Setting the Compass – New Waters Ahead: Strengthening Synergies and Capitalisation

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | November 2025

Overview and Methodology

The session examined how Interreg can strengthen its future impact by making synergies and capitalisation core components of programme logic in the next programming period. Building on the Harvesting conclusions and the emerging legal framework participants agreed that these dimensions are now essential for demonstrating effectiveness, coherence and value for money.

Using a simplified World Café format, participants discussed three interconnected themes: who should lead and sustain synergies and capitalisation; what incentives could motivate programmes to invest in them; and what aspects of the 2021–2027 period could have been planned differently to embed these processes more effectively from the start. This collective reflection helped clarify the strategic, operational and governance conditions needed to anchor synergies and capitalisation firmly within the next generation of Interreg programmes.

Conceptual Anchors

The discussion was framed by two core ideas: **synergies,** understood as the principle that "working together makes things better" by aligning actions across EU instruments and avoiding overlaps, and **capitalisation**, seen as "learning from success" through identifying what works and embedding it into future interventions. DG REGIO reinforced that both dimensions will be essential after 2027, noting that "synergies and capitalisation are *de facto* compulsory under the proposed legal framework" - particularly Article 7(5) of the Fund Regulation and Article 8.3(h) of the ERDF Regulation. Together, these provisions confirm that both concepts will form part of the core DNA of the next generation of Interreg programmes.

Group Key discussion messages

1) SYNERGIES

A. Strategic Incentives for Stronger Synergies

Participants agreed that synergies must be proactively planned rather than emerging spontaneously during implementation. The experience of 2021–2027 demonstrated that synergies appearing too late in the cycle limited meaningful cooperation. For the next period, programmes should embed synergies at the strategy level, ensuring alignment of priorities, call calendars and thematic scopes. Aligning timing, objectives and geographic focus creates the structural conditions for cooperation, enabling programmes to act together in a coherent, mutually reinforcing way. Programmes highlighted that working jointly from the outset helps avoid thematic fragmentation and allows Interreg to articulate its contribution more clearly within wider EU policy pipelines, especially when aligned with ERDF, ESF+, Horizon and other mainstream instruments.

B. Governance and Responsibilities

Strengthening synergies requires strong governance, with Monitoring Committees and National Authorities playing a decisive role. Their endorsement ensures that synergies are recognised as strategic priorities, linked to national and regional policies, and embedded in programme logic. Programmes themselves must lead the operationalisation of synergies by defining cooperation frameworks, proposing formats for joint action and ensuring continuity across implementation phases. Institutionalising regular cooperation—through formal meetings, thematic alignments or consistent contact between neighbouring or thematically linked programmes—provides a stable environment for joint action. Monitoring Committees, in particular, act as the bridge between programme-level decisions and wider political structures, ensuring the coherence, visibility and uptake of results.

C. Operational Models and Tools

The discussion underscored that synergies benefit from structured, repeatable mechanisms rather than isolated pilots. Co-designed calls, clustering approaches, joint thematic events and shared expert pools were identified as highly effective in turning ad-hoc interactions into sustained collaboration. Digital ecosystems such as KEEP, INDEX and Jems act as essential enablers, helping identify thematic overlaps, complementarities and potential joint interventions. When used systematically, these tools create a more evidence-based and coordinated approach to cooperation. Programmes also emphasised the need for structured matchmaking through thematic roundtables, policy labs and peer-learning processes that allow project communities to connect naturally and efficiently with each other.

D. Culture and Capacity

A recurring theme was the importance of cultivating a “synergy mindset” within MA/JS/MC teams. Synergies require time, staff capacity, and a willingness to act proactively, including taking the initiative in approaching mainstream or centrally managed funds. Programmes stressed that cooperation should be seen not as an administrative burden but as an impact multiplier that strengthens Interreg’s visibility and policy relevance. Investing in staff training, operational guidance and dedicated time within workplans is essential to ensure that synergies are pursued consistently and systematically.

