

Capitalisation Strategy



2021-2027

Interreg
North Sea



Co-funded by
the European Union

Contents

Introduction

- 04** About this strategy
- 05** What is capitalisation?
- 06** Goals of the strategy
- 07** Capitalisation process
- 11** Challenges and opportunities
- 13** Working together

Approach

- 15** Main tactics
- 16** Supporting projects
- 20** Promoting project work
- 24** Tracking capitalisation
- 25** Exchange and cooperation

Evaluation

- 27** Annual evaluation

Introduction



1. About this strategy

This strategy outlines the Interreg North Sea Programme's approach to fostering project capitalisation, i.e., boosting the positive impact of our funding. It builds on the capitalisation strategy developed for the VB programme period, lessons learned so far, and the Capitalisation Management Guide published by Interact in 2020.

The strategy has also benefitted from tailored capitalisation support provided by Interact in 2021-2022. The support brought new ideas and perspectives to light that helped improve our approach.

The strategy is prepared by the programme's Capitalisation Team, with helpful inputs from colleagues at the Joint Secretariat and our National Contact Points.

While the strategy is developed for the VIB (2021-2027) programme period, the scope of work covers capitalisation of projects in previous periods as well. This reflects the simple fact that capitalisation takes time.

Vocabulary

Below is a concise list of special terms used in this document.

Term	What it refers to
Capitalisation	Transfer and reuse of project-generated knowledge, leading to positive impact.
Product	Specific project work/knowledge that can be transferred and reused to create impact.
Impact	Positive effects of using the products delivered by projects.
North Star	1-3 main impacts that the project expects to produce within or beyond its lifetime.
Givers	Projects that have produced knowledge which can be transferred or reused.
Takers	Organisations that may adopt and reuse the knowledge produced by projects.
End users	People who ultimately benefit from the project's positive impacts, such as citizens, farmers, SMEs, etc.



2. What is capitalisation?

There is no formal, unified definition of “capitalisation” in the context of Interreg; however, our support organisation Interact has done some groundbreaking work on defining and clarifying capitalisation and related terms in the world of Cohesion Policy.

In line with Interact’s guidance, the North Sea Programme defines capitalisation as

transfer and reuse of knowledge generated by Interreg North Sea projects.

This can also be seen as our programme’s “return on investment”.



Ultimately, our goal as an Interreg programme underpinning the European Cohesion Policy is to achieve as much positive change as possible with our limited funds.

Interreg North Sea projects are often first movers within their respective fields. They drive positive change by exploring and showcasing new approaches and solutions to serious challenges. When their work is transferred and reused, the scale of positive impact can grow far beyond the original scope of the project.

The Interreg North Sea Programme aims for our funding to make the strongest possible positive change. Boosting and scaling up the impact of our projects is therefore a top priority.

The main aim of this strategy is to:

1) Enable capitalisation of Interreg North Sea projects to scale up positive impacts of the programme funding.

Also, knowledge about the capitalisation which actually happens in our programme is important for future programme evaluations, to inform decision-making, and to evaluate the efficiency of this strategy.

A secondary goal is therefore to

2) Track capitalisation which has already happened.

