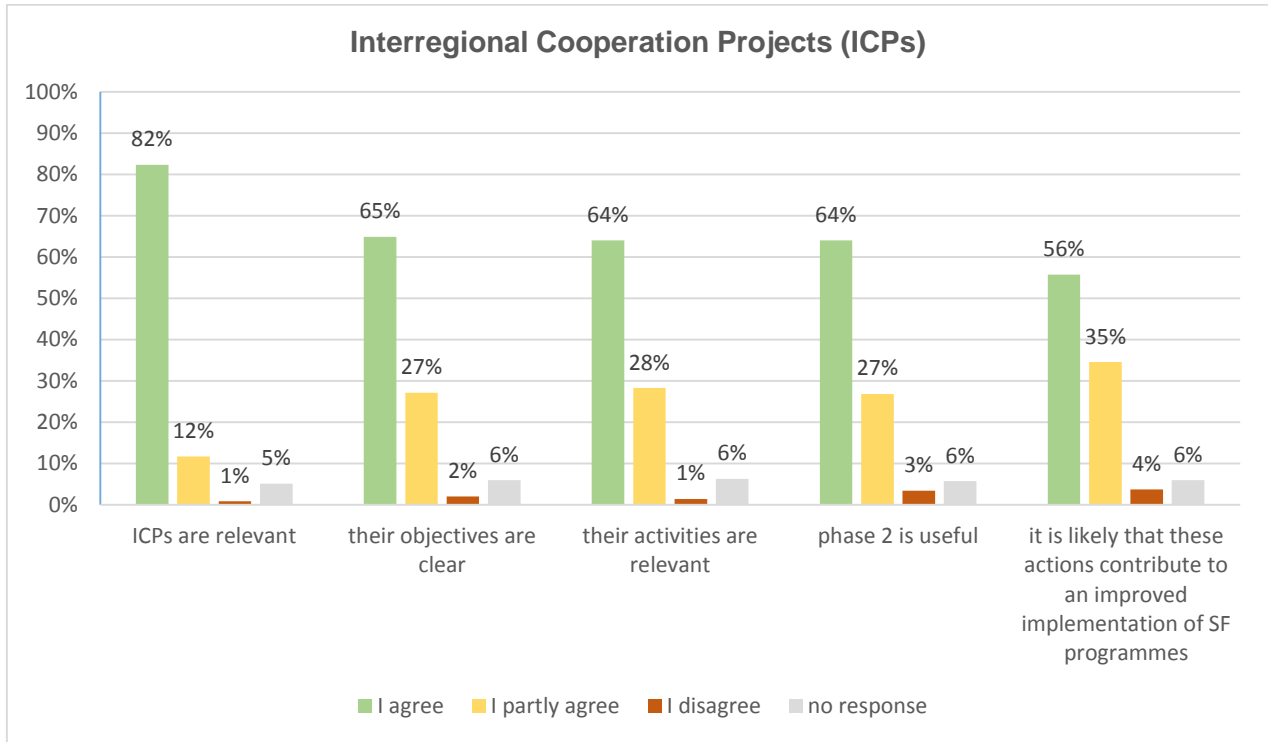
### 3.5 Actions supported by INTERREG EUROPE (section 2 of the cooperation programme)

The survey asked to judge the relevance, clarity and usefulness of the two actions supported by the programme: Interregional Cooperation Projects and Policy Learning Platforms.

A vast majority of respondents (more than 80%) consider the Interregional Cooperation Projects as relevant. More than two thirds of the respondents also consider that their objectives are clear, the activities are relevant and phase 2 is useful. The majority of the other respondents (more than one fourth) can also partly agree with this. The percentage of respondents agreeing with the capacity of the project to improve Structural Funds is less high since it reaches 56%. But another 35% can partly agree with this statement. This lower rate reflects the challenge of INTERREG EUROPE and its necessity to get closer to the stakeholders in charge of the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal.

