

Harmonized approach to capture & highlight the added value of Interreg

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Interact



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Interreg

Agenda/ day one

01

**Welcome and
introduction**

02

**Agree on the
definition for
key element:
identity**

03

**Setting the
scene:
reflection on
impact
pathway**

04

**Development
of impact
pathways**

05

**Wrap up
and closure
of day 1**

Objectives

- Develop a **structured approach** for designing and integrating impact pathways into programme evaluations.
- Draft **impact pathways** for evaluating the added value of Interreg
- Reflect on and refine **evaluation questions** to better capture the added value of cooperation.



Status quo

Enhance the shared understanding of Interreg's added value by developing a robust methodology to effectively demonstrate its impact.

Analysis

Review the 2014-2020 impact evaluations of Interreg programmes to analyse how added value was defined.

Common definition

Started to build a common framework by developing a common definition of added value in Interreg

Key elements

Identified key elements contributing to Interreg's added value.

Tentative approach

Develop together possible impact pathways

Tentative approach

Define evaluation questions

Tentative approach

Come up with common messages

Common working definition of added value

Added value refers to the unique benefits and impact that cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation brings, which could not be achieved without the Interreg programme's support.

This added value is characterized by for example the formation and strengthening of sustainable cross-border/transnational/interregional partnerships, the testing, developing and/or rolling out of shared solutions to common challenges, and the promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation across borders, building capacity for sustainable development, addressing shared challenges jointly, and generating long-lasting socio-economic and environmental impacts.

Interreg programmes go beyond the scope of individual, local, regional, national or interregional actions and create synergies that generate lasting socio-economic and environmental impacts.

By enabling people and professionals to collaborate across borders, Interreg programmes reduce barriers and disparities, broaden perspectives, and strengthen regional cohesion, ultimately benefiting communities.

Key elements of the added value of Interreg programmes 1/3

Uniqueness and additional benefit of the programme

- **Unique achievements and outcomes:** The only way how Interreg projects, outputs, and accomplishments are possible is jointly through cooperation and collaboration. Interreg delivers unique results by enabling cross-border cooperation to deliver results that cannot be achieved through other mechanisms.
- **Lowering mental barriers:** Interreg reduces the negative impact of borders in terms of the spread of ideas and the use of services. It broadens the mental scope of people involved in the implementation of the projects and their target groups. In border areas this results in people having more actual possibilities (as consumer, job-seeker etc.)
- **Identity:** **!(Please note:** This will be discussed and decided upon during today's meeting.)

Key elements: Identity

Variant A

Interreg contributes significantly to the development of regional identities by promoting cross-border cooperation and facilitating the exchange of cultures, ideas and values. By supporting joint projects, Interreg strengthens the awareness of regional commonalities, creating a stronger sense of belonging.

Variant B

Interreg contributes significantly to the development of regional identities by promoting cross-border cooperation and supporting joint projects that strengthen regional characteristics and commonalities. In doing so, it anchors the European idea by raising awareness of Europe's cultural diversity and promoting cohesion between the regions as part of a common European future.

Key elements of the added value of Interreg programmes 2/3

2. Strengthening partnerships

- **Enhancing partnership maturity:** Interreg fosters the development of long-term, cross-border/transnational/interregional partnerships that go beyond individual projects, creating lasting collaborations that would not have formed without Interreg support.
- **Improving cooperation quality:** Interreg programmes raise the quality and effectiveness of cross-border/transnational/interregional cooperation by establishing structures and practices for productive partnerships.
- **Strengthening long-term cooperation and governance:** By building institutional and governance capacities, Interreg programmes create a sustainable foundation for ongoing collaboration between regions, promoting forward-looking cross-border governance and strengthening cohesion across Europe.