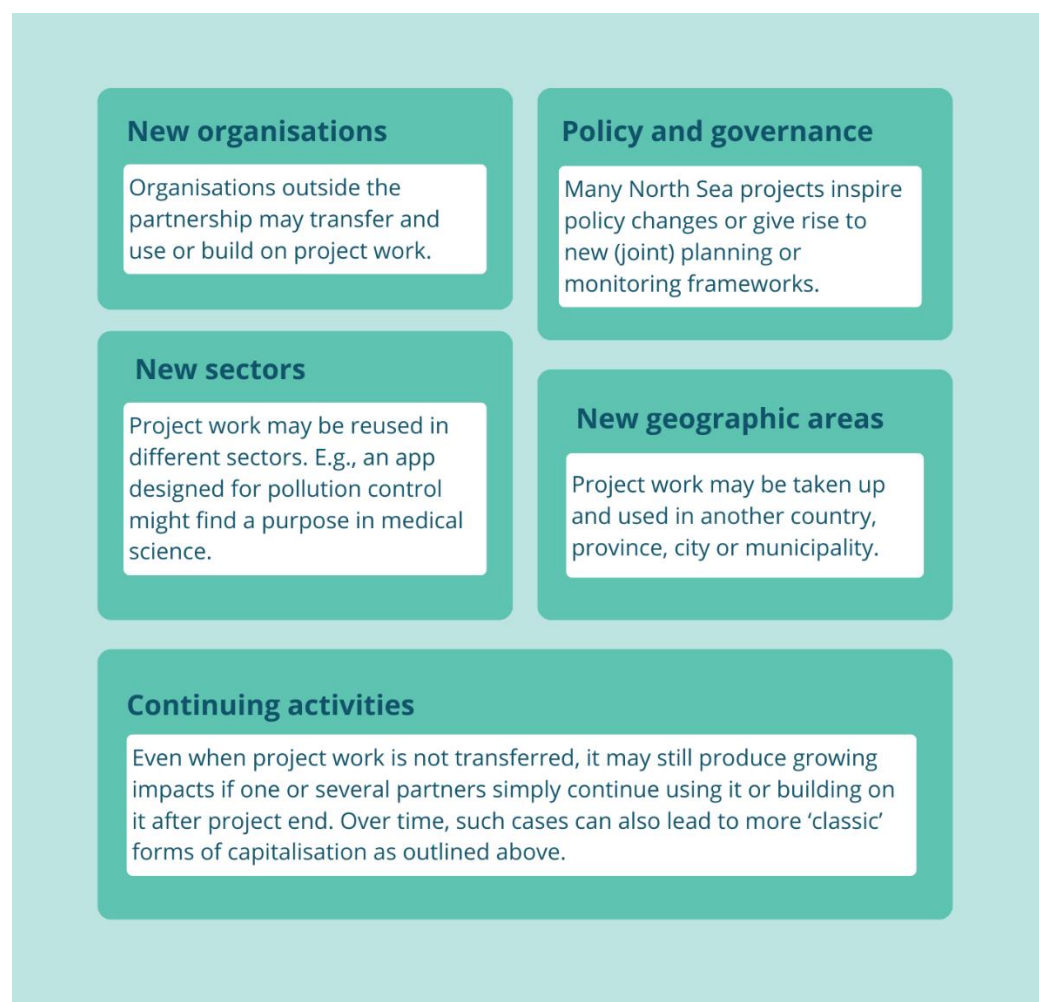


4. Capitalisation process

The process of capitalisation can be viewed through several different lenses. The perspectives below have helped shape our thinking about what we can do to facilitate it.

4.1 Transfer and reuse

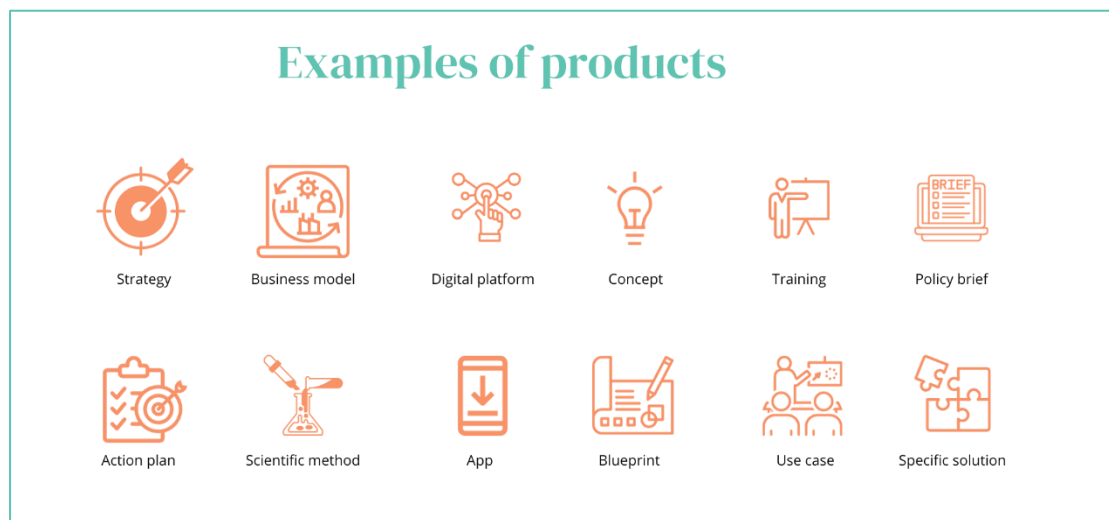
Transferring and reusing project work can happen in several ways, as illustrated below.