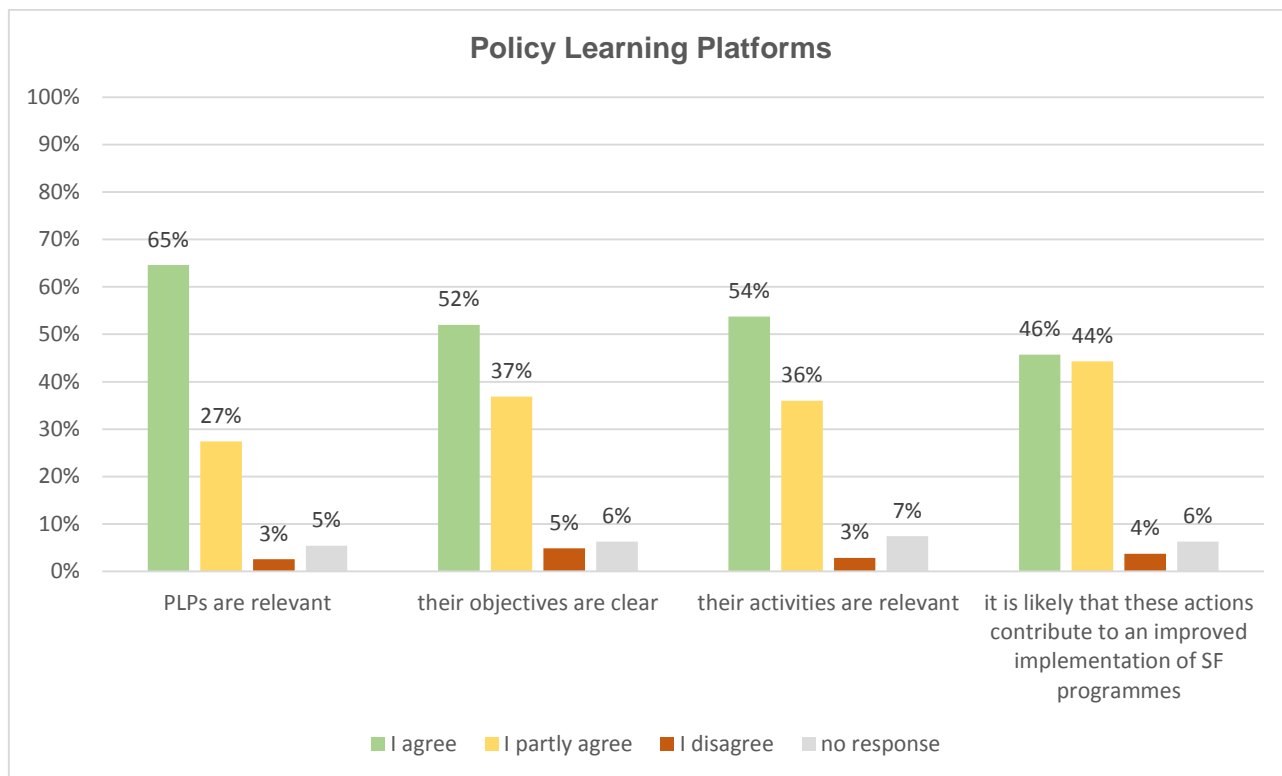
In the comments, the feed-backs on the introduction of phase 2 and the possibility to propose pilot actions are in general positive. But a few respondents express their concern that it might represent additional burden for the projects.





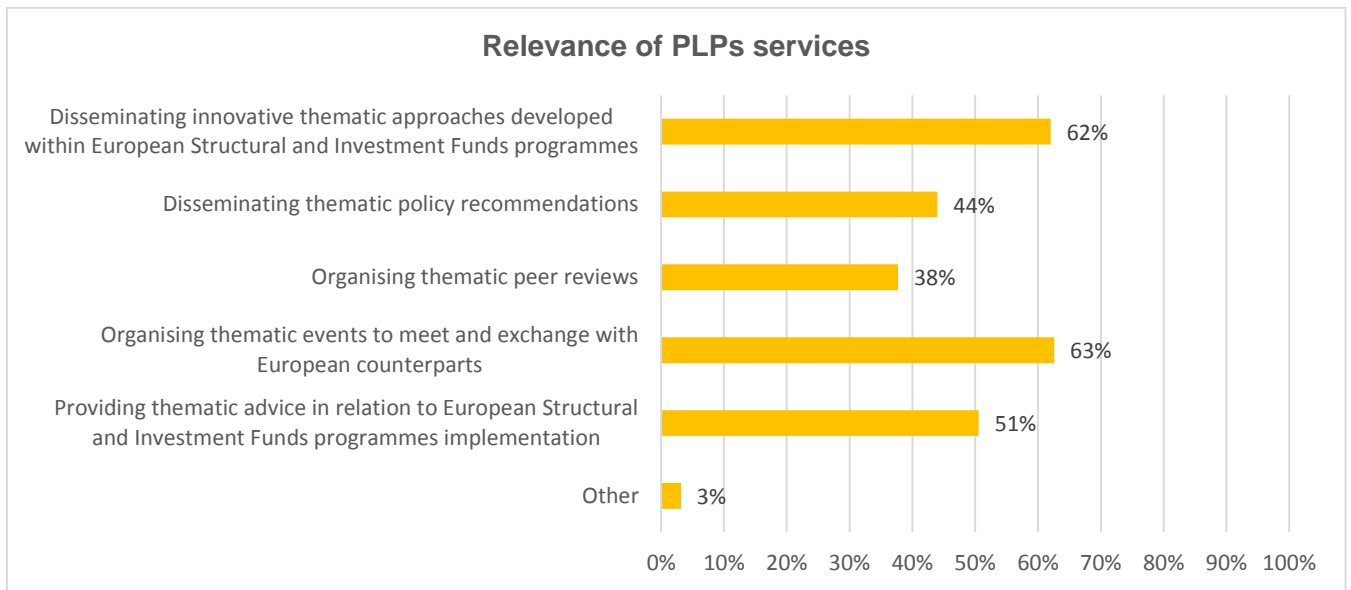
Even if the overall opinion remains largely positive, the percentage of respondents adhering to the Policy Learning Platforms is lower than that for the projects. For instance, on the first question related to the relevance of this action, 65% agrees compared with 82% for the projects. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents disagreeing with the platforms and their features is comparable to that of the projects and is very low (never exceeding 5% of the respondents).

