IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION OF THE ALPINE MASSIF INTERREGIONAL PROGRAMME (POIA) 2014-2020

SYNTHESIS

April 9th, 2018

*This summary contains the main **findings** and **recommendations** of the evaluation carried out between June 2017 and March 2018. The evaluation is accompanied by annexes with detailed analyses, surveys and tools used for the evaluation work (evaluation framework, sociograms, diagrams...).*

Objectives of the evaluation

For each European programme, the year 2019 represents an important deadline with the "performance review" which must enable the release of performance reserves or which may lead to a suspension of payments if the objectives set for the year 2018 are not met.

In this context, the implementation evaluation should identify both the **good practices**, **difficulties** and bring recommendations for **operational improvement** that could be applied in the short term to support the achievement of the objectives set.

For the programme, the evaluative questions are as follows:

Question 0: Assessment of the achievements of the Interregional Programme

Question 1: To what extent does animation promote the emergence of good quality projects?

Question 2: To what extent do Collective initiatives promote the achievement of programme objectives?

Question 3: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the interregional dimension of the programme?

Question 4: What lessons will be learned from the results of the study for the preparation of the programme review?

For each of these evaluative questions a detailed state of the art has been done, highlighting strengths, difficulties, and providing operational recommendations.

Activities carried out

In order to carry out this evaluation, a detailed analysis of the achievements and implementation conditions of the programme was carried out. It included in particular:

1. Permanent exchanges with the pilot of the mission and the realisation of about 30 interviews with stakeholders (*Managing authority, partners, animation partners ("relais d'animation"), beneficiaries)*

2. The organization of workshops with the *Espaces Valléens* as well as with the partners of the programme

3. Online surveys for beneficiaries and animation partners

4. Detailed data analysis from the Synergy database

5. Case studies with animation partners

6. Benchmark studies with other interregional or Interreg programmes (*IOP Pyrénées, IOP Loire, IOP Massif Central, 3 INTERREG programmes, LEADER programmes, ERDF programmes (Centre Val de Loire, Guyana), European Commission, OI ERDF (CIVIS-La Réunion))*

After drafting a framing report, a detailed analysis of the POIA and the analysis of data collected, this final report contains the answers to the evaluative questions, strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the programme and operational recommendations.

1. Assessment of the achievements of the POIA

1.1. Progress of the programming

At the beginning of the programming period, the POIA was confronted to a large number of projects applications for the Specific Objective 1 (Espaces Valléens) and was also confronted to difficulties with the use of Synergy. This led to **delays in the instruction of applications** (from 5 to 22 months). This situation, with other administrative constraints (governance, complexity of cooperation projects…) has highlighted the **need to strengthen human resources** dedicated to the management of the programme.

The efforts made during the years 2016 and 2017 made it possible to achieve a **good level of ERDF programming** in 2017 (38.32%) despite some differences between priority axes (38.90% for Axis 1, 27.7% for Axis 2 and 16.71% for Axis 3).

Figure 1:   Evolution of ERDF programming
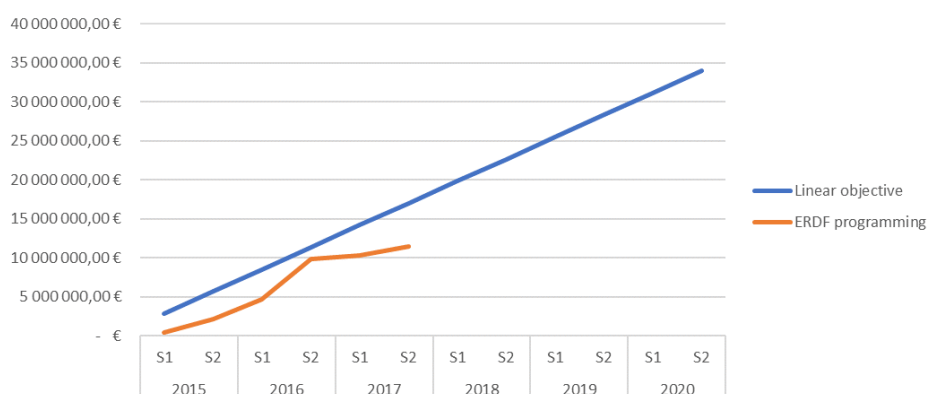
1.2. Monitoring the objectives of the performance framework

Despite a good programming level, certification was still low at the end of 2017 with only **16,41%** of the target set for 2018. At that time, most of the output indicators had also still relatively low values.