4.2 Products: What can be capitalised on?

It is often helpful to focus on the types of project work that can be transferred and reused. The list below is not exhaustive but gives an idea of the wide range of work that may be involved.

We refer to these types of work as “products” in the context of capitalisation. Depending on the context, we may also refer to them collectively as project “work” or “knowledge”.



4.3 A broad view of the process

There is no one-size-fits-all process of capitalisation. Also, it is unlikely to follow a strictly linear pattern. Nevertheless, it is helpful to think of it more broadly as a process of growing engagement that ultimately leads to uptake and reuse of project work.

Givers and takers



In the context of capitalisation, we define the projects and their partners as “givers”, while all outside organisations that might reuse their work are potential “takers”.

Being clear on who the takers are is key to driving capitalisation. The takers are the people and organisations which may adopt and reuse the project’s work, thereby creating additional impact.

Takers are typically either policymakers or professionals embedded within public administration, academic institutions, or the private sector. This means that the effort to engage with them is normally different from general work to publicise the project in mass media.



A basic process outline

The three stages below represent increasing levels of taker engagement that takers will normally go through. Capitalisation only happens at stage 3.

Stage 1: Takers notice the project's work

Takers first need to be aware of the work in order to reuse it. Takers may discover project work on digital platforms or learn about it at meetings, conferences, through professional networks, or via the press.

Stage 2: Takers become seriously interested

A mild interest is rarely enough for takers to engage further. The project needs to convince them about the benefits of reusing their work and generate a high level of interest among the takers. For example, trials may show that a solution works well and even saves money or time. Testimonials by other takers can further underline the benefits.

Stage 3: Takers adopt and reuse the project's work

For capitalisation to happen, takers must eventually adopt and use the project's work. In most organisations, there is a natural resistance to changing existing approaches or investing in new solutions. Even if one person in a taker organisation has understood the benefits and is ready to go for it, they often need to also convince their colleagues or superiors. To help, the projects can present the benefits in an attractive, shareable format such as presentations or infographics. If needed, projects can also offer training and tutorials to help their takers along.



4.4 What is an impact?

“Impact” is a key word in capitalisation. The term refers to

positive change resulting from the work of a project.

The precise understanding of “positive change” depends on what is meaningful for the project. Some impacts are tangible and measurable, while others provide a basis for future impacts on the ground. The two VB (2014-2020) examples below showcase this need to tailor.

Example 1: SMARTGREEN

In one pilot, SMARTGREEN tracked the CO₂ emissions, the energy use, and the quality of crops resulting from a new greenhouse concept. The impact might be summarised as:

We will introduce a novel greenhouse concept enabling the greenhouse industry to save energy and reduce CO₂ emissions down to near zero.

Example 2: GEANS

GEANS developed DNA tools to effectively monitor the health of marine ecosystems. Their impact may be defined as follows:

We enable fast, cost-effective monitoring of marine ecosystem health by developing and validating e-DNA technology for practitioners and authorities.

There is one main difference between the two projects above:

- SMARTGREEN was able to measure and calculate the benefits from their new greenhouse concept based on a trial. The impact on the climate of switching from traditional greenhouses to the new concept is direct and grows linearly with the scale of uptake.
- By contrast, GEANS does not have the basis for providing meaningful figures for the future health of the marine ecosystems in the North Sea. Their impact is indirect though potentially very strong because monitoring is crucial in sustainable marine management.



5. Challenges & opportunities

The Joint Secretariat has identified the following main challenges and opportunities for capitalisation in the North Sea Programme.