The results obtained reflect the innovative character of the second action. Since it is the first time interregional cooperation envisages to support platforms, the respondents have more questions and often requires further detailed information on this action. This is also reflected in the comments received. Even if some of these comments are very positive (e.g. 'excellent initiative'), several respondents would still like to better understand the activities of the platform and its link to the projects. In particular, only 46% of the respondents fully agree on the capacity of the platform to influence Structural Funds (but another 44% can partly agree with this capacity). Despite these questions, it is remarkable that, for such a new initiative, the overall tendency remains so positive.



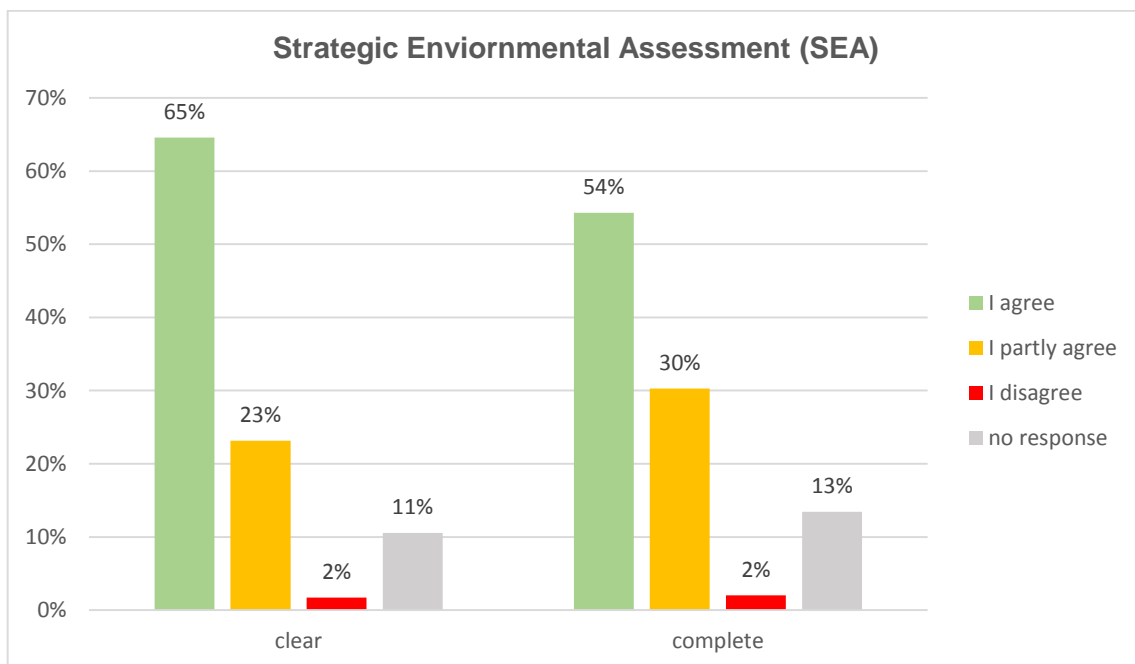
Respondents were asked to select the services of the platforms which they found the most relevant. A majority of the respondents consider the dissemination of innovative thematic approach within Structural Fund programmes and the organisation of thematic events as the most relevant services. Half of them also select the provision of thematic advice in relation to Structural Funds implementation. But the dissemination of policy recommendations (44%) and the organisation of thematic peer reviews (38%) were less successful. The latter is important to note since it refers to the demand oriented approach that the programme would like to develop and the rather low percentage obtained would deserve further investigations.