2) CAPITALISATION

A. Strategic Incentives for Capitalisation

Capitalisation was discussed as a structured, programme-led process designed to ensure that valuable project results are analysed, transferred and reused across territories and policy frameworks. Participants agreed that capitalisation must be embedded ex-ante in programme strategies, call planning, guidance and assessment criteria. When capitalisation is planned only at the end of the project cycle, opportunities for transfer are more limited and less organic. ISO1 emerged as a particularly promising instrument for financing transfer pathways, especially because it links investment to measurable and verifiable outcomes. Programmes highlighted the need for technical incentives - such as templates, simplified processes or assessment bonuses - that make capitalisation feasible, meaningful and attractive for beneficiaries.

B. Governance and Responsibilities

As with synergies, capitalisation requires strong governance. Programmes are responsible for defining methodologies, establishing clustering approaches, setting transfer logic and overseeing monitoring tasks. Monitoring Committees and National Authorities must confirm and help steer the strategic importance of capitalisation by integrating results into regional and national strategies and linking them to broader processes. This governance involvement ensures continuity across periods and anchors capitalisation within policy ecosystems rather than treating it as a communication product. Dedicated staff capacity - particularly in analysis and methodological support - was seen as essential for identifying transferable results and assisting beneficiaries.

C. Operational Models and Processes

Capitalisation benefits from a structured lifecycle, often described as the sequence “study → test → transfer”, plus networking as an integral part of the process. This approach encourages systematic identification of what works, validation of solutions across contexts, and long-term embedding through networks or communities of practice. Designing capitalisation directly into projects - through dedicated work packages, activities and flexible rules allowing interventions beyond the initial partnership - helps ensure that transfer is feasible and adequately resourced. Clustering projects under subthemes allows programmes to identify patterns, support thematic learning and, where relevant, connect capitalisation to synergy processes. Matchmaking tools that help projects identify opportunities for transfer were seen as crucial in accelerating uptake.

D. Culture, Continuity and Simplification

For capitalisation to become a structural feature rather than a final-stage task, programmes and beneficiaries need a shared understanding of its purpose and value. Tools and methods must remain simple, accessible and free from unnecessary administrative burden. A consistent message was the need to reduce fragmentation by systematically exchanging examples, methods and tools across programmes, supported by Interact. Training for both programme authorities and beneficiaries plays a vital role in creating a culture that recognises capitalisation as central to Interreg’s impact.

3) COMMON POINTS – Synergies and Capitalisation

Across all three discussion corners, participants highlighted a series of overarching needs that apply equally to synergies and capitalisation. Both require programme-led, long-term engagement supported by clear strategies, stable governance and continuity across programming periods. Both must be integrated “by design” into programme strategies, calls, application forms, assessment criteria and operational planning. The role of Monitoring Committees and National Authorities is fundamental, both for political recognition and for connecting Interreg with national and regional policy frameworks, including NRPs. Conceptual clarity is equally important: programmes need simple, harmonised definitions and expectations across DGs, as well as simplified rules - particularly regarding territorial flexibility for transfer. Both processes demand a strong investment in culture, capacity and training, ensuring that staff and beneficiaries have the skills, time and tools needed to collaborate. Finally, data ecosystems and structured matchmaking spaces - such as KEEP, INDEX, Jems, thematic clustering and policy labs - emerged as core enablers of both processes.

Overall take away. Synergies and capitalisation are two sides of the same transformation. Both require strategic embedding, stable resources, political commitment and sustained cooperation. The next generation of Interreg programmes will depend on their ability to make these processes part of the core DNA of programme logic, ensuring coherence, greater territorial impact and clear value for money across the cooperation community. Central to this transformation is a stronger focus on transfer and uptake, enabling Interreg to contribute more meaningfully to territorial solutions and policy reforms.

Session leader: **Mecedes Acitores**
Delivery team: **Nicolas Garnier, Kelly Zielniewski, Baiba Liepa, Phil Heaton**

Report drafted by: **Mecedes Acitores**