5.1 Challenges

- **Projects have limited time to communicate their main outcomes, results, and impacts.** Most projects will keep fine-tuning their tools and solutions until close to project end. They will also produce the strongest results and proof point towards the end. At this point, the project has little time left for raising awareness of its final products and convincing takers to adopt them.
- **Reaching the right recipients can be tricky.** Some stakeholders can be hard to reach, such as policymakers and SMEs. Making them aware of project work requires targeted efforts. Also, the Joint Secretariat does not have the capacity to reach all the different target groups across all projects and in the entire North Sea Region.
- **Resource constraints.** Limited resources can make it hard to utilise the full potential for capitalisation of project work.
- **The largest impacts may happen long after project closure.** North Sea projects carry out limited-scale trials of innovative approaches and solutions, which restricts the level of impact that can be reached during the project. However, larger-scale impacts may result later on if the work keeps spreading year on year.
- **Demonstrating long-term impacts is challenging.** Tracking the long-term impacts of our projects is time-consuming, with no guarantee of reward. Also, the project's work may have been just one among many drivers of a certain positive development.



5.2 Opportunities

- **Interreg North Sea projects** focus on topics with a high and growing level of public interest.
- **Projects may engage with relevant target groups at an early stage**, to make them aware of their work. This can greatly enhance the chance of capitalisation later on.
- **The project partners** often possess a substantial joint network of contacts who are possible takers.
- **Many past projects** have delivered work that has indeed been taken up by external organisations and created positive impact. These untold stories can be brought to light to boost further capitalisation.
- **The National Contact Points** have strong links to the national frameworks and can help foster capitalisation in their respective countries.
- **We are part of Interreg**, with opportunities for joint capitalisation efforts.



6. Working together

The Joint Secretariat is located in a single place in the North Sea Region – Viborg – and does not possess extensive professional networks across the entire region or within every field covered by our projects. This means we can only support capitalisation to a limited degree on our own. Cooperation with our closest stakeholders therefore plays a big role in our capitalisation efforts.

The secretariat has set up a dedicated Capitalisation Team. Supported by the management, the team is responsible for this strategy and for planning and coordinating our work to support capitalisation. All staff at the secretariat help execute the plans.

In addition, our **National Contact Points (NCPs)** constitute an important force in capitalisation within each of the North Sea Region countries. With their national networks, knowledge about regional frameworks, and fluency in the national language, they are uniquely placed to spread the word within their country. Although the NCPs have quite different resources at their disposal, they all have some possibilities to drive capitalisation at national and local levels. The NCPs have expressed their interest in capitalisation and willingness to engage in this part of our work. Therefore, the secretariat cooperates closely with our NCPs around capitalisation.

Project people are another superpower in capitalisation, providing they are motivated and inspired to boost capitalisation of their projects. Previous experience has shown a high level of interest among our projects. In particular, project leaders, work package leaders, and communication specialists have a key role to play in this process.

Finally, we will engage with our **close allies** who may help in spreading the word about our project impacts. This includes, for example, the members of our Monitoring Committee and the North Sea Commission. We will seek to enable our allies to spread the word by providing them with attractive communication products and easy links.



Approach



7. Main tactics

In line with the goals outlined in chapter 3, the programme will support capitalisation mainly by:

- Supporting projects to capitalise on their work.
- Securing long-term visibility of the projects' work.
- Tracking and documenting project capitalisation.

The first two approaches support the primary goal, while the third approach supports the secondary goal set out in chapter 3.

The tactics and actions foreseen for each main approach are listed in chapters 8, 9, and 10. These approaches have been carefully selected to overcome the challenges and making the most of the opportunities described in chapter 5, and to best utilise the resources outlined in chapter 6.

We will further develop, revise and fine-tune them as we discover how theory and plans work in practice.



8. Supporting projects

Our projects are uniquely placed to work with the specific target groups that are relevant in their own context. The projects can increase their chances of capitalisation by taking a strategic approach early on, and we will guide and encourage our projects to do so.

To keep this manageable, we work mainly with the project leaders, work package leaders, and communication managers. These roles are best placed to drive the process of capitalisation and spread the message within their partnership.