A few examples of other possible services like the provision of e-learning modules or of policy methodologies were also provided.



### 3.6 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

As reflected in the graph below, a majority of respondents find the SEA clear and complete. Further information on the questionnaire results for the SEA can be found in the expert's contribution in annex 3.

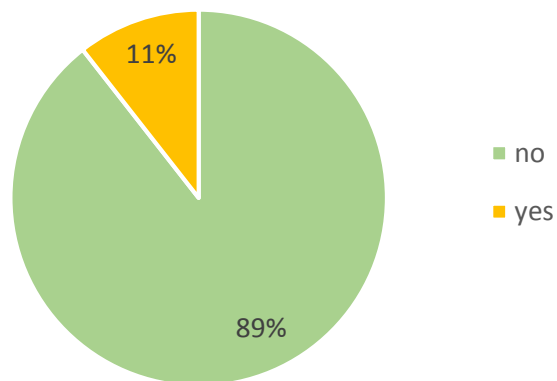


### 3.7 Objections to the programme

Respondents were able to raise any objections to the programme in question 6 of the on-line survey.

Despite the graph below, only 4 real objections were received. These objections were either due to the lack of precise information provided in the programme or to the fact that a specific domain of regional development was not covered in the selected Thematic Objectives. All the other contributions refers to requests for further information. Details can be found in annex 2.

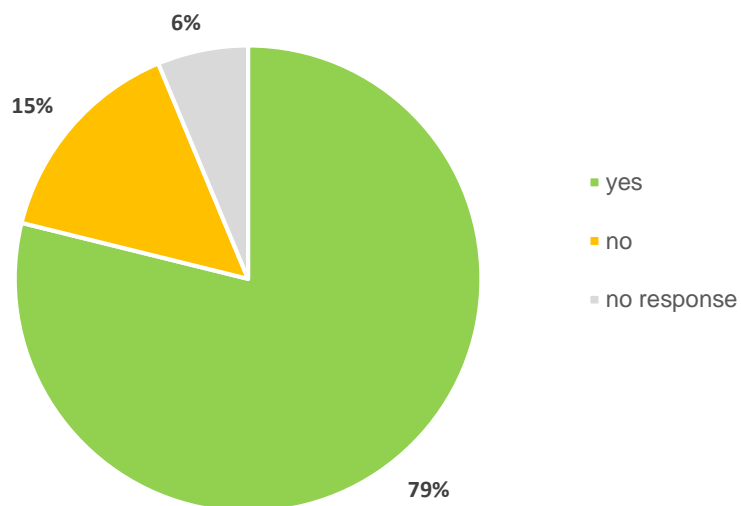
### Do you have any objections to the CP and/or SEA?



