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UPDATE OF THE FIRST PROGRAMME EVALUATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4th Deliverable: Executive Summary

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1 EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION

1.1 Financial Effectiveness

1.1.1 Progress of financial implementation of the Cooperation Programme

Both the degree of Programme activation, and the degree of project inclusion are more than satisfactory - especially in view of the new project approvals in 2021. From now on, more emphasis should be given to monitoring of the projects:

- On the one hand, of the newly approved projects which will have a reduced implementation horizon (2-2.5 years at the most), and
- On the other hand, a small number of projects - from the already included ones - that have notable implementation failures. The most precarious of all is the THAL-HOR II project, which requires a new, realistic implementation plan and a detailed and strict implementation schedule.

1.2 Physical Effectiveness

1.2.1 Progress of physical effectiveness of the Cooperation Programme

It is estimated that the already approved projects by 31/12/2020, will cumulatively exceed Programme target values in relation to all output indicators except for the following two and the already approved projects in 2021 will cumulatively exceed Programme target values in relation to all output indicators but one:

- Number of researches, studies, plans and information systems, for the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Plan.

In this occasions, the under-achievement is due to failures during the design phase of the Programme:

- Due to the uncertainty regarding the Marine Spatial Planning process, and

The estimation of the achieved values for Programme result indicators has already shown some serious problems, not so much regarding the attainment of the target values, as regarding their original design:

- The result indicator R0304 "**Improvement of the average annual level of air pollutants in urban areas over 120,000 inhabitants**" requires a recalculation of the baseline value due to inappropriate use of data from outside the only 2 urban areas of the Programme eligible zone with a population of over 120,000 inhabitants (ie outside Nicosia and Heraklion). The new calculation - from which the inappropriate data has been excluded - for the year 2014 brings the **baseline value to 0.532**. Maintaining the Programme strategic goal of reducing indicator values by 20% by 2023, the new indicator **target value is estimated at 0.4256**.
- Regarding result indicator R0305 "**Increase of passenger traffic in ports that benefit from the interventions**" there is a discrepancy between the indicator description and the way baseline and target values are calculated: the description refers only to ports where interventions are made by the Programme, while indicator values refer to all passenger traffic in the cross-border area. The new proposed description is: "**Increase of passenger traffic in the ports of the cross-border area**" (unit of measurement = thousands of people).
- Regarding result indicator R0311 "**Area covered by institutional arrangements or joint action plans for the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Plan**" there is a problem with the baseline value. Project "THAL-HOR I" did not result in any joint action plans for the implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning, nor in institutional arrangements. Therefore, **the baseline value should be set to 0**.
- Regarding result indicator R0309 "**Percentage of urban solid waste diverted from landfilling**" there is a significant problem in the baseline and target values due to the sources of data used (unreliable data sources). It is proposed to recalculate both baseline and target values based on the data from the official Electronic Waste Register of the Greek Environment and Energy Ministry and the CYPSTAT data. The new calculation of the brings **the baseline value to 18%**. Maintaining the Programme strategic goal to increase this percentage by 6 percentage points by 2023, brings **the target value to 24%**.

2 ATTAINMENT ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

It is estimated that the Programme will achieve **all quantitative targets** of its performance framework. Even in the event that any of the financial indicators - currently estimated to be achieved by 86% - eventually falls below the 85% threshold for any reason, it is still estimated that a rate of 75% -85% is easily achievable, which makes it acceptable under the Implementing Regulation.

3 EFFICIENCY EVALUATION

In relation to time efficiency of the implementation processes of the Programme, the durations of the Calls for projects and of the contracting procedures are satisfactory, but the project evaluation/approval times should be reduced.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, the actual unit-cost of the implemented interventions is in most cases lower than the assumed unit-cost that was used during the preparation of the Programme when designing the performance indicator system. This discrepancy, which is most frequently due to a different mix of interventions than the initially assumed mix, artificially increases Programme resource efficiency. The opposite is observed with regards to two indicators:

- “Number of researches, studies, plans and information systems, for the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Plan”. The unit-cost discrepancy is due to the artificially high number of studies (15) assumed to be needed for the completion of the Maritime Spatial Plans of the two countries.
- “Solid Waste: Additional waste recycling capacity”. The difference in unit-cost is due to the fact that the implemented projects focus on the reuse of organic waste, while the unit-cost used when estimating the indicator target value comes from interventions focusing on packaging recycling.