We also seek to motivate our projects by integrating capitalisation in some of their dialogue with our project advisors and through the reporting system.

8.1 Capitalisation as a journey

To help projects, the secretariat has developed a concept where the capitalisation process is understood as an adventurous journey towards their main expected impacts (their "North Star").

The use of a journey as a metaphor is a way of inspiring projects to work towards capitalisation from an early stage. The idea of the partnership travelling together towards their North Star is powerful for motivating all partners to engage in capitalisation.



Seven essentials

The concept includes 7 “essentials” that the projects must “pack” in order to reach their “North Star”. The concept prompts projects to engage with their takers early on and help them through to the final stage of the engagement process outlined on page 9.



The 7 essentials that the projects must bring along on their capitalisation journey.

1) Future impact: The process starts with the 1-3 main impacts that the project wants to create. The impacts can be used as a basis for developing strong messaging and slogans.

2) Identify relevant work: The project then needs to define the “products” that can be transferred, scaled up, and built upon by others to create the envisaged impacts

3) Know your takers: Projects need to identify their main takers and understand the takers’ agenda. Takers can be broadly defined as, e.g., “municipalities” or “SMEs”. However, certain roles within each group are key. For example, in an SME this might include CEOs and certain experts.

4) Engage with takers: Armed with knowledge about their takers, the projects can engage with them through targeted messaging, using relevant channels and means.

5) Build your case: The projects must gather proof points and testimonials throughout the project, to help takers see why they should take up the project’s work.

6) Wrap your work: The project should provide its proof points and good case examples in formats that are attractive and shareable (infographics, videos, stories...).

7) Help your takers along: The project may offer to train and guide their takers if needed.



8.2 Project guidance

Based on the concept outlined in 8.1, the secretariat provides guidance to our projects. We aim to bring the concept of capitalisation from theory into practice. Each project needs to integrate its specifics into the general framework.

The main purpose of this is to inspire the projects to reach out to their takers early on and collect testimonials and factual evidence while they have the chance.

We will guide projects through the following actions:

- **Producing a project guide** to capitalisation.
- **Collecting and sharing good examples** of successful project capitalisation.
- **Asking projects to take a so-called "Impact challenge"**: At kick-off events and/or through dialogue, the project advisors challenge the partners to align on the 1-3 main impacts that the project expects to have during the project or beyond. This is an exercise for them to develop shared visions for how their project will change the world.
- **Organising how-to workshops and webinars** enabling the projects to get started on their capitalisation journey: How should an impact be formulated? Which products can the project capitalise on? Who are the takers? How can they best be reached? How can the project best showcase the benefits? Etcetera. A first workshop, TakeUP, was organised in June 2023, involving 50+ people from 32 projects approved in calls 1 and 2. The workshop received very positive feedback from the participants. Some of these events are a joint effort between the secretariat and the NCPs.
- **Offering support and assistance to projects** regarding capitalisation. This is an "open door" policy where projects can get in touch to discuss their actions and plans whenever they need to. The NCPs may also offer such support to partners in their own country, depending on their resources.

8.3 Capitalisation in applications and reporting

The VIB application and reporting system integrates capitalisation aspects. This reminds our projects about the importance of capitalisation. It also enables project advisors to spot any needs for support on capitalisation and to capture interesting developments.



How capitalisation aspects are covered

- *In the application form*, applicants need to clarify who will benefit from their outputs, and explain about the ownership, durability and transferability of the project's work. Finally, the "results" part specifically asks applicants to estimate a) the total number of solutions that will be taken up or upscaled by organisations and b) the total number of organisations with increased institutional capacity.
- *The progress reports* includes a section entitled Impact Challenge, asking projects to list their anticipated impacts and describe their progress towards achieving them.
- *The final report* (in process) will also include questions aiming to capture capitalisation.

8.4 Legacy article

Once projects are coming to an end, we invite them to author a North Sea Legacy story capturing their work and impacts. Alternatively, the secretariat offers to write such a story based on interviews with the project. To help our projects, we have developed a guide for North Sea Legacy article authors.