This percentage should increase in 2018 with a better processing of applications as well as with the progress made with the use of Synergy. However, a **special attention should be paid to Axes 2 and 3** that are confronted to the most important delays.

Table 1: Performance framework indicators with significant delays (Synergy - February 2018)

| Indicator	Target 2018	Predictive value	Realised value	Achievements / 2018 targets
Axis 1: Number of supported heritage development infrastructures	**30**	**33**	**3**	**10%**
Axis 2: Number of companies supported	**80**	**11**	**7**	**8,75%**
Axis 3: Number of annual action plans for integrated natural hazards management supported	**16**	**10**	**0**	**0%**
Axis 3: Number of scientific and operational partnerships for natural risk management	**1**	**10**	**0**	**0%**

1.3. Types of projects and beneficiaries concerned

The types of projects programmed by the POIA are **globally consistent with the objectives set**, with a special place given to engineering projects because of the nature of the activities supported by the Collective Initiatives ("*Démarches collectives*") (setup of the "*Espaces Valléens*", Alpine Space Wood Certification ("*Certification Bois des Alpes*"), Integrated Management of Natural Risks (*Gestion Intégrée des Risques Naturels* - GIRN)).

These Collective initiatives are **source of innovation** by encouraging local actors to develop new methods of governance and management. **Partnership projects** bring also a significant added value even they face additional management difficulties (project management and coordination of partnership).

If the programme mobilises a real **diversity of actors**, and ensures a **significant animation work**, it remains necessary to pay a particular attention to **new beneficiaries, to private actors**, **associations** or **small municipalities** that may have difficulties to fulfill the administrative requirements (and delays) imposed by the POIA.
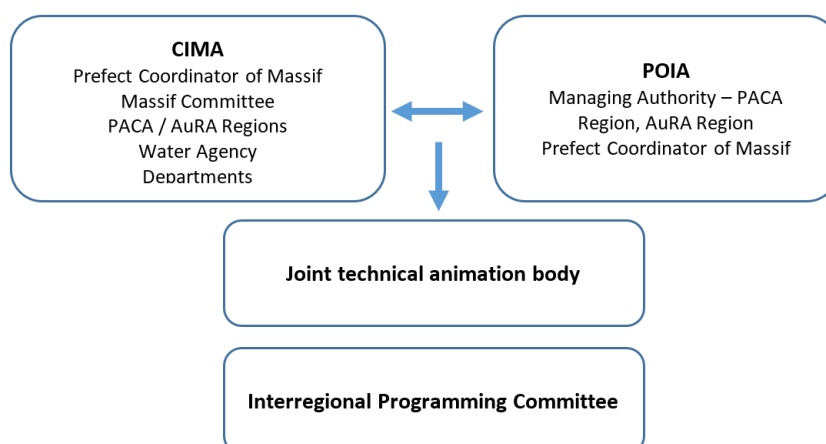
1. Types of beneficiaries of the POIA
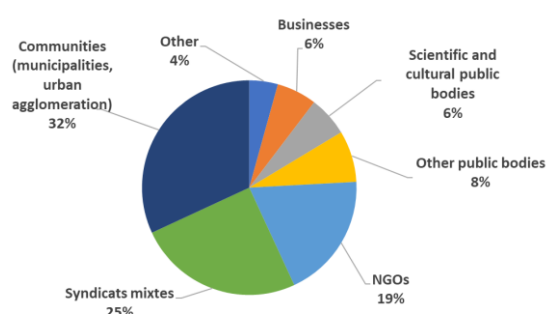
1.4. Implementing procedures

The POIA is backed by a **well-structured institutional partnership** at the level of the Alpine Massif (Massif Committee / Interregional Convention for the Alpine Massif – CIMA) and with its different partners (Region Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Region Auvergne-Rhône Alpes, Prefect coordinator of the Alpine Massif and other co-financers) are involved in the interregional programming committee.