Key elements of the added value of Interreg programmes 3/3

3. Tangible impacts of cooperation

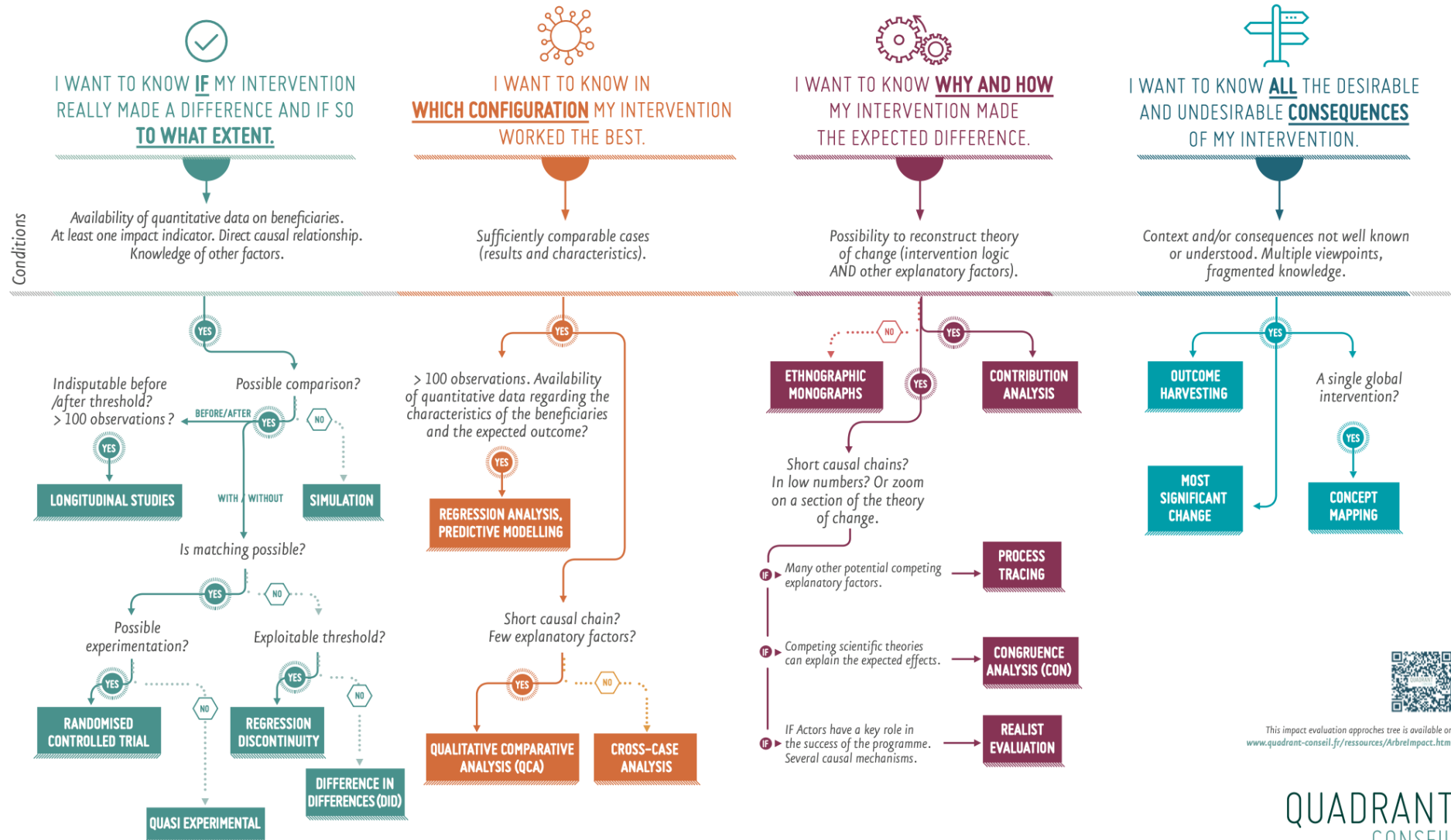
- **Direct benefits for citizens/institutions:** Interreg brings concrete benefits to citizens and institutions on both sides of borders, from building mutual trust to improving the quality of life across borders.
- **Addressing crossborder/transnational/interregional challenges:** It enables solutions to common cross-border and transnational (CBC/TN) challenges that can be effectively tackled only in cooperation between countries facilitating collective approaches to shared issues.
- **Building capacity and innovation:** Interreg strengthens local and regional capacity by providing access to new skills, knowledge, and tools, while fostering innovation and knowledge exchange across borders.
- **Economic and regional synergies:** Interreg programmes drive economic growth, regional synergies, and sustainable development through joint efforts, resulting in broader regional benefits and enhanced competitiveness

A tentative approach: Developing an impact pathway model



HOW CAN IMPACT BE EVALUATED?

WHICH APPROACHES CAN YOU USE DEPENDING ON THE INTERVENTION'S CHARACTERISTICS AND THE AVAILABLE DATA? IN RESPONSE TO WHICH EXPECTATIONS?



This impact evaluation approaches tree is available on www.quadrant-conseil.fr/ressources/ArbreImpact.html