The legacy stories include links to the project website and direct links to any specific work that the reader might be interested in reusing (toolkits, methodologies, policy recommendations, etc.).

8.5 Thematic roundtables

Depending on available resources, the secretariat may set up online thematic roundtables for projects to share experience on generating uptake of their work within specific fields. The roundtables are work-intensive, however experience has shown that our projects very much appreciate and benefit from this type of mutual exchange.

8.6 Additional activities

European events and contests: The secretariat supports our projects to shine the light on their achievements in the context of European events, awards and contests. Examples include the EU Week of Regions and Cities, the Interreg Project Slam, EU Sustainable Energy Awards, and more.

These initiatives are linked to capitalisation because they focus on the projects' achievements. The selection criteria typically require projects to have produced strong results or impacts. Being nominated for or winning such awards brings instant visibility on the European scene.

Starting in 2024, we will more systematically encourage and support our projects to join the above-mentioned and other similar initiatives.



9. Promoting project work

The secretariat will also help showcase the projects' work and the benefits it brings, to help takers discover work that they may take up and reuse. The secretariat and the NCPs have the possibility to shine the light on projects and their achievements not only while they are still ongoing, but also after they have ended. To this end, we will take the following approaches.

9.1 A storytelling approach

We will maintain a strong focus on telling stories about our projects and how they have changed the world. Stories have a deeper impact on readers/viewers than facts on their own. While facts and figures are important, they should not stand alone. By using storytelling techniques, our communication is likely to be more effective.

A strong focus on engaging content

We aim for our stories and videos to be entertaining while informative. Visual storytelling and the use of plain language are important parts of this.

We also aim for some stories to focus on people – in particular the “end users”, i.e., those who ultimately benefit from our projects' work. Giving farmers, SMEs, citizens, or other end users their own voice can make a story more engaging.

9.2 A thematic approach

We will compile projects and their impacts into different themes that are of top interest in our region. In the VB period, we have defined 12 themes¹. This makes it easier to promote their work towards their takers and to make it more findable on the web.

The list of themes may be revised or expanded in the new programme, however the approach of communicating by theme remains very valid. This will be further expanded in the new programme, including a more targeted approach to promoting videos (see below).

9.3 A sectoral approach

The majority of takers of North Sea project work are found in five sectors:

1. Policymakers at European, national, regional, and local level.
2. Public authorities at national, regional, and local level.
3. Knowledge institutions.
4. Private companies.
5. Civil society organisations.

¹ Renewable energy, liveability, green transport, climate adaptation, blue economy, circular economy, new markets, sustainable farming, energy efficiency, digital transformation, ecosystem management, and water governance.



Tailoring communication towards these sectors could be key to generating uptake. This may involve showcasing how organisations in the same sector have benefitted from project outcomes. This can be done in different formats such as (video) testimonials, quotes, stories, case studies, publications, and via virtual or physical events.