The programme, however, is confronted, like other interregional programmes, **to a greater complexity of organization, management and communication.** Exchanges between partners helped to identify some difficulties (exchange of information) and **to improve the management and consultation process in recent years** (consultation between services, preparation of Interregional Committees, joint Technical Animation Body...).

Attention must however be maintained on **coordination activities**, the exchange of information and the reduction of deadlocks during the instruction phase or after the programming of projects (face to face monitoring committees, exchanges with the working groups of the Massif Committee, implementation of e-Synergy...).

Figure 2: Articulation CIMA / POIA

1.5. Synthesis and recommendations

Strengths	Weaknesses
- A well-structured governance and Massif partnership - A satisfactory overall programming level/dynamic programming of Axis 1 - A limited number of indicators. Well targeted operational indicators - A typology of projects and beneficiaries coherent with the objectives of the programme - Good quality projects applications	- Significant delays of instruction - Difficulties with the use of Synergy - Weak financial and output indicators at the end of 2017 - Complex administrative procedures for applicants - Many interlocutors for applicants (animation, monitoring…)

Recommendations

With regard to the current situation, the following points could improve the implementation of the programme:

- (1) Strengthen the human resources of the programme in order to speed-up the instruction phase and reach the objectives of the performance framework (including instruction and certification)
- (4) Reducing formal administrative constraints to ease (and accelerate) the implementation of the programme and projects (certification of expenditures, simplification of procedures...)
- (5) Specify the protocol for checking indicators in Synergy and monitor more efficiently their progress
- (6) Consider implementing "simplified cost" measures for post 2020

2. Contribution of the animation to the quality of the projects

2.1. Networks of actors involved in the programme

The POIA has a large network of actors and partners to ensure animation and monitoring activities on its **overall territory**. The information and animation unit of the programme realise an **important work praised by the beneficiaries** (Information and training days, daily follow-up...). The Commissariat de Massif intervenes at the level of the Massif Committee and supports the animation of the "*Espaces Valléens*".

The **animation partners** ("*relais d'animation*") play an **interface role** between the programme and the territories and are often requested by the beneficiaries for support which exceed the role of information assigned to them by the programme. **Adaptation of their status and role** could help strengthen the programme's capacity to support beneficiaries.

Regional Operational Services (within Regional authorities) constitute also an important source of support and expertise. However, their expertise is not fully used due to their late involvement in the projects programming process. Their participation to "collective project reviews", before the programming of projects, could contribute to increase the quality of projects applications.

Figure 3: Diagram of actors contributing to the animation of the POIA
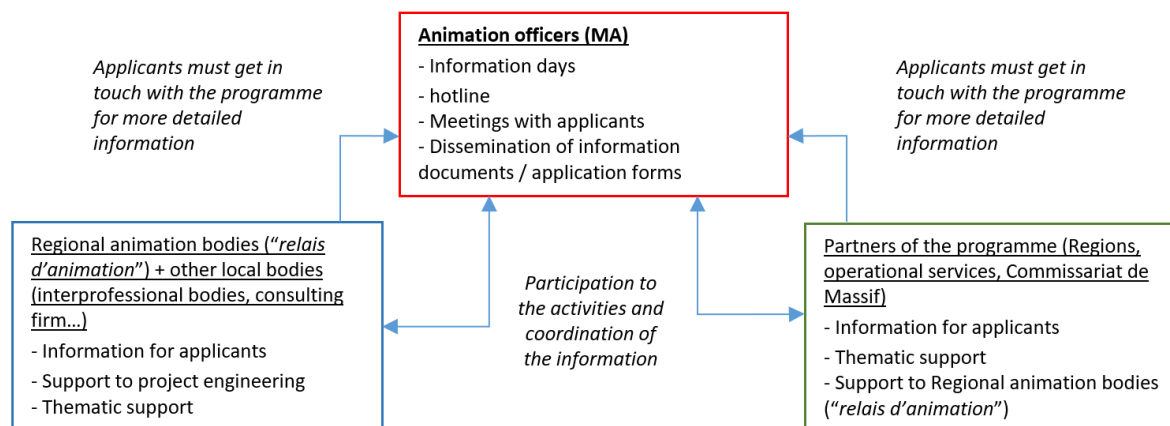
2.2. Relevance of communication tools for applicants and beneficiaries