Finally, reduced unit-costs are observed with regards to interventions aiming at increasing tourist visits, but the difference may be due to incorrect estimates/counts of visits by the project beneficiaries. In this case, further investigation is needed in order to ensure tourist visits are counted correctly by the projects. No further action is proposed for the other discrepancies noted previously.

4 EVALUATION OF THE INTERVENTION LOGIC

4.1 Update of Programme Strategy.

4.1.1 Update of the Programme Diagnostic Report

The cross-border area is on the road to recovery from the fiscal crisis, but the macroeconomic environment is not favorable yet. After the recession of 2009, entrepreneurship is showing some signs of recovery, but very "limited" at the moment, with the exception of individual sectors such as communications, business services and tourism. At the same time, investors in Greece continue to appear "hesitant", in contrast to Cyprus where investor confidence seems to have returned. Finally, export activity seems to be going into recession again from 2019 which will probably continue with greater intensity due to the results of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the whole of Europe and the cross-border region even worse than the 2008-2009 financial crisis. The sectors of industry, trade, passenger transport and tourism have been hit particularly hard. The recovery period is expected to be long.

With respect to innovation, Cyprus continues its upward trajectory with small but steady improvements. From the Greek CB Regions, Crete has made forward leaps in the period 2011-2018, improving its position on the European innovation map, but this is not shared by the other two CB Regions, with the South Aegean showing the worst performance.

Blue economy remains an important growth factor for the cross-border region, mainly due to the large share and continuous growth of coastal tourism which in turn supports fisheries and aquaculture. In fact, the prospect of hydrocarbon (oil and natural gas) exploitation in the area has the potential to further increase the share of the blue economy in both employment and gross value added.

In terms of the labour market, there is no homogeneity in the cross-border area. The significant degree of diversification of the Cypriot economy along with the rapid fiscal adjustment and economic recovery managed to keep unemployment rates (total and long-term) at relatively low levels, despite the temporary spikes during 2013-2014. Cyprus seems to have the healthiest labour market in the entire cross-border region. Similarly, the economy of Crete, based on two dynamic sectors (tourism and primary sector), allowed for recovery from the temporary spikes in unemployment during 2013-2015, but with higher final overall unemployment rates and a higher share of long-term unemployment. On the contrary, the strong dependence of South Aegean on tourism on one hand seems to protect it from the rise of long-term unemployment (possibly through flexible forms of employment and temporary employment) but on the other hand maintains a significant degree of volatility in the labour market, which results at high overall unemployment levels. Finally, the sluggishness of the economy in the North Aegean Region (with significant dependence on a non-dynamic primary sector and a timid shift towards tourism) causes both high overall unemployment and a high share of long-term unemployment. It is still unknown whether and to what extent the labour market has been affected by the large number of immigrants / refugees who have entered the Region since 2015.

With respect to the baseline year of the diagnostic report of the Programme (2012) unemployment rates in all CB areas have decreased.

The North Aegean Region continues to be the most vulnerable to negative demographic change among all the areas of the cross-border zone (negative physical growth, aging population and very large refugee / migration flows from 2015 onwards). Cyprus - despite being affected by the economic crisis with an outflow of population during 2011-2014 and by an influx of refugees / migrants from 2015 onwards - exhibits the healthiest population structure. Finally, South Aegean and Crete do not seem to be significantly affected by refugee / migration flows and the declining trends in their population structures are clearly attributable to the increasing incidence of population aging.

