



Report on the outcome of the survey and the regional consultations in the South-East Finland - Russia 2021-2027 Programme strategy development

Introduction

This report combines inputs received in the 52 responses to the programme partner survey that took place online between 15-25 May 2020, as well as regional consultations in the Finnish and Russian core regions that were organised on 4 and 5 June 2020. Four online meetings were organised to consult the programme partners in five programme regions, and in total 31 participants contributed to the discussion.

On-line meeting agenda and methodology

In each session the participants were introduced to the results of the survey and discussed two policy objectives that were most voted in general and in the particular regions. During the group discussions the relevance of the selected Policy Objective (PO) and Interreg Specific Objective (ISO) to the regional needs and potential of their implementation were discussed.

Discussions were facilitated by the staff of the Managing Authority and the Branch Office and the process was supported by the TESIM expert. They took place in the national languages and the focus group –method was used; with the defined set of questions, and with the hosts acting as observers and managing time.

Overview of the participants in the on-line consultation meetings

Region	Date of the meeting	Number of participants
South Karelia	4 June	7
South Savo and Kymenlaakso		3+2
City of St. Petersburg	5 June	13
Leningrad Region		6

Policy Objective PO2

“A greener low-carbon Europe and its neighbourhood”

This Policy Objective was the most voted in general, as well as in the regions of South Karelia (71%), South Savo (83%) and Kymenlaakso (100%), whereas the results in the Leningrad Region (50%) and St. Petersburg (55%) are below the average. In the survey the most voted sub-topics under this policy objective were the ones related to **renewable energy** (however, in the discussions the cross-border relevance of this specific objective was considered lower); **climate change** and **circular economy**.

Discussions in the consultations

This Policy Objective was discussed in the consultations in all three Finnish regions, as well as in St. Petersburg. And the participants of the consultations mentioned the following:

- as this objective has been addressed in the programme already previously, there is a need to focus on the practical measures, and that the people living in the border regions, as well as SMEs operating in the area need to be involved;
- as the natural resources do not know borders, the PO2 is seen as very relevant for CBC, but at the same time it is noted that financing from the CBC has to be seen as complementary to other (national, regional and EU) funding sources;
- the link between the environmental measures and the regional economic development has been stressed several times, referring in particular to the circular economy and sustainable tourism, as well as management of the protected natural areas;
- there are strong and interested partners, like universities and vocational schools, regional development companies and enterprises in the regions, however, attraction of new applicants and partners should be also considered;
- the policy objective is strongly supported by the regional and national strategies, e.g. Environment policies of Leningrad Region and St. Petersburg, Strategy of socio-economic development of St. Petersburg until 2035, Ecological doctrine of the Russian Federation, National action plan for the first phase of adaptation to climate change, as well as the European Green Deal;
- the priority topics for South Savo are linked to nature, forest, water and food, and they are all well linked to the sub-topic of circular economy.

Also, specific objectives related to water management (linked to climate change mitigation) and preservation of biodiversity (linked to circular economy as well as to renewable energy) were mentioned by the participants.

Further on, following specific areas of actions were suggested:

- common approaches and methodology of environmental risks monitoring and evaluation;
- assessment of climate change influence on different sectors of economy;
- air quality monitoring methods;
- protection and sustainable use of wetlands;
- common actions in circular economy, benchmarking best practices of Finland for sustainable development of cross-border territories;
- industrial circular economy;
- environmentally friendly traffic, especially electric vehicles;
- use of alternative energy sources (sun, waves, etc.);
- plastic-less economy;
- use of new efficient materials in construction;
- sustainable tourism was mentioned several times as one of the priorities to be supported under this PO.

However, even if recognised as a priority, there were some doubts on the Finnish side related to the “right” direction of this policy objective allowing for mutual benefit and impact on both sides of the border. It is important that the priorities supported under this objective are not only related to the export of Finnish knowledge and expertise. Also, the need for more active involvement of the private sector was mentioned.

Policy Objective PO1

“A smarter Europe and its neighbourhood”

This Policy Objective was the most “popular” in St. Petersburg (64%) and South Savo (67%), compared to the average of 44.2%. In the other regions it was less voted, receiving 33% support in Leningrad Region and 21% in South Karelia, whereas respondents from Kymenlaakso did not at all consider this policy objective as important, giving it a 0% support. From the list of the potential sub-topics **research and innovation** as well as **growth and competitiveness of SMEs** were considered as most important in the survey, as well as in the consultations, but in addition to them also the importance of **digitalisation** was raised by the regional representatives as a horizontal priority, as this is rather a tool that can be applied for achievement of many objectives.

Discussions in the consultations

The participants of the South Savo and St. Petersburg discussed this Policy Objective, and they mentioned that:

- there has been a long-lasting cooperation and development under this objective, and there are committed actors in the participating regions;
- however, on top of the higher and vocational education institutions also other actors need to be involved as the potential driving forces, e.g. municipalities and cities, as well as NGOs;
- this policy objective is in line with the strategic documents, e.g. Smart SPb, Regional strategy for socio-economic development of St. Petersburg until 2035, National strategy of tourism development in Russia;
- digitalisation and smart specialisation are emerging themes due to the post-pandemic situation, and new solutions and activities (that are not foreseen in the regional strategies) need to be explored to deal with the new situation.