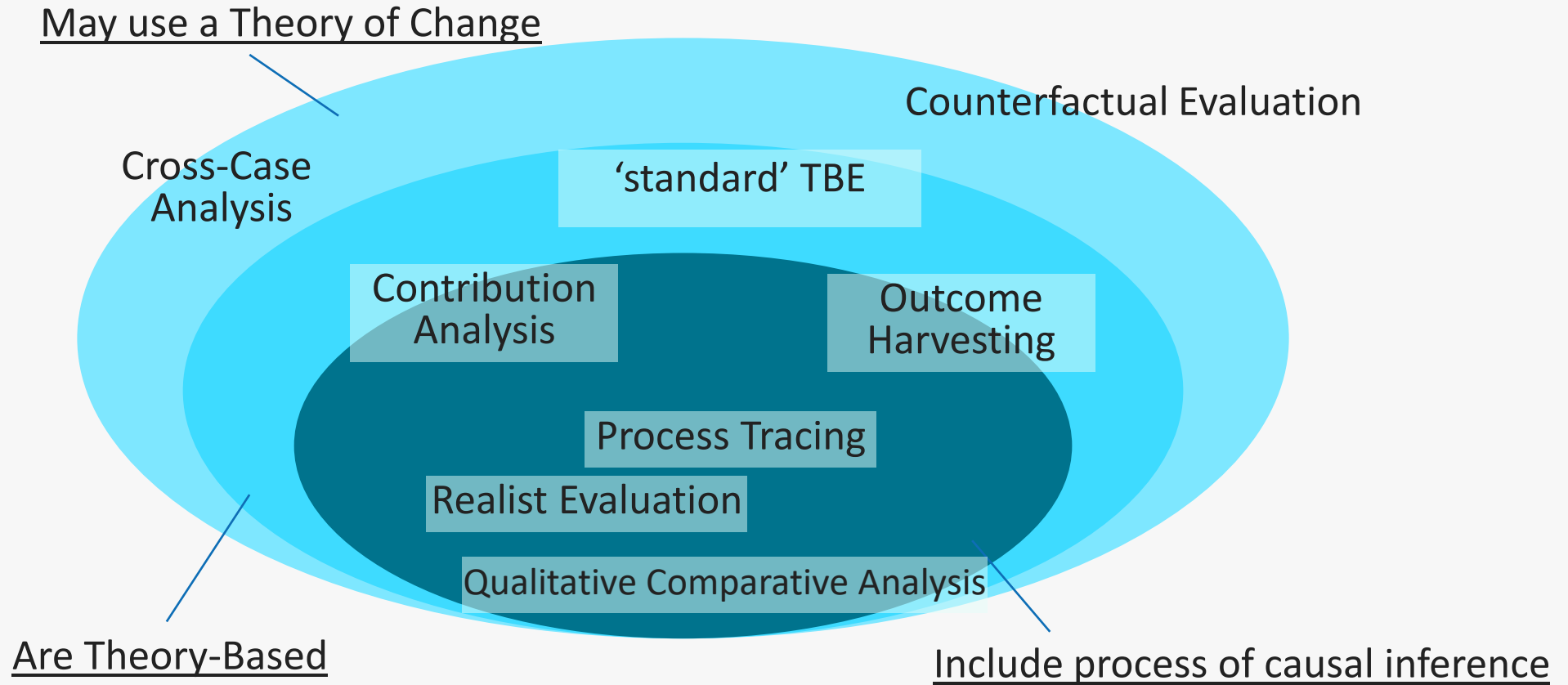
**QUADRANT
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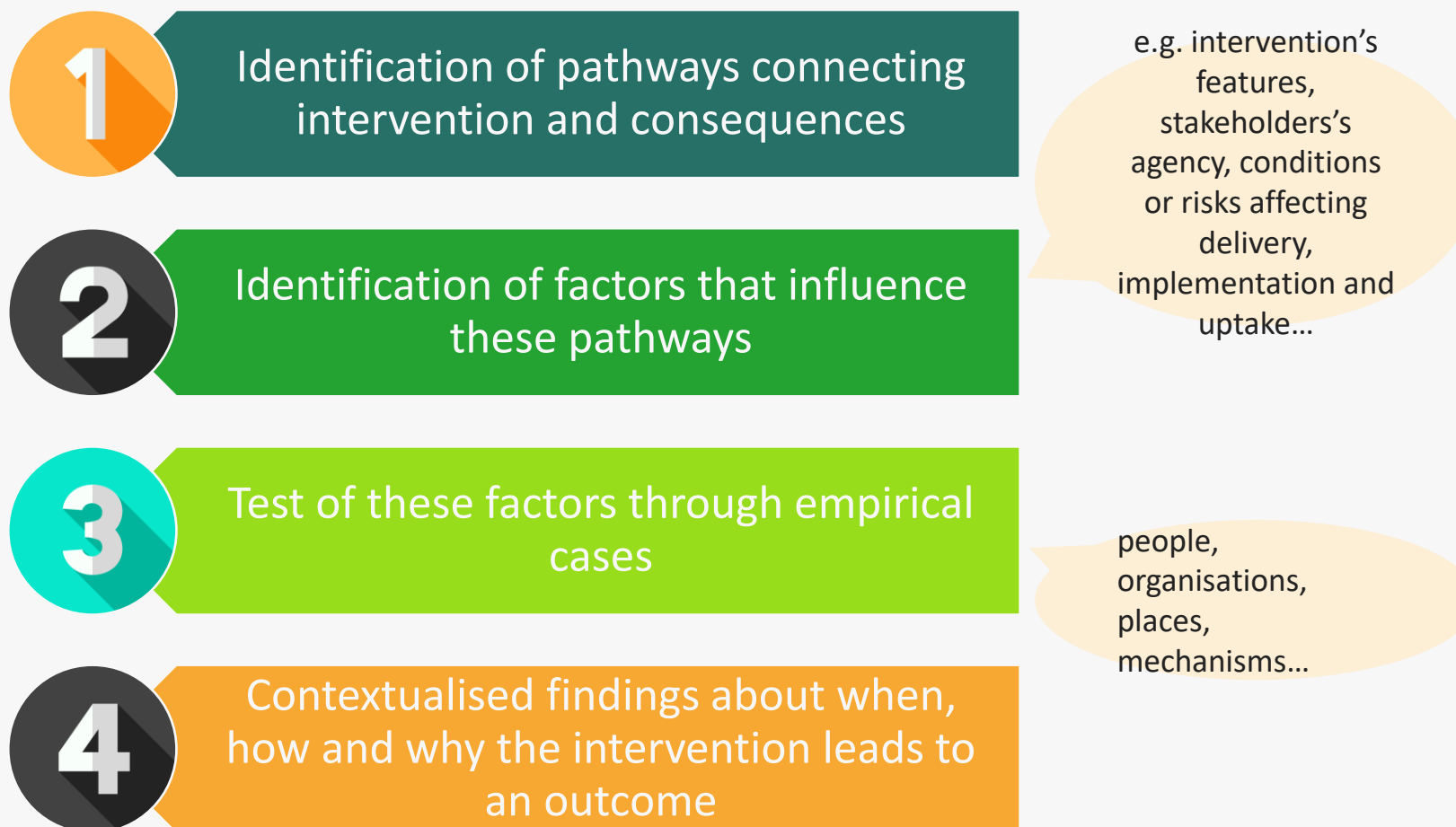
THEORY-BASED ‘IMPACT’ EVALUATION?