In Cyprus, poverty and social exclusion statistics have remained relatively stable and under control during 2008-2019, but in the Greek CB Regions they have deteriorated significantly since 2011 as a result of the economic crisis and the long fiscal adjustment process. Despite the significant improvement of conditions after 2017, they remain higher than those of 2012 (year of comparison with the diagnostic report of the Programme), especially in rural areas. The level of health services continues to be low in the entire cross-border region, and mainly in the North and South Aegean Regions, but without appearing to affect the level of health of the population, as expressed through mortality rates. With respect to educational levels, despite the significant improvements made since 2013 (base year of the diagnostic report of the program), there is a considerable lag of the Greek regions compared to Cyprus. However, the notable reduction in school dropout rates in Regions such as Crete creates favorable conditions for the future.

In Cyprus air transport plays a crucial role for passenger traffic and maritime transport for freight traffic. On the contrary, for Greece - and especially for the Aegean islands - maritime transport is vital for both freight and passenger transport. Reducing the cost of maritime transport is therefore crucial for the Aegean islands.

Despite significant improvements in broadband networks – as compared to 2013 (base year of the diagnostic report of the program) - and a large increase in the use of Internet for personal purposes (calls / video-calls, social network usage, etc.), the use of internet for professional purposes (e-commerce, e-banking) and for transactions with the public sector is still low. The lag is greater in Greece than in Cyprus.

In the field of environment, there has been a significant improvement in wastewater treatment facilities, but the situation is not at all pleasant in terms of the circular economy. In addition to the significant per capita volumes of waste generated, the two countries also perform very poorly in the percentage of waste diverted from landfilling, mainly due to the lack of sustainable ways of managing organic waste. In general, the circularity index of the economy is very low in Greece and Cyprus. At the same time, the cross-border area is significantly affected by climate change, and the effects will continue to worsen in the future in the absence of effective global action to reduce the global economy carbon footprint. The main effects include: increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and water scarcity, decrease of soil moisture and productivity, increase of temperature and heat-waves,

increase of the risk of forest fires. However, civil protection systems in the cross-border area - and especially in Cyprus - show fairly high resilience compared to other European countries.

Although the cross-border area does not make a significant contribution to Europe's carbon footprint, energy production and consumption - as one of the main polluters - remains an important area of environmental policy. Almost half of the energy consumed by households in Cyprus and more than half of the energy consumed by households in Greece goes to cooling and heating of buildings, thereby keeping building energy efficiency at the heart of energy policy. Finally, despite the progress made in both countries in terms of reducing annual emissions of some air pollutants (lead, sulfur oxides, particulate matter), reduction of some pollutants (nitrogen oxides and ammonia) remains a challenge.

4.1.2 On-going relevance of Programme Strategy to the findings of the update.

Overall, Programme Strategy remains relevant, as most objectives¹ (general and specific) continue to address significant challenges of the cross-border area. Minor modification to the focus is required, but it concerns rather the next Programming Period 2021-2027 and not the current Programme, as the mix of interventions of this Programme has already been defined in its entirety by the already approved projects.

S.O. 1.1 Increasing the use of ICT in areas of common interest (in the areas of e-government, e-business, e-culture and tourism): The objective is highly relevant to the findings of the analysis. Digital technologies are proving to be increasingly important not only for the quality of life (part of which is government-to-citizens services) but especially for the economy where the cross-border area is in deficit.

S.O. 1.2 Promotion of SME export-orientation: The objective is highly relevant to the findings of the analysis. Cross-border economies will need a lot of support as a result of the pandemic. The joint development of innovations and technology that will address specific economic challenges in the cross-border area is of great importance. This dimension is missing from this Programme.

S.O. 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency in public buildings: The objective is highly relevant to the findings of the analysis. Energy savings in building should continue, with a greater emphasis on passive systems and bioclimatic applications to reduce air conditioning needs in the summer. It would be good to include not only interventions in the shells of the buildings but also in the surrounding area (e.g. public space).