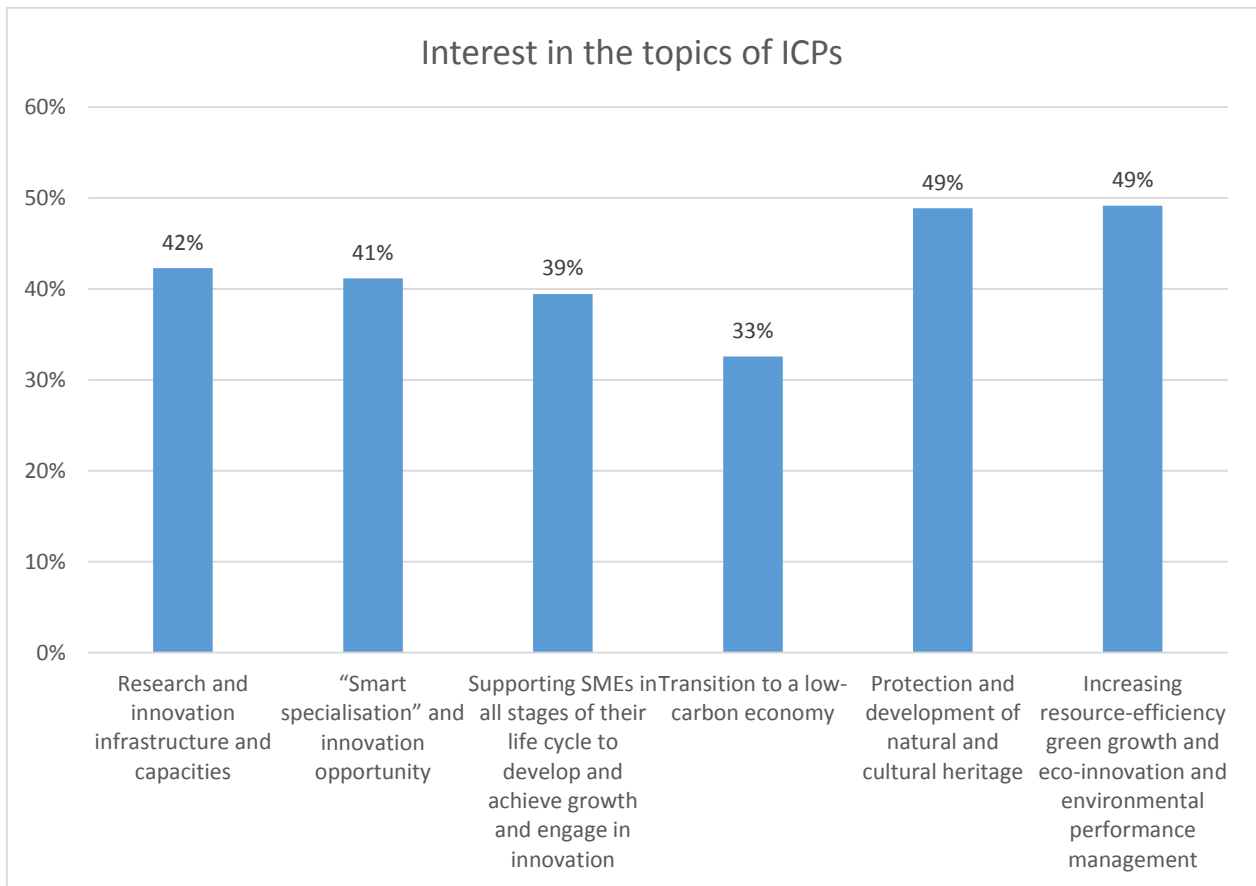
### 3.8 Involvement in future INTERREG EUROPE actions

A high percentage of the respondents (79%) are planning to be involved in an interregional cooperation project. This can explain their motivation to complete the on-line consultation questionnaire.

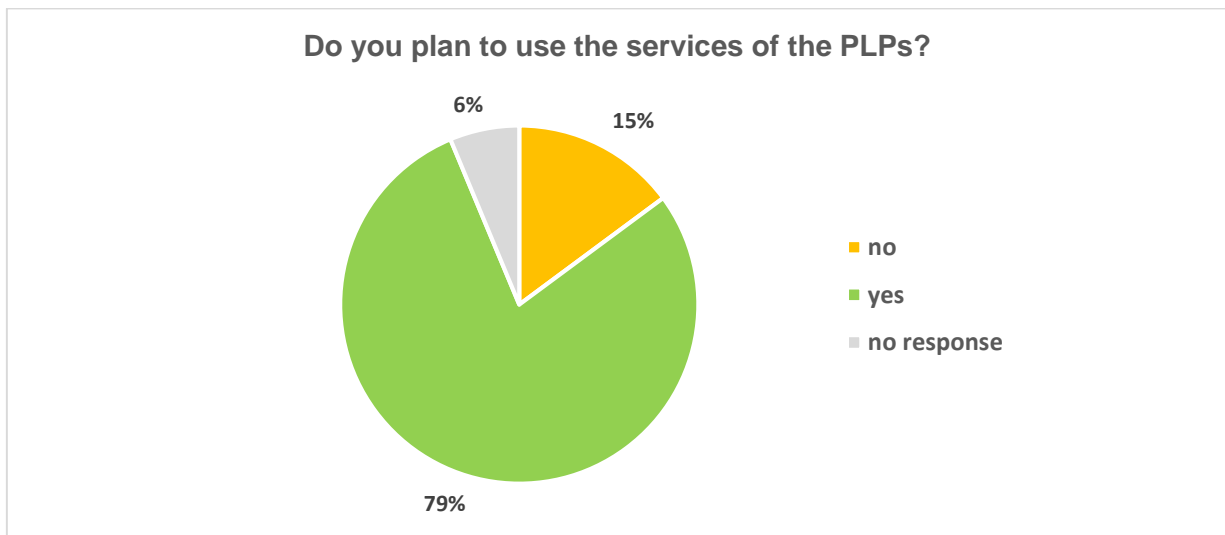
### Do you plan to be involved in an interregional cooperation project?