In a general way, applicants and beneficiaries **appreciate the information and animation activities carried out by the programme**. The **website** of the programme provides access to useful documents (application guide, FAQ) and more technical documents are disseminated during **training meetings** after the selection of projects.

Nevertheless, candidates sometimes have difficulties **to understand and follow the administrative process** which is considered to be relatively complex. Their work could be facilitated by a more direct access to all documents (before application), by the **simplification** of documents (forms) or by highlighting some main **vigilance points** (to do and not to do...).

2.3. Mobilisation of target audiences and beneficiaries

At the scale of the programme, the work done by animators, partners, (Regions, State administration) and the involvement of animation partners ("relais d'animation") allows to reach a wide range of actors in all the territories (cf. map 1 p.8).

However, the mobilisation of actors within axes 2 and 3 shows some particularities with the involvement of new actors or less experimented beneficiaries (small businesses, NGOs, small municipalities).

Due to their profile (limited financial and administrative capacities), a particular attention should be paid to them, particularly in case of delays in the instruction and programming phase. These beneficiaries may also require specific technical support (information, training,...) on certain administrative issues (eligibility of expenditure, public procurement, state aid,...).

2.4. Contribution of the animation to the quality and structuring dimension of projects

As a result of the surveys, the beneficiaries indicate that the activities of animation and communication helped to strengthen their application on:

1. Administrative aspects (for 65% of them)
2. Budget (40.38%)
3. The definition of actions and indicators (19.23%)
4. The definition of strategies, objectives and territorial impact (13.46%)

For 23% of them, animation and communication activities did not have a significant effect on their application.

Assessments are slightly lower for administrative and financial requirements regarding the Axis 2, highlighting the difficulty of small businesses and NGOs to comply with the administrative requirements of ERDF programming.

2.5. Synthesis of strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
- People in charge of the animation of the programme (MA) are pro-active and have thematic competences on programme priorities - A network of well-structured and operational animators close to potential beneficiaries (Regions, State Administration, animation partners) - Animation partners close to local actors and providing relevant thematic support - Thematic and local information meetings appreciated by the beneficiaries - "Mountain" services of Regions providing useful technical and thematic support - An applicant guide useful for the beneficiaries	- Some difficulties for candidates and beneficiaries to manage technical documents of the POIA - A participation of POIA partners that could be strengthened (operational services) - A status and mission of animation partners that could be better specified - A risk of loss of information between the different levels of interlocutors (animation, instruction…)

3. Contribution of collective initiatives ("*démarches collectives*") to the achievement of the objectives of the programme

3.1. Transversal approach

For the period 2014-2020, three Collective initiatives have been put in place in the continuity of the previous period ("*Espaces valléens*", "*Bois des Alpes*" and "*Gestion intégrée des risques naturels*" (GIRN)).

These Collective initiatives **have no equivalent in other regional or interregional programmes** and constitute an innovation that could be disseminated and shared.

They are characterised by the setting up of **innovative practices** (definition of objectives, governance, organisation of actors) that contribute to the **added value** and to the **Interregional dimension** of the programme. They also represent **a challenge in terms of project engineering and financing** in order to ensure their development in the medium and long term.

3.2. Espaces valléens

The Collective initiative "Espaces valléens" was revived in 2014-2020 with the widening of the territories identified during the period 2007-2013. Following the selection of 35 Espaces valléens in 2015 and 2016, 82 projects were programmed including a majority of engineering and animation projects. With the definition of action plans, the operational phase could start with an ERDF budget of EUR 500,000 per "*Espace valléen*" (including engineering).