- ... means that the approach includes specific processes aimed at inferring causality
- Theory is used as a way to frame inferential processes and ensure validity
- Various ways of going about causal inference, such as finding configurations of factors that explain change, or identifying change mechanisms...

ONE BIG FAMILY...



STANDARD PROCESS OF THEORY-BASED APPROACHES



What are **impact pathways**?

A visual and analytical tool

Impact pathways visualize and explain the sequence of changes expected from an intervention (from inputs → activities → outputs → outcomes → impacts)

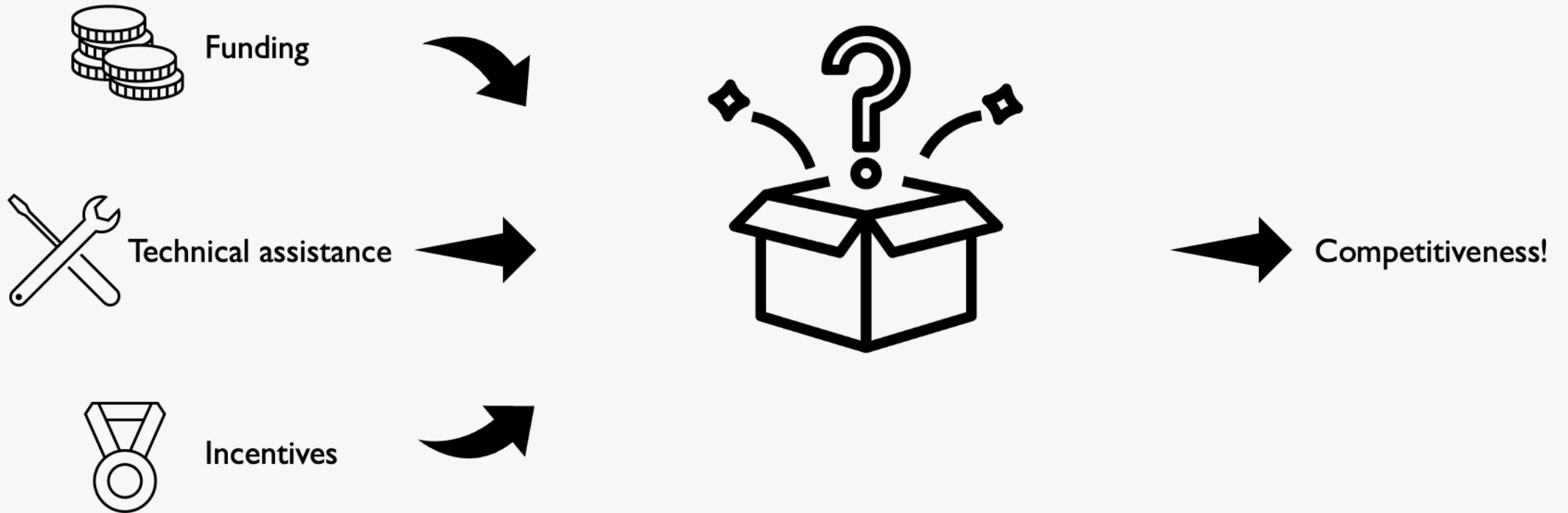
Map the change

Help to map how an intervention is expected to lead to change: capture causal links and external factors

Embedded within a ToC

Impact pathways can be embedded within a Theory of Change (ToC)

The problem of the mystery box



What's inside the box?