S.O. 2.2 Reducing the environmental footprint from public transport in urban areas with significant air pollution: The objective is highly relevant to the findings of the analysis. Reducing air pollutants - especially in urban areas - remains a major priority especially in light of the increasing frequency of heat waves and the combined discomfort to residents from the combination of high temperature and pollutants. But the scope of the policy should not be limited to public transport.

S.O. 2.3 Enhancing interoperability and safety in maritime transport: The objective exhibits low relevance to the findings of the analysis and should be abandoned. The lack of transverse maritime travel routes concerns exclusively the maritime transport system in the Aegean Sea, while the high cost of maritime transportation concerns exclusively the Greek CB area.

S.O. 3.1 Improving the joint risk management of natural, technological and humanitarian disasters: The objective is highly relevant to the findings of the analysis. As the impacts from climate change intensify, this policy area is becoming increasingly important. A stronger focus is proposed on dealing with a small number of specific challenges (e.g. dealing with the urban heat island in summertime, dealing with wild fires, dealing with desertification, etc.)

S.O. 3.2 Improving the attractiveness of areas of natural and cultural interest (tourism): The objective is very relevant to the findings of the analysis. The importance of coastal tourism is significant for the economies of the cross-border zone, but the targeting - in terms of the tourism model - must change.

S.O. 3.3 Improving Marine Spatial Planning Systems and Coastal Zone Management: The objective is somewhat relevant to the findings of the analysis, as the blue economy is an important part of local economies. After two

¹ With the exception of maritime spatial planning and the improvement of maritime transport.

programming periods, however, it is clear that maritime spatial planning is a national issue for both countries and not a cross-border one. Of course, individual joint research actions could contribute with tools and systems for decision-making, management and monitoring. Therefore, the focus of the specific objective with respect to "design management and monitoring tools" of maritime spatial planning should be redefined.

S.O. 3.4 Improving the efficiency of use of waste and water resources: The objective is highly relevant to the findings of the analysis. The low performance of the cross-border area in the circular economy necessitates the continuation of initiatives, especially with regards to organic waste. However, climate change and its impact on water resources highlight this as the most important focal area of resource efficiency in the cross-border zone, and should in the future attract more resources and address more areas of application than in the present programme (e.g. agricultural applications, water recycling for domestic or other use, use of treated wastewater, rainwater and harvesting, water storage technologies (e.g. on or underground) in combination with flood catchment areas, etc.)

For the next Programming Period, the following targeting modifications are proposed:

- **Support for entrepreneurship**, especially after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the problem will be largely addressed through national programs, there is a significant scope for the Cooperation Programme in joint development of innovations and technology that will address challenges - of particular importance to the cross-border area - in productive areas, such as e.g. agricultural crops with reduced water requirements.
- **Blue economy:** the next programme should shift focus from the design of a spatial regulatory framework to the promotion of specific actions - in line with the spatial framework - that will provide solutions in specific focal areas of the blue economy. For example, address the large shortages in the supply of fish (both from fisheries and fish farming) which becomes even more critical as coastal tourism develops, land use conflicts (such as between oil/gas exploitation and coastal tourism, or between marine RES and coastal tourism), etc. THAL-HOR II should also provide input into the identification of these focal areas.
- **Tourism:** remains the driving force of the cross-border economy but at the same time increases the vulnerability of the economy to external shocks (the most recent example is the COVID-19 pandemic). In order to increase the resilience of the economic system, the "sun and sea" model, which is based on the exploitation of natural and other resources (i.e. the already existing "tourist destinations") of the region, should be abandoned and the transition to another model should be actively sought where tourist destinations will be shaped through the creation of value-added tourism activities. Therefore, the new Programming period should shift its focus from the plain "protection and promotion of existing resources" to the creation of "tourism added value".
- **The field of maritime transport should be abandoned** as it is of national rather than cross-border character.
- **Digital technologies:** they prove to be increasingly important for the future, and the cross-border area continues to lag behind in both the digital economy and digital governance fields. The current programming period has contributed - to a small extent - to digital governance but not to the digital economy. In addition, the model of creating online databases or interactive information dissemination platforms should be abandoned and the projects of the new period should aim at high value-added digital services, such as smart city applications that provide valuable services to the citizen, smart applications that increase the efficiency of public sector resources, smart applications in sectors of the economy (e.g. precision agriculture), etc.
- **Circular economy:** interventions should continue - perhaps with greater intensity - in both the circular economy (with an emphasis on organic waste management) and the management of water resources (with an extension to more fields beyond water supply systems and an emphasis on technological or other innovations).
- **Air pollution:** interventions in urban settings should be seen in a broader context that takes into account the full effects of combined air pollution and climate change (e.g. increase in temperature and discomfort, decrease in rainfall, etc.) in the urban living conditions (e.g. thermal discomfort, respiratory