Territorial Dimension

In these territories, intercommunalities are considered as a relevant intervention level for 91% of the people participating to the online survey. However, they mention some difficulties when the territories of Espaces valléens do not correspond exactly with other intervention areas (Pays, Regional Natural Parcs, LEADER areas, Natura 2000 areas...).

The managers of "Espaces valléens" can also have **some difficulties to promote an approach** that does not correspond to any institutionalised framework. The "*Espaces valléens*" are also confronted to the reorganisation of local authorities and intercommunalities stemming from the law (Loi NOTRe).

Effectiveness and efficiency of the Collective initiative

The implementation of "*Espaces valléens*" is relatively stable with a significant mobilisation of **Local authorities** and **socio-economic actors**.

In terms of effectiveness, the "*Espaces valléens*" have generated a large number of projects from local authorities and local actors (35 EV selected). The strategies that have been setup by project partners are coherent with Alpine Massif priorities and **will contribute to the socioeconomic development of each territory**.

During the implementation phase, it appears however that budgets available (EUR 500 000 per EV) can cover only a part of the activities foreseen in strategies and action plans. Surveys highlight also the need

for more flexibility in the implementation of action plans confronted to the evolution of socioeconomic contexts and local needs.

In terms of efficiency, the beneficiaries mention a certain complexity and delays in the elaboration of projects. Budgets spent for the definition and selection of "*Espaces valléens*" correspond to about 13% of the overall ERDF budget available. This percentage is much lower when taking into account other cofinancing resources.

3.3. "*Bois des Alpes*" certification

The "*Bois des Alpes*" initiative is in continuity with the period 2007-2013 during which the Interregional Convention for the Alpine Space (CIMA) supported the implementation of the "*Bois des Alpes*" certification process. This approach is supported by the Regional Unions of Forest Municipalities (URACOFOR), in connection with the Association "Bois des Alpes" and the associations of professionals of the wood industry (*interprofessionnelles du bois*). The POIA supports the adaptation of production tools (investment for wood industry) and also the promotion of the use of "Alpine wood" in the Alpine Massif.

Territorial Dimension

The Collective initiative "*Bois des Alpes*" is dedicated to all potential beneficiaries located in the Alpine Area (French territory). Certification is possible for companies located outside this area, provided that they can justify the provenance of the wood they use for their activities.

Map 1: Location of certified and subsidised businesses
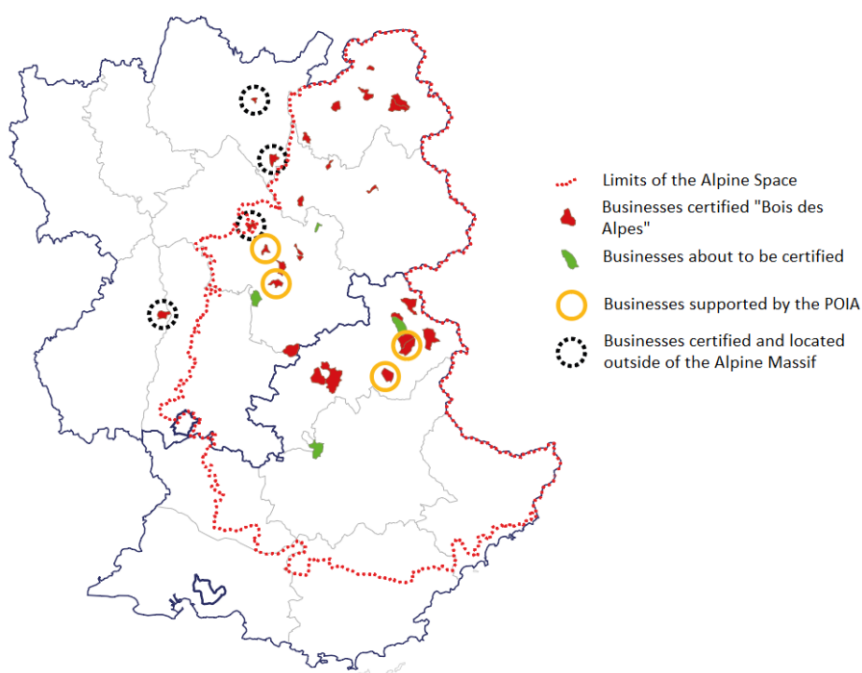
Effectiveness and efficiency of the Collective initiative

The Collective initiative "*Bois des Alpes*" is relatively **targeted and operational** with investments having a direct impact on the business activity. The programming of this axis and its achievements showed a constant progression over the years 2016 and 2017 with 7 investment projects for an average budget of 718 000 euro (ERDF and cofinancing).