Intervention stakeholders: their priorities and actions will affect both progress towards and the results of an intervention

Events: these are sequences of actions and effects leading from the intervention to its (expected) outcomes

Proximate 'conditions' such as institutional capacities, stakeholder priorities and beneficiary responses - that shape composition of causal pathways and likely progress

Broader contextual factors – the more distant and difficult to influence factors such as geography, socio-economic characteristics, culture, etc.

How impact pathways support evaluation?



Clarify objectives and expected change processes



Trace causal links between actions and observed outcomes



Focus data collection on key stages in the impact pathway



Engage stakeholders in co-developing and validating assumption

From Theory of Change to impact pathways

- Theory of Change (ToC): Big-picture view of how change is expected to happen
- Impact pathway: A detailed segment of the ToC, focusing on specific causal chains
- Impact pathways zoom in on one outcome chain
- They allow for in-depth analysis of particular results



Visual logic of a ToC

A pathway of change that shows the connections between long term, intermediate and early outcomes

Level 4
Territorial impact

Goal 1



External factors
for territorial
impact

Level 3
goals: Interreg
programme
level

Added value goal 1

Accountability ceiling

Level 2
Pathways



External
conditions for
successful
implementation

Topic/key element

Level 1
Precondition

Preconditions 1, 2, 3, 4,

Key components of a ToC

- **Outcomes/preconditions** are the main building blocks of a ToC and are structured as a chain of preconditions, i.e. one outcome is the precondition for the next outcome. The chain of outcomes represents a time-line (from short term to longer term)
- The **accountability ceiling** delimits the sphere of influence of an intervention or programme
- **External assumptions**, are outside the accountability domain of the ToC and represent the assumed external conditions for the functioning of the ToC. If these preconditions are not given from the outset or appear to be very problematic, they should be integrated into the ToC itself as preconditions.

Visual logic of ToC: added value

Added value

Level 4
Territorial impact

Goal 1

Goal 2

Contribution

Accountability ceiling



External factors
for territorial
impact

Level 3
goals: Interreg
programme
level

Added value goal 1

Added value goal 2

Level 2
Pathways

Topic/key element

Topic/key element



External
conditions for
successful
implementation

Level 1
Precondition

Preconditions 1, 2, 3, 4,

Group work: building impact pathways

Set of cards:

- **‘Outcome cards’**: are the building blocks that can be either impacts or intermediate outcomes, or enabling conditions (depending on the case)
- **Blank cards** that can be used to describe **impacts, or intermediate outcomes**, or enabling conditions, or obstacles affecting impact
- **Blank cards** which can be used to describe **‘activities’** used by INTERREG programmes

Group work: building impact pathways

A basic tenet of complex interventions:

- We can identify ingredients, but there are no recipes
- Ingredients can be outcomes, they can be activities, or conditions, or context (e.g. 'cooperation')
- Some ingredients are relevant to you, some are not: it depends on your strategy, context, etc.
- Learning and reflecting on how these ingredients are mixed is key to strategic thinking

In this exercise, you:

- Read the cards
- Choose one card which that you believe is a valuable outcome of INTERREG programmes
- Move upstream to identify the activities and intermediary results that are needed to get to this outcome. There can be one or several chains leading to this outcome
- Move downstream if you think there are additional outcomes that are connected to your starting point
- Rewrite, rephrase, add new cards...
- Use micro-stories for inspiration!
- When you're done, take another outcome and start again

Take a look at your micro stories for inspiration....

- Based on your knowledge and experience of previous INTERREG programmes, can you tell us about an important change that your programme made or was expected to make?
- Why was this change important? And for whom?
- What were the main barriers or obstacles to achieving this change?
- What was the outcome? Was the change achieved? And what were the conditions that influenced the outcome?

Removing legal and administrative mismatches

In our programme, we aimed to foster cross-border healthcare access between rural areas in Country A and Country B. One significant outcome was the creation of a shared emergency response protocol, which reduced response times by 30%. This change was especially important for elderly residents living near the border. However, legal and administrative mismatches between the two countries initially delayed implementation. Success became possible thanks to sustained political support and the creation of a cross-border coordination task force.

Micro-story: EE-LV programme

One of the aims of Estonia-Latvia programme was to improve the network of small harbours along the East Baltic coast. Seven harbours were modernised, and a joint information system and promotional tools were developed to position Estonia and Latvia as shared sailing destinations. This created new opportunities for local businesses. Challenges included differing ownership of the harbours, inconsistent infrastructure, and limited funding per site. The impact of the 2020 travel restrictions caused by the pandemic also reduced the testing of new services. Nevertheless, the project established strong foundations for future growth and contributed to EU cohesion goals by supporting smart, green and inclusive regional development.