and other health problems, adverse effects on greenery maintenance, etc.), and in no case should interventions be limited to the field of public transport.

- **Energy savings:** interventions should focus on innovative applications and pilot projects (e.g. self-sufficient buildings, ways of integrating active and passive systems in historic preservation, energy interventions in archaeological sites, energy autonomy in sensitive facilities such as hospitals, etc..) instead of simple energy upgrade projects. At the same time, more emphasis should be placed on improving the energy performance of buildings during summertime by exploring other solutions as well such as the use of green infrastructure, the use of new (highly reflective) materials, the use of bioclimatic methods, etc.
- **Risk management:** interventions in this area should focus entirely on the effects of climate change and especially on issues related to rising temperatures and the incidence of droughts.

5 PROGRAMME REVISION PROPOSALS

5.1 Proposal to Modify the Specific Objectives of the Programme

Minimal modifications of Programme specific objectives and / or expected results are proposed as follows, in order to better reflect the Intervention Logic of the Programme.

Specific Objective	Modification Proposal	Expected results	Modification Proposal
S.O 1.1 Increase the use of ICT in areas of common interest (in e-government, e-business, e-culture and e-tourism)	S.O 1.1 Increase the use of ICT in areas of common interest (in e-government, e-culture and e-tourism)	Improving access of cross-border residents and visitors to public sector ICT applications that contribute to enhancing competitiveness and cross-border cooperation in selected sectors such as tourism and culture.	Improving access of cross-border residents and visitors to public sector ICT applications
		Increase usage rates of ICT by citizens, businesses and public administration, in order to develop and implement joint extroverted initiatives to strengthen the local economy in selected sectors.	Increase usage rates of ICT by citizens and public administration
		Increasing the share of services and functions offered digitally and displaying resources (natural, cultural, productive-business, etc.) more efficiently in order to support the local productive system	Increasing the share of services and functions offered digitally
		Ensuring the openness and interoperability of applications and their content and accessibility for all, under secure conditions	
		Improving information maturity and usage of existing data in electronic transactions of citizens, businesses, public bodies.	
S.O. 1.2 Promoting extroversion of SMEs		Increase the ability of SMEs to create and exploit business opportunities beyond local markets	
		Increased awareness and participation of SMEs in networking with other companies and organizations for the creation and transfer of know-how	
		Improved access to key markets (especially abroad) and expansion of the customer base of companies through the use of marketing techniques applied jointly, especially in the tourism and agro-food sectors	
		Improved products and services and the organization and operation of SMEs, through the integration of innovations and modern technologies.	