In terms of efficiency, small businesses may experience difficulties to fulfil **administrative requirements**. These difficulties are increased in case of delay in the instruction of applications. This can cause them to use **external expertise** or resort to other co-financing. The efficiency of the initiative "*Bois des Alpes*" is however enhanced by the involvement of **animation partners (URACOFOR)** that contribute to increase demand from the municipalities and thus to support the activity of wood businesses.

The initiative "*Bois des Alpes*" highlights the **specificity of private beneficiaries** (economic operators) and the need to provide them **appropriate information and support** (public procurement, state aid, reporting...).

3.4. Integrated Natural Risk Management (GIRN)

The GIRN approach follows the setting up of **Pilot Sites** during the previous period (2007-2013). It is supported by the Alpine Pole of Study and Research for the Prevention of Natural Hazards (PARN) whose animation work and support is **praised by the beneficiaries**. The initial idea of financing projects carried out in specific territories (Alpine Areas of Integrated Natural Risks Management - TAGIRN) has been adapted in order to better take into account the constraints of Alpine municipalities.

Territorial Dimension

The POIA's willingness to promote integrated risk management at the intercomunal level is an innovation in a context where **risk competence falls within the municipal level**. If the intercommunal approach is relevant for a better prevention and management of the different types of risks in the mountain areas, it must face **regulatory and operational constraints** that limit the number of municipalities that can be involved in this process. Research actors are on their side very interested by **interregional cooperation projects**.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the Collective initiative

One of the main added values of GIRN approach is to **involve research actors and local authorities in coordinated cooperation activities**.

At the beginning of the programme, research institutions have been rapidly involved in **cooperation projects**. The mobilisation of municipalities likely to develop a GIRN approach took more time (**need for political involvement and availability of human and financial resources**) but accelerated from 2017 on. More flexibility introduced in the eligibility conditions for the Axis 3 should increase the mobilisation of local authorities by the end of the programme.

In terms of effectiveness, the GIRN approach contributes to promote **quite innovative governance processes**. However, this innovative dimension reduces the number of potential beneficiaries in the short term. Its development also depends on the regulatory framework and on the support that State Authorities could provide (like with the STePRIM initiative).

In terms of efficiency, the implementation of GIRN does not generate an excessive cost for the programme with the involvement of PARN that has not yet applied for POIA funding.

3.5. Synthesis of strengths and weaknesses for the implementation of Collective initiatives

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Collective initiatives cover the entire interregional area	- The mobilisation of municipalities is disrupted by the implementation of the new law (Loi NOTRe)
- Collective initiatives are targeted on well-identified territories and actors	- Collective initiatives are demanding in terms of project engineering and dependent on the financing of the POIA
- Collective initiatives have a strong thematic focus on Alpine Space priorities	- Lack of flexibility in EV action plans
- Animation partners ("*relais d'animation*") are active and available for potential beneficiaries	- Private bodies with limited ERDF experience
	- No competence for risk management at intercommunal level
	- Output indicators far from their target value

> **Recommendations**
>
> Collective initiatives are innovative and are then confronted to some implementation difficulties. Recommendations can be made on the following points:
> - (7) Despite implementation constraint, maintaining cooperation projects for the Post 2020
> - (10) Better specify the status and function of the animation partners ("*relais d'animation*") (post-2020 perspective)
> - (11) Pursue the identification and mobilisation of potential beneficiaries for "*Bois des Alpes*" and "GIRN" Collective initiatives
> - (12) Think about the potential evolution of Collective initiatives towards initiatives better articulated with public policies and less demanding in terms of project engineering and support

4. Strengths and weaknesses of the interregional dimension of the programme

4.2. Management of the programme

In comparison with regional programmes, the management of interregional programmes requires the involvement **of a larger number of actors** and the setting up of **more complex coordination processes** wether it is for the elaboration of the programme, the drafting of calls for projects, animation activities, the selection process, the financing or the monitoring of projects.