Micro-story: Interreg BSR

In our programme, we aimed to foster social innovation by empowering vulnerable groups to shape the services they need. Through the SEMPRES project, implemented in rural areas across Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and Finland, one key change was enabling people with experience of exclusion—such as single parents, long-term unemployed, and migrants—to co-create support initiatives. Examples include mobile youth counselling in Vidzeme (Latvia), intercultural women's cafés in Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), and peer support groups in Klaipėda (Lithuania). This shift helped tailor services to real needs in remote communities, where traditional welfare often fails to reach. Transnational cooperation enabled regions to learn from one another, adapt tested approaches, and jointly develop participatory tools. Barriers included top-down service cultures and limited participatory know-how. Change was achieved through empowerment circles, over 90 micro-projects, and service provider training. Several pilots continued beyond the project, and participatory methods were institutionalised in some regions, proving the power of user-driven innovation.

Micro-story: Central Baltic programme helps small and medium enterprises enter new markets

SMEs are at the core of economic development in Central Baltic region making up to 95% of all economic activity. However, the export knowledge and capacity are lacking for many of these companies limiting their growth. To help small and medium companies grow and expand into new markets, with the funding of Central Baltic programme new cross-border launchpads run by local business development organisations supported SMEs provided mentoring, training, development workshops. SMEs were invited to take part in business missions to facilitate soft landing in their target markets.

For the launchpads to be successful one of the obstacles to overcome was the need to shift the paradigm by understanding the way the market operates in their chosen target market and what are the customers preferences.

For the business development organisations, it meant that the right mentors with the matching knowledge should be invited, clear and focused aims for each participating company should be established and a road map agreed and followed, reviewing when relevant.

Micro-story: Interreg AT- CZ

In our programme, we aimed for health projects with tangible outcomes on the ground. By the support of Interreg AT-CZ, it was possible to give birth to the Healthacross initiative and to a series of projects dedicated to jointly tackling health issues. Based on an evidence-based approach, the Healthacross initiative has achieved various positive outcomes, including the planning of the 1st European cross-border health centre (the building itself was funded via EAFRD). Another important outcome was a web-application to link the emergency-control centres across the border. One main constraint was finding an appropriate solution for the end-user in financing – the CZ social security law will be changed soon to simplify the reimbursement for medical treatments across borders – but not by means of Interreg. Our main lessons learnt: Interreg can provide impetus for tackling problems that go beyond the scope of actual responsibilities, but not everything can be realized by means of Interreg. A longer time perspective and committed actors are needed to take up challenges step-by-step. The project bundle shows a good example on how different instruments (Interreg, EAFRD, B-Solutions) can be used in a complementary manner.

Micro-story: Interreg Alpine Space

In the 2014-2020 period, the AS programme encouraged potential beneficiaries to develop new tools and methods in response to the need to improve multilevel and transnational governance. The involvement of young people in participatory processes was a significant achievement to improve decision-making about future policy. This eventually led to the creation of the EUSALP Youth Council whose purpose is to provide a platform for institutional involvement of young people in all EUSALP bodies. Well-established initiatives to promote youth-related activities include project ideas competitions and summer camps. EUSALP was the first EU macro-regional strategy to establish a Youth Council.

Micro-story: Interreg Central Europe eCentral: Unlocking Energy Efficiency for Small Municipalities

Through the INTERREG eCentral project, we tackled a key challenge: enabling small municipalities to renovate public buildings despite limited budgets. This change was vital for communities relying on outdated schools, cultural centres, and sports facilities—often burdened by high energy costs. The main barrier? Lack of access to financing models suited to smaller-scale projects.

eCentral tested innovative solutions like Energy Performance Contracting and crowdfunding in Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia. In Croatia, for example, an investment plan for two primary schools identified up to €7 million in potential funding. These pilots proved that even small towns can attract investment for nearly Zero Energy Building (nZEB) renovations.

The project's key outcome was a practical tool that helps municipalities identify cost-optimal renovation strategies—empowering them to act sustainably and independently.

Micro-story: Interreg LAT-LIT

The aim of our programme was to improve living and working conditions in its area. Our road project, which aimed to reconstruct 3 road sections crossing the border, can be mentioned as a notable success story. Initially, it was legally challenging to organize a joint procurement for the reconstruction works due to different legislation in both countries. However, both partners agreed to maintain informal communication and reached a mutual understanding on the sequence in which the works would be carried out in each country. In the result all road sections were reconstructed as planned, the number of people crossing the border increased - not only for work-related purposes, but also for attending various events and visiting tourist attractions in the neighbouring country.

Agenda/ day two

01

Recap

02

Continuation:
Development
of impact
pathways

03

Formulation
of evaluation
questions

04

Evaluation
framework

05

Wrap up,
closure of the
workshop and
outlook

Steps for working on impact pathways (1/2)

1. Map the landscape

Identify and map the various potential impact pathways relevant to your thematic area or programme goals.

2. Zoom in

Select key impact pathways and align specific projects or interventions along them for focused analysis.

3. Define key questions

Develop evaluation and learning questions tailored to each pathway—taking into account the availability and quality of your data.