Specific Objective	Modification Proposal	Expected results	Modification Proposal
		Promoting electronic accessibility to SME services and products	
S.O. 2.1 Increase energy savings in public buildings		Increased know-how in energy design issues in buildings	
		Awareness on energy planning issues, energy saving and the use of alternative energy sources in buildings.	
		Energy savings in the public sector.	
S.O. 2.2 Reduction of the environmental footprint from public transport in urban areas with significant air pollution		Reduction of air pollutant levels in urban areas	
		Reduction of air pollutant levels in highly polluted areas (hotspots)	
S.O. 2.3 Enhancing interoperability and safety in maritime transport	S.O. 2.3 Enhancing interoperability in maritime transport	Enhanced accessibility in the cross-border area	
		Improved transport safety	
S.O. 3.1 Improving joint risk management of natural, technological and humanitarian disasters		Enhanced joint management of the region's natural resources, with an emphasis on risk prevention and disaster protection, and in particular from marine pollution and the effects of desertification and soil & coast erosion.	Enhanced joint management of the region's natural resources, with an emphasis on risk prevention and disaster protection
		Increased resilience to natural and technological disasters through the development of relevant strategies and infrastructure/equipment.	Increased resilience to natural and technological disasters
		Improved response time and quality of response to environmental, technological and humanitarian disasters-risks.	
		Improved protection of biodiversity and the ecosystem (marine).	
		Strengthened public services and infrastructure in order to timely anticipate and warn of natural and man-made disasters as well as to limit damages caused by them.	Strengthened forecasting and early warning capacity of natural and man-made disasters
		Improved conditions of protection and service to human resources in case of natural and other hazards.	
S.O. 3.2 Improving the attractiveness of areas of natural and cultural interest (tourism)		Extended tourist season	
		Increased carrying capacity and tourist visits to assisted sites	

Specific Objective	Modification Proposal	Expected results	Modification Proposal
S.O. 3.3 Improving Marine Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management		Increased level of cross-border cooperation in matters of Marine Spatial Planning	
		Increased level of cross-border cooperation in matters of Integrated Coastal Zone Management.	
		Increased area of maritime and coastal zones covered by regulatory provisions.	
S.O. 3.4 Improving the efficiency in the use of urban waste and water resources		Improved efficiency of water resources	
		Promotion of integrated waste management	

5.2 Proposal for the modification of output and result indicators

Based on the evaluation of the Programme monitoring system, no modifications to the output indicators are proposed. The following modifications are suggested for the result indicators.

Specific Objective	Code	Result Indicator		Baseline value Proposed	Target value 2023 Proposed
		Current	Proposed		
SO 2.2	R0304	Improving the average annual level of air pollutants in urban areas with more than 120,000 inhabitants	Same	0,532	0,4256
SO 2.3	R0305	Increasing passenger traffic in ports benefiting from the interventions.	Increasing passenger traffic in ports of the cross-border area (data source: Eurostat & CYSTAT)	10.985 thousands of persons	12.366 thousands of persons
SO 3.2		Change in annual overnight stays in tourist accommodations	Ίδιος (change the data source to Eurostat)	Same	Same
SO 3.3	R0311	Area covered by regulatory provisions or joint action plans for the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning	Same	0²	Same
SO 3.4	R0309	Percentage of urban waste diverted from landfilling	Same (change the data source from Waste Management Bodies / CYSTAT to EWP ³ /CYSTAT)	18%	24% (διατηρείται η αύξηση κατά 6 ποσοστιαίες μονάδες)

5.3 Proposal for the modification of budget

The evaluation proposes the following changes in the budget of the Programme (euros), as well as modifications by Intervention Code.

Priority Axis	Approved budget from last revision (Public Expenditure)	Proposed budget (Public Expenditure)	Changes by Priority Axis (Public Expenditure)
P.A. 1	6.686.435,29	6.282.366,22	-404.069,07
P.A. 2	21.675.550,59	24.433.569,74	2.758.019,15
P.A. 3	32.954.143,53	43.870.892,24	10.916.748,71
Technical Assistance	3.244.354,12	3.244.354,12	0,00
Programme	64.560.483,53	77.831.182,32	13.270.698,79

² There was no common plan or any regulatory provisions during 2007-2013.

³ Electronic Waste Register of the Ministry of Environment and Energy

6 IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMME INTERVENTIONS

Specific Objective 1.1 Increasing the use of ICT in areas of common interest

Based on the characteristics of the ITC applications and the theory of change, the applications developed by the Smart Cities project could reach a usage rate of up to 44% in the general population. The most successful of the three applications seems to be the application of reporting problems to the Municipality by elderly citizens in Chania where it is estimated (based on the initial usage data) that the usage rate will reach 25.6% (in just 6 months of continuous operation), a percentage that is higher by 60% of the average usage rate for this age class.