9.4 A geographic approach

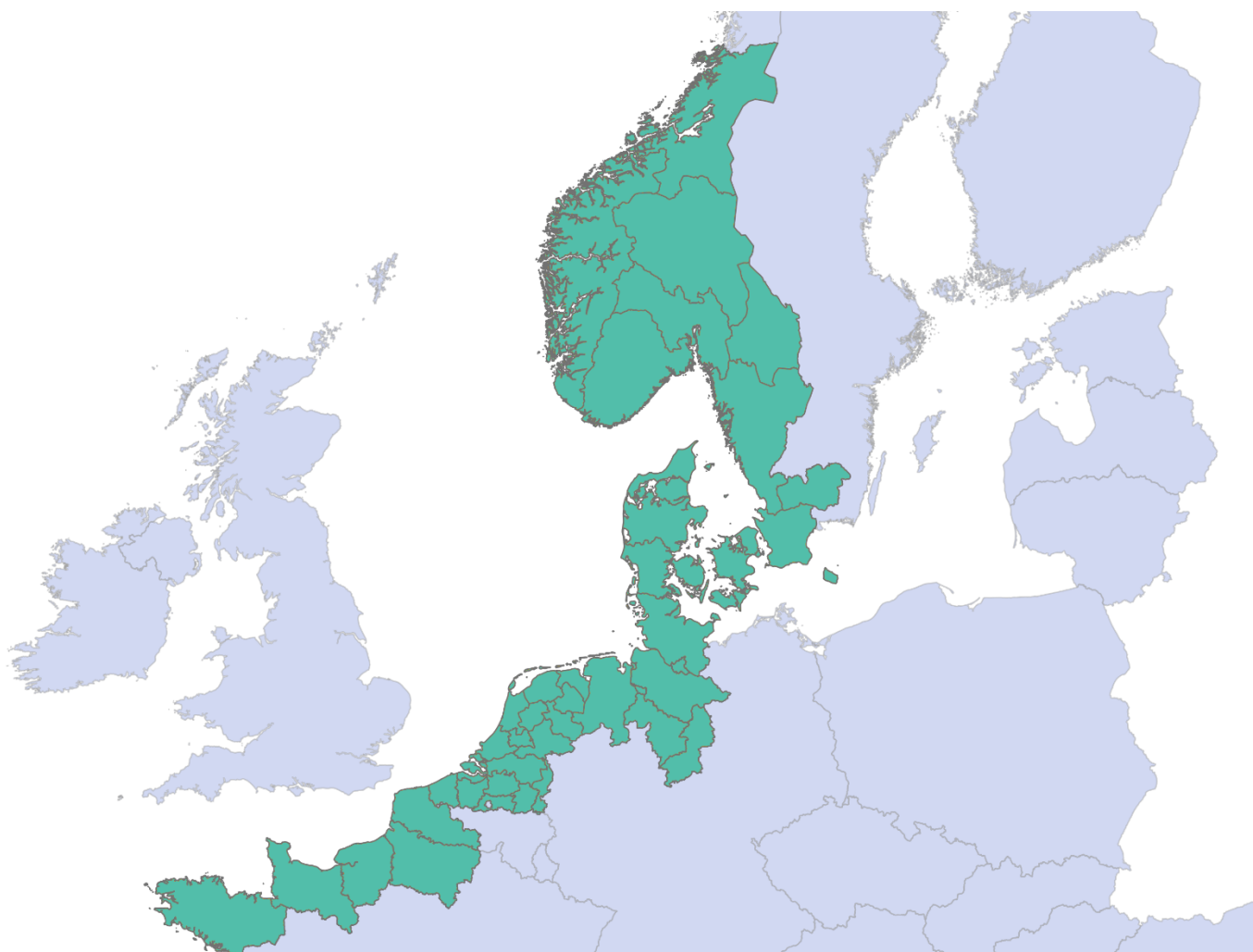
Showcasing the benefits of our projects' work within each country or region can greatly strengthen our reach. In the VIB period, we will therefore focus more on informing at national and sub-national levels, in addition to the overall communication done by the secretariat.

Once we have compiled good examples from the individual country, this can potentially be further structured and presented by topic and/or by sector, as explained in sections 9.2 and 9.3.

A key role for National Contact Points

We aim to identify and publicise good examples of projects delivering benefits in each member country and promote these cases at national and subnational level. We will support the NCPs to contribute to this work. Being familiar with the regional frameworks and speaking the local languages, our NCPs are uniquely placed to promote project work within their countries. We therefore seek to engage strongly with the NCPs around this part of our capitalisation efforts.

A focus on national and sub-national dissemination represents a new level of cooperation with our NCPs within communication. Initial dialogue has shown that NCPs are clearly motivated to take an active role in capitalisation within their respective countries.



9.5 Digital platforms

We aim to showcase our projects' achievements on our own websites and on other platforms with a high visibility.

Programme websites

Given the amount of traffic on our programme websites, they can play a role in helping takers discover work of interest for them.

Our current [programme website](#) was launched in October 2022. It incorporates all the VIB project websites including news about their work and important documents. In addition, the website showcases project achievements and impacts from both the VIB and VB programme periods.