Steps for working on impact pathways (2/2)

4. Refine the pathways

Review and adjust the pathways based on stakeholder feedback, data insights, and evolving understanding of change mechanisms.

5. Test the logic

Apply the pathways in real-world contexts or simulations to check their plausibility and practical usefulness.

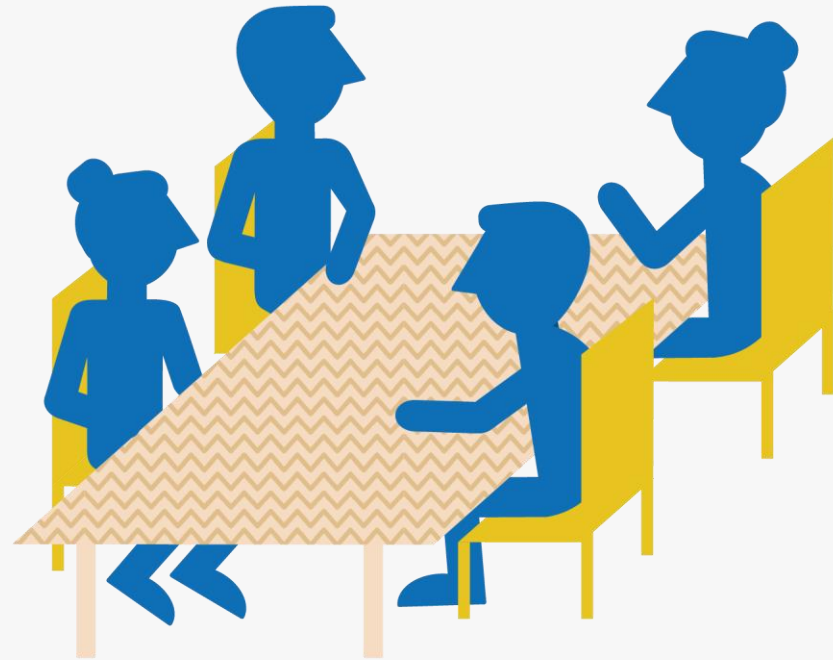
6. Make evaluative judgements

Use the pathways as a framework to assess the contribution of interventions to intended outcomes and impacts.

Group work: Mapping impact pathways across stages of cooperation

Each group: **presents** their pathway(s) – short and focused.

No criticism yet! But others can suggest practical changes.



Turning impact pathways into smart evaluation questions

Once we've mapped how change is expected to happen,
→ We ask: What do we need to learn or test?

Evaluation questions help:

- Focus the analysis
- Guide data collection
- Assess the role and value of cooperation
- Good questions are linked to key steps or assumptions in the impact pathway

Where to place evaluation questions?

Key points to target with questions:

- Points of change: Where outcomes shift significantly
- Points of assumption: Where we expect something to happen without direct control
- Points of risk or uncertainty
- Steps that are essential for success (tipping points)

Look for:

- Gaps in logic
- External conditions that matter

How to formulate strong evaluation questions

- Use clear, focused wording
- Link to a **specific part** of the pathway
- Match the **intended use** of the evaluation (learning, accountability, improvement)

Use guiding words:

- To what extent...
- How did...
- What contributed to...
- Why did... / Why didn't...
- What were the effects of...

Example:

"To what extent did Interreg-funded cooperation influence local policy planning in cross-border regions?"