Representatives of St. Petersburg also noted:

- practical and tangible outcomes are expected, as well as involvement of different target groups, including youth and elderly people;
- importance of the life-long learning,
- importance of social innovations, tourism and culture (creative industries, innovative events and congress tourism);
- linking the PO1 and PO5, e.g. innovative products for border crossing procedures to ensure smooth, quick and comfortable process, like specific time slots for crossing the border;
- focus on innovative SMEs and other types of enterprises, e.g. micro-companies; joint SME networks for their promotion on the world market.

In South Savo the discussions related to the Policy objectives 1 and 2 were very much interlinked, introducing the potential activities in the areas of: clean solutions in energy sector; bioeconomy; travel and "multispatiality" as an emerging phenomenon (telecommuting from summer houses, sharing homes both in city and at the countryside).

Policy Objective PO4

“A more social Europe and its neighbourhood”

Overall, Policy Objective 4 received the same support as PO1 (44.2%), and its popularity in the programme regions was very similar, ranging from 50% in Kymenlaakso and Leningrad Region, 43-45% in South Karelia and St. Petersburg, and the lowest score of 33% in South Savo. From the specific objectives related to this PO, the most voted was **education and training**, and the relevance of this objective was stressed by the participants of the consultations not only when discussing PO4, but also in relation to other policy objectives as well. So, for example representatives of St. Petersburg mentioned that *“Sub-topic education and training should be actually considered a cross-cutting, horizontal issue for all the POs, because qualified personnel is crucial for any of the thematic actions”*. This is also supported by the participants from Leningrad region stating that *“Education and professional training are relevant for several themes including tourism development (e.g. cycling tourism specialists), health and social sectors”*.

Discussions in the consultations

This PO was discussed with the representatives of South Karelia and Leningrad Region, and in relation to it they mentioned the following:

- there are many projects focusing on training in the current programme, however, projects addressing social issues have not been supported in the programme recently, and if not specifically supported, the situation will not change in the future;
- there is a wide range of potential partners (educational institutions, universities, also municipalities could be involved) and activities (new technologies, innovations for schools, smarter services, distant and online education);
- on top of education, also social priorities are in line with the national priorities of the Russian Federation; and also, Finnish colleagues mentioned that focus on smart innovations in social sector could be of interest, as well as preparedness to respond to unusual new situations.

More specifically, the representatives of Leningrad Region stated:

- the need to include the infrastructure component;
- also, employment and labour market development as an important priority for the region (targeting SMEs, assistance in promotion of business incubators at fairs, conferences).

Interreg Specific Objective ISO1

“A better cooperation governance for Europe and its neighbourhood”

Even if the ISO as such received 40.4% of the support from the respondents in the survey, popularity of the specific objective related to **people-to-people cooperation** (P2P) was the highest of all specific objectives. 77% of the respondents said that this topic has high cross-border relevance for the programme, and 46% of the respondents voted for it as the most important specific objective to be supported by the programme.

Discussions in the consultations

This objective was discussed in more detail with the representatives of Kymenlaakso region, as this was the region with the highest percentage of votes for this ISO (50%).

The participants indicated that this objective might not be prominently represented in the regional strategies but stressed its high relevance to the cross-border cooperation. This is also supported with the numbers from the survey.

Regional representatives also stressed the importance of having a specific priority devoted to the people-to-people cooperation, as having it as a horizontal priority (as is the case in the current programme) significantly reduces the number of P2P projects. They also stressed the wide range of projects (culture, history, tourism, health, environment, events, sports, other cooperation areas) and actors (youth, schools, municipalities, small actors, NGOs).

Policy Objective PO5

“Europe and its neighbourhood closer to their citizens”

In the whole group of survey respondents this Policy Objective received 36.5% support (which is the sixth highest out of seven), ranging from 27% in St. Petersburg up to 67% support in Leningrad Region.

Discussions in the consultations

Even if this PO was not highly voted on average, it was the most voted one in the Leningrad Region, this is why we took the opportunity to discuss it with the regional representatives. From the discussion it was clear that the participants see this objective as a possibility

- to work on the joint activities in the area of tourism (including comfortable environment, improvement of recreation areas, joint routes and tourism products with common branding, cycling and yacht tourism, landscape design tourism);
- to implement infrastructure development activities in the area (household management, development of rural roads, objects of social relevance, small-scale infrastructure for tourism, like yacht fuelling stations). The importance of the infrastructure component was also raised from the perspective of the long-term sustainability, local ownership and visibility, as well as recognition of the CBC value among local population;
- there are interested organisations for the implementation of activities in this policy objective, including SMEs, investors;
- the above-mentioned activities are in line with the regional plans and strategies.

Interreg Specific Objective ISO2

“A safer and more secure Europe and its neighbourhood”

On average, this was the fifth most voted policy objective in the survey, the regional preference for this objective was varying from lowest of 17% in South Savo to the highest of 50% in Kymenlaakso. In the other regions it was ranging from 33-43%, with South Karelia, St. Petersburg and Leningrad Region allocating respectively 43%, 41% and 33%. However, it also has to be mentioned that the specific objective of “border crossing management” received comparatively high support and is the fifth most voted SO out of the suggested list of 21.

This policy objective was not discussed in any of the regional consultations.

Policy Objective PO3

“A more connected Europe with its neighbourhood”

The Policy Objective 3 was the least preferred among the respondents of the survey, only 15.4% giving it their preference, and also on the regional level the scores were not high, ranging from 0% in Leningrad Region to maximum of 25% in Kymenlaakso.

This policy objective was not discussed in any of the regional consultations.