We showcase project work, achievements and impacts in the following ways:

- *Impact by topic:* We will develop and expand our [impact section](#) showcasing VB project successes within 12 main themes. Each theme has a web page linking to all relevant project websites. As the VIB projects mature, they will come more into focus.
- *Videos capturing project work or impacts:* We seek to promote videos showcasing project successes on our website.
- *Legacy blog articles* (see section 8.4) capture the main outcomes of our projects as they are closing.
- *The project websites* are embedded in the North Sea Programme website, thus benefitting from the visibility of the entire site. We expect and encourage our projects to showcase their work on their websites.

Our VB programme website incorporates the VB project websites and showcases their impacts. This website will be archived during 2024 and kept online at least until 2029.

Our IIB and IVB programme websites are online in an archived state, offering insights into project highlights and achievements. These platforms will be also kept online until 2029.

YouTube channel

As part of a general effort to enhance the programme's YouTube channel, we are creating playlists specifically with capitalisation mind. For example, one playlist includes programme videos highlighting selected projects' achievements and impacts, such as the Let's North Sea! video series produced in 2022-2023.

We will also create thematic playlists, similar to the impact pages, consisting of high-quality videos produced by the projects.



Social media

While social media are characterised by being fast and dynamic, they are important in driving traffic to stories and videos about our project's work. We will explore ways to work with social media in a more effective and targeted way for our capitalisation purposes.

External platforms

In addition to our own platforms, there are opportunities to feature projects at some external sites. We aim to discover and make use of such opportunities. For example:

- The InfoRegio site features selected projects.
- The PANORAMA Magazine published by DG Regio has a very wide circulation and is published both online and in print format.
- DG Regio sometimes puts out calls for stories in a certain category.
- We will support the NCPs to showcase North Sea projects on any national or sub-national portals featuring EU-funded projects.



10 Tracking capitalisation

The long-term benefits of our funding will often go unnoticed without a conscious effort to track them. Understanding the real scale of the impacts of our funding provides an important basis for evaluations of programme performance and informs future decision-making.

Also, stories about capitalisation can catalyse additional uptake and reuse of project work by making it visible on a broader scale. Finally, such tracking helps in understanding the effectiveness of this strategy.

We seek to track capitalisation in the following ways:

- We monitor and follow the progress of our projects. We do this via project websites, progress reports, and final reports. In addition, project advisors and the communications team are in regular contact with the projects. This enables the secretariat to capture capitalisation happening before project end.
- Our legacy stories aim to capture any capitalisation that has happened during the project lifetime.
- Starting with the VB projects, we have adopted a procedure for conducting follow-up calls with project leaders 1-2 years after project closure. These interviews will focus on gathering information about capitalisation happening since the project closed. We will compile and use the information gathered to evaluate the initial level of capitalisation happening in our programme.
- To the furthest extent possible, we also seek to identify long-term impacts from the IIIB (2002-2006) and IVB (2007-2013) programme periods. This will be done on a more selective basis due to time constraints and the fact that some project participants may no longer be possible to reach.



11 Exchange & cooperation

The Interreg North Sea Programme does not operate in isolation. We are part of the Interreg family of programmes, and mutual exchange and sharing of approaches have so far been very useful in our work on capitalisation. This includes the capitalisation network set up by Interact, tailored support on capitalisation provided to our programme, and the regular exchanges between communication staff of the transnational Interreg programmes.

Going forward, we will continue to engage with our colleagues in the other Interreg programmes, both bilaterally and by participating in meetings and initiatives led by Interact and DG Regio.

In the past, this has often involved joint campaigns and events that have inspired our work. Examples from recent years include joint social media campaigns, articles for the Interact blog, a joint series of podcast episodes, joint stands at key events, and more. We will continue and strengthen our transnational cooperation around disseminating impacts and fostering uptake of project work.



Evaluation



12 Annual evaluation

At the end of each calendar year, the secretariat will evaluate the strategy including the status of its implementation and the outcome of the actions taken.

The evaluation will include lessons learned and review inputs received from our National Contact Points, our projects, and other stakeholders. As a result, the strategy may be revised and adjusted.

The annual evaluations will take place in December of each calendar year, starting in December 2023. A methodology for the evaluation will be developed in conjunction with the first evaluation.





*Helping innovators in the North Sea Region
realise their game-changing ideas*