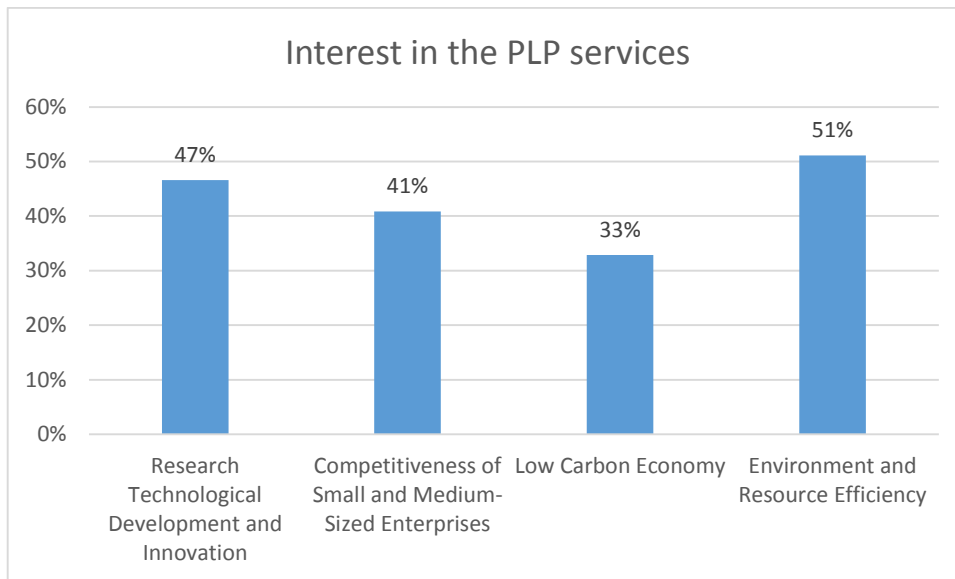
The topics, that respondents would like to address with a project, are illustrated in the graph below. Apart from a relatively smaller interest in low carbon economy, the topics of interest are rather equally shared among the different investment priorities of the programme.



For what concerns the [Policy Learning Platforms](#), nearly 80% of the respondents are interested in using their services in the future. This is very encouraging considering that this action is completely new.



Similarly to the Projects; the respondents also selected the topics of the PLPs they would be most interested in and there is no difference with the interests expressed for the projects.



#### 4. Results of workshop

The detailed report of the consultation workshop organised in Brussels on 6 February 2014 can be found in annex 4.

#### 5. Conclusions

One of the main lessons learnt from the public consultation and in particular from the online questionnaire is the overall positive reaction on the programme's strategy and main features. As reflected in the above graphs, a majority of respondents agree on the different aspects of INTERREG EUROPE. This may be partly explained by the fact that a significant number of respondents were familiar with interregional cooperation and are therefore aware of the benefit it brings. But still, half of the respondents were not involved in any INTERREG IVC projects. It is also worth highlighting that the positive feedback also applies to the most innovative feature of INTERREG EUROPE, namely the introduction of phase 2 for the projects and the development of Policy Learning Platforms.

This point is very encouraging and explains why the public consultation did not lead to any major changes in the proposed strategy. Nevertheless, several contributions led to a direct modification of the Cooperation Programme (completeness or clarification of certain aspects of INTERREG EUROPE). For instance, the importance of the global context and of the international dependencies were reminded in the strategy of the programme. The importance of climate change for all EU territories was clarified. Additional information was included on a few topics like transport in the third priority axis. The role of ICT as a cross-cutting notion of the programme was better highlighted. The possible synergies between INTERREG EUROPE and other EU programme was also further described in section 6.2 of the cooperation programme.

The overall positive feedback should not undermine the challenges INTERREG EUROPE will have to face. In particular, the specific focus on improving Structural Funds was noted by several respondents as interesting but difficult due to several constraints. From that point of view, the public consultation will also contribute to fine-tune the strategy of the future programme and in particular its communication strategy.