This governance was made more difficult at the start of the programme with the **transfer of the Managing Authority** to the Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur Region which led to internal reorganisation of services.

Despite these constraints, the POIA benefits from a **Level of technical assistance comparable to regional programmes** (in percentage) which increases the pressure on its managers and animators.

This situation created **communication difficulties** between partners in early programming (Managing Authority, Regional Authorities, Commissariat de Massif) and led to the use of **written procedures for Monitoring Committees**.

In this context, the programme and its partners put in place a **Joint technical Animation Body** (*Cellule d'animation technique conjointe*) responsible for the monitoring of applications and for the coordination of cofinancing at interregional level. **Communication has improved** even if the share of information could be more developed with communication managers of the different partners.

About the content of projects, it appears that **regional operational services** could be better mobilized to provide their expertise before the selection of projects.

4.1. Performance of the interregional approach

The interregional dimension of the POIA constitutes **an asset to meet the objectives of the Alpine Massif.** At strategic level, the coordination between POIA and CIMA helps to make a **clear distinction** with the priorities of ERDF/ESF regional operational programmes.

The geographical distribution of POIA projects within the Alpine region proves to be relatively balanced, highlighting the interregional dimension of its priorities.

This is due to animation activities implemented in the overall area and to the capacity of animation partners to be in direct contact with potential beneficiaries. Cooperation projects contribute to this interregional dimension, but they can only be implemented in limited numbers because of specific management constraints.

Map 2 : Geographical distribution of POIA projects (*Location of the beneficiary*)
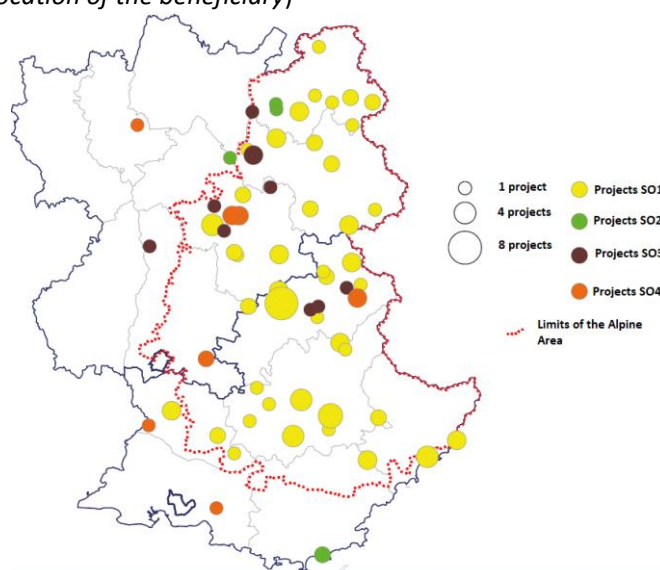
The significant geographical coverage of the Alpine Massif and the limited budget of the POIA necessitate a **strong territorial and/or thematic targeting** of projects in order to maintain its efficiency.

As indicated about the "*Espaces valléens*", the programme must find a **balance between the needs of local actors and its investment capacities**.

The situation is different for axes 2 and 3 that do not foresee the financing of a large number of projects and that are focused on relatively targeted issues. The Axis 2 is characterised by a strong **operational and Alpine dimension** but the programme must take into account the lack of experience of private bodies about ERDF financing. For the Axis 3, the focus of municipalities and research bodies on integrated risk management increases the need for an **interregional Massif approach**. The lack of competence regarding natural risks management at intercommunal level necessitate however strong political involvement to progress in this direction.