Specific Objective 1.2 Promotion of SME export-orientation

The interventions implemented by the Programme could lead to a limited increase in the export activity of the agri-food sector (ranging from 3% to 9%). Due to the small share of the sector's exports in total cross-border exports, this would have an even smaller impact on the total value of CB area exports: ranging from 0.6% to 1.8%.

Specific Objective 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency in public buildings

The interventions implemented by the Programme have brought about significant reductions in energy consumption per sq.m. (ranging from 12% to 39%) in the buildings where they were applied within the period 2018-2020. Compared to the general trends in energy consumption in the cross-border area during the same time period, this represents a mean decrease of 12.7% over and above the general trend.

Specific Objective 2.2 Reducing the environmental footprint from public transport in urban areas with significant air pollution

Generalized use in the city of Nicosia of the technology developed by the Step2Smart project could lead to a reduction of air pollutants by at least 7.3% according to the initial calculations and measurements. However, in order to document this beyond doubt, the pilot application (which is to take place shortly) should measure all pollutants recorded by the Nicosia Traffic Station in addition to the CO2 levels.

Specific Objective 3.2 Improving the attractiveness of areas of natural and cultural interest

The interventions implemented by the Programme improved tourist attractiveness of the destinations where they were implemented. Their impact on tourist overnight stays varies both in relation to the type of intervention and in relation to the profile of the tourists for the specific destination, and it is estimated - for the two completed projects - that it can range from 2% to 9%. Generalized and combined implementation of similar interventions in the whole cross-border area could lead to a long-term increase in tourist overnight stays by up to 14%.

Specific Objective 3.4 Improving the efficiency of use of waste and water resources

The interventions implemented by the Programme can reduce the percentage of urban waste landfilled in the localities where they were implemented:

- by 67% to 76% (ACUA project).
- by 9% to 26% (VIOMA project).

Generalized and combined application of the two technologies in the entire cross-border area, could divert from the landfilling up to 51.4% of the produced urban waste.

7 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY EVALUATION

The communication strategy of the Programme is well structured and effective but could become more innovative, especially in terms of how to engage the potential beneficiaries into acting as multipliers of

the communication effort, and in terms of establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the communication effort.

The annual information and publicity plans should become the "roadmap" for the implementation of the communication strategy. In order to effectively fulfill this role, in the future, they need to include more detail and a timeline for all planned communication actions. Communication activities should start earlier in the Programme lifetime (long before the first Calls), and become more inventive using new technologies and taking advantage of marketing principles in order to promote the Programme and its actions. The engagement of PR professionals is recommended for the organization of a wide informational campaign immediately after the first specialization of the actions of the new Programme.

Most projects lack a communication strategy text. Partners with a strong communication culture and sufficient prior experience do not seem to be affected by this shortcoming, but partners who lack either a communication culture or experience fail to fill this gap with very unfavorable outcomes. For this reason, we consider that **the submission of a proper communication strategy should become mandatory** - for all projects approved - either with the submission of the funding application, or before the signing of the project contract. The communication strategy should include at the very minimum:

- the communication "audiences" of the project (i.e. to whom the communication actions will be addressed),
- the communication "objectives" (i.e. what is sought to be achieved through communication actions),
- the communication message (per audience and/or objective), and
- indicative communication tools/means to be used,

and must be approved by the MA/JS before the signing of the project contract. It is also suggested to include a **special paragraph in the annual project progress report** where projects will need to mention the achievements of their communication strategy (in terms of its objectives) and not just the outputs (e.g. so many brochures printed, so many press releases, etc.). Finally, it is suggested that all **good communication practices of projects be published on the Programme website** on an annual basis and that **good practice examples are disseminated effectively to all project communication managers**. The above proposed improvements could turn communication strategy into the Programme's absolute strong point.