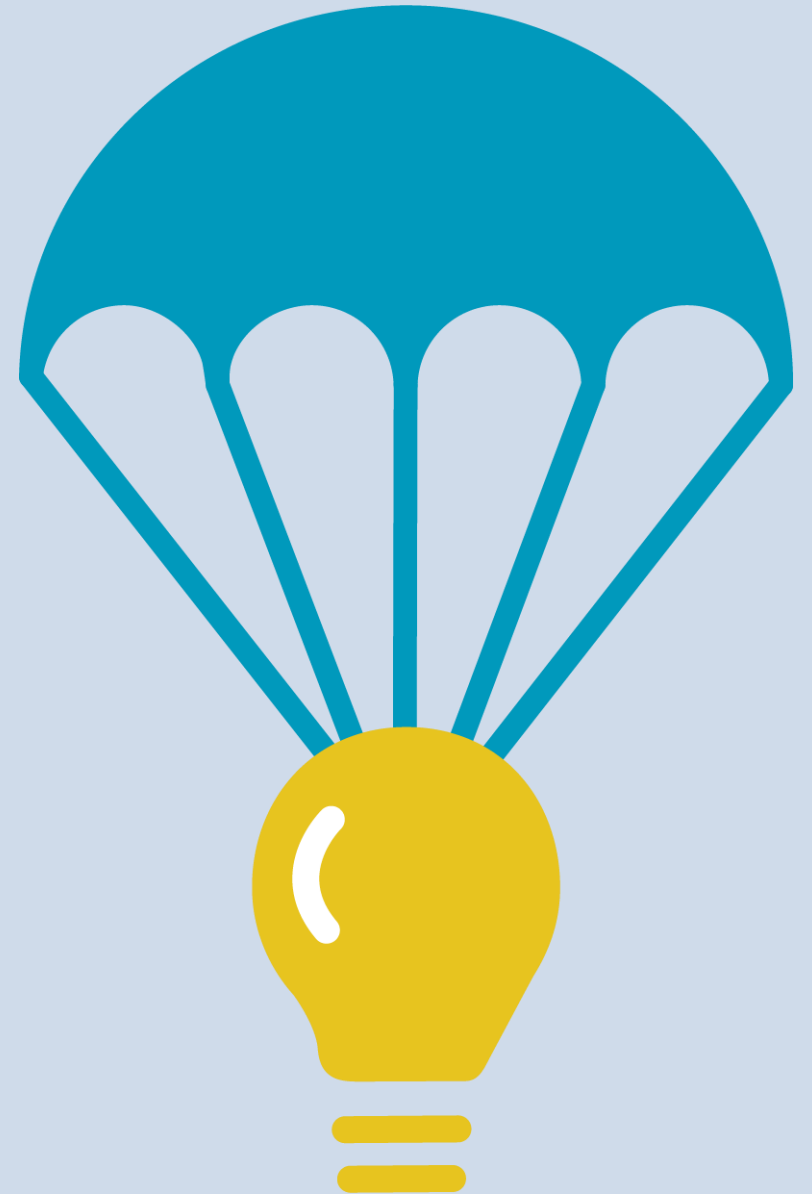
Key considerations when formulating questions

- **Purpose:** Why do we need this question? Who will use the answer?
- **Relevance:** Is it aligned with the programme's goals and impact pathway?
- **Feasibility:** Can we collect the data needed to answer it?
- **Scope:** Is it focused, not too general or abstract?
- **Stakeholder interest:** Does the question matter to programme actors?

Start with **many questions**, then **prioritise** based on usefulness and feasibility.

Group work: Formulating questions

Review the impact pathways we developed and generate meaningful questions based on them.



Forthcoming events

- How to develop a theory of change and impact pathways? November, online
- Certified Training: Evaluation Foundation. November, online
- Interreg Knowledge Fair, 4-5 November

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

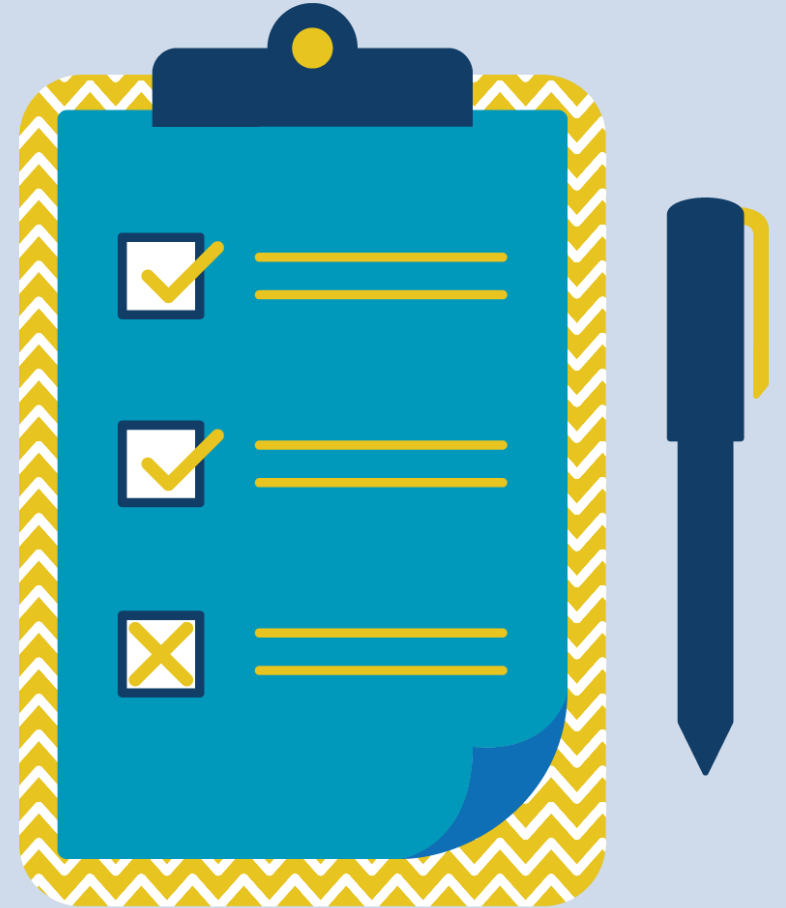
November

December

Thank you for being here!

Your opinion matters to us.

Please take a few minutes to provide us with feedback to help us improve our services.



Cooperation works

All materials will be available on:

Interact connections / Interact library / Harmonized approach to capture & highlight the added value of Interreg