4.3. Synthesis of the strengths and weaknesses of the interregional dimension of the programme

Strengths	Weaknesses
- A programme and projects coherent with the priorities of the Alpine Massif - A strong articulation between the POIA and other public policies - Animation tools and activities covering the overall Alpine area - A balanced distribution of projects - Implementation of cooperation projects - Beneficiaries who recognise the importance of the interregional dimension of the programme in order to develop their network and their actions	- Higher management constraints for interregional programmes - Difficulties to be targeted and to answer to the needs of a large diversity of territories - Cooperation projects confronted to administrative difficulties

Recommendations

Recommendations regarding the interregional dimension of the programme have already been formulated in the previous parts (management and organisation, communication, implementation of Collective initiatives). Some can be recalled in particular:
- (7) Despite implementation constraint, maintaining cooperation projects for the Post 2020
- (8) Better mobilise partner's communication officers in order to better highlight the achievements of the POIA
- (9) Strengthen the participation of POIA partners and regional operational services (collective project review before the selection of projects)
- (10) Better specify the status and function of the territorial animation partners ("*relais d'animation*") (post-2020 perspective)

5. Lessons learned from the evaluation

5.1. Relevance and economic dimension of the thematic axes

On **Axis one**, the POIA helped to **structure local tourism development strategies** and to **federate communities around shared projects.** Animation activities promoted stronger and better quality projects and the mobilisation of territorial actors.

This mobilisation however generates **strong expectations** that the POIA budget cannot meet alone. For the implementation of the action plans, it is necessary to maintain the mobilisation of the partners which is sometimes thwarted by the time-frame of the projects.

Axes 2 and 3 are relatively targeted and correspond to the stakes and priorities of the Alpine area. For the **Axis 2**, an issue concerns the **ability to mobilize small private actors.** For the Axis 3, **the evolution of regulations** would be necessary to better promote GIRN at intercommunal level.

The geographical distribution of projects and financing, which is **relatively balanced** between the two regions, confirms that the POIA corresponds to **shared needs at interregional level**. **Collective initiatives bring impetus in the territories of the Massif** but are confronted to some difficulties due to their complexity and to budgets available.

5.2. New emerging needs

The programme promotes exchanges and can build on an ecosystem of actors at the heart of current dynamics and emerging needs. However, the margins of adaptation are limited, particularly for the Specific Objective 1 where future interventions are depending on pre-defined action plans.

In order to take into account new needs, several ideas can be envisaged:
- To increase exchanges with territorial animation partners ("*relais d'animation*") that are in direct contact with potential beneficiaries
- To give the possibility to adapt the action plans of the Espaces Valléens
- To strengthen human resources within the Managing Authority in order to increase the qualitative support of beneficiaries
- To adapt animation and monitoring activities of the programme according to beneficiaries that are confronted to administrative or financial difficulties

6. Summary of Evaluation recommendations

(1) Strengthen the human resources of the programme in order to speed-up the instruction phase and reach the objectives of the performance framework (including instruction and certification)

(2) Improve the information of project holders about administrative matters, calls for projects and about the instruction and programming process (especially in case of delays)

(3) Provide a special assistance to the less experienced applicants and beneficiaries (small businesses, NGOs...)

(4) Reducing formal administrative constraints to facilitate (and accelerate) the implementation of the programme and projects (certification of expenditure, advances, simplification/easing of procedures...)

(5) Specify the protocol for checking indicators in Synergy and monitor more efficiently their progress

(6) Consider implementing "simplified cost" measures for post 2020

(7) Despite implementation constraint, maintaining cooperation projects for the Post 2020

(8) Better mobilise partner's communication officers in order to better highlight the achievements of the POIA

(9) Strengthen the participation of POIA partners and regional operational services (collective project review before the selection of projects)

(10) Better specify the status and function of the territorial animation partners ("*relais d'animation*") (post-2020 perspective)

(11) Pursue the identification and mobilisation of potential beneficiaries for "Bois des Alpes" and "GIRN" Collective initiatives

(12) Think about the potential evolution of Collective initiatives towards initiatives better articulated with public policies and less demanding in terms of project engineering and support