



The Interim Evaluation of Objective 2 Programmes

IQ-Net Thematic Paper 2(1)

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Improving the Quality of Structural Fund
Programming through Exchange of
Experience***

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Preface

IQ-NET: Networking to improve the quality of Objective 2 programmes

Launched in early 1996 and managed by the *European Policies Research Centre* (EPRC) at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, the network *IQ-NET* facilitates exchange of experience in the development, implementation and evaluation of Objective 2 programmes. Funded by a consortium of 13 Objective 2 areas and the European Commission (DG XVI), the network meets twice a year to examine issues of practical relevance to programme-makers and share examples of good, innovative and distinctive practice from across the EU. The first two meetings were held in Glasgow, in association with Strathclyde European Partnership (February 1996), and in Cardiff, hosted by the Welsh Office and Welsh Development Agency (September 1996). The third and most recent meeting was held in April 1997 in Gelsenkirchen, Nordrhein Westfalen. Meetings provide the opportunity to discuss the results of a structured programme of applied research and debate, steered by the network's partner regions:

- Steiermark and Niederösterreich, Austria
- Nordjylland, Denmark
- Päijät-Häme and South Karelia, Finland
- Aquitaine and Rhône Alpes, France
- Nordrhein Westfalen and Saarland, Germany
- Ångermanlandskusten and Fyrstad, Sweden
- Industrial South Wales and Western Scotland, UK

IQ-NET Thematic Papers

This document contains the second series of thematic papers produced by EPRC in spring 1997 as part of *IQ-NET*'s applied research programme:

- Series 2, No 1: Interim Evaluation.
- Series 2, No 2: Synergy between the Structural Funds
- Series 2, No 3: Environmental integration in Objective 2 programmes
- Series 2, No 4: The Objective 2 Programme of Nordrhein Westfalen

It supplements the following *IQ-NET* papers produced in 1996:

- Series 1, No 1: Managing the Structural Funds.
- Series 1, No 2: RTD/Innovation policies in Objective 2 programmes.
- Series 1, No 3: Generating Good Projects.
- Series 1, No 4: Monitoring and Evaluation.

Focusing on topics selected by the network's partner regions, each paper places issues in their international context, raises questions for debate and highlights distinctive and innovative practices. For the convenience of readers, executive summaries are included in French, German and English.

Papers are first drafted on the basis of field research (encompassing interviews with Objective 2 programme managers and partners at regional, Member State and Commission levels) and substantial desk research. They are then modified to reflect the discussions of the *IQ-NET* meeting and the comments of network sponsors. The papers are distributed to a wide group of people nominated by the sponsors. The EPRC welcomes comment and feedback on them.

Readers are reminded that the content of the papers does not necessarily represent the official position of either the partner regions or the Commission, and that errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the authors alone.

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Translations were carried out by Ingrid Schumacher (German) and Lexus in Glasgow (French).

Further Information

Additional copies of the papers and further information on *IQ-NET* can be obtained from John Bachtler and Sandra Taylor, managers of the network, at the EPRC. The December 1996 and June 1997 editions of '*IQ-NET Bulletin*', a newsletter co-financed by DG XVI and available from EPRC, contain synopses of the papers.

The Interim Evaluation of Objective 2 Programmes

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Executive Summaries

The Interim Evaluation of Objective 2 Programmes

Évaluation Intermédiaire des Programmes d'Objectif 2

Zwischenevaluierung von Ziel-2-Programmen

1. THE INTERIM EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVE 2 PROGRAMMES

1.1 Introduction

The importance of interim evaluation, currently completed or underway in the majority of Objective 2 areas, lies in its potential to have an immediate influence on the operational focus and balance of programmes by assessing implementation to date. This summary paper provides a brief overview of the often widely differing approaches to interim evaluation, and covers aspects including the rationale, current status, objectives, initial results and dissemination options of the studies. The longer paper deals with these topics in considerably greater detail, analysing in more depth the framework and practice of the evaluation exercise, the initial results (where available) of the interim evaluations in a number of areas as well as the possibilities for their dissemination.

1.2 The Rationale for Interim Evaluation

The European Commission views interim assessment as a key part of the monitoring process. It can, for example, highlight weaknesses in monitoring systems and data as well as providing valuable information on progress in implementation - something particularly important for new Member States. In some cases it provided guidance for approaches to the 1997-99 programmes. The Commission also views interim evaluation as a potential asset to programme management.

1.3 Organising Interim Evaluation

In reviewing the *current status* of the interim evaluation process in Objective 2 areas, three main elements can be highlighted: the coverage of the evaluations; their timetable; and their management. In terms of *coverage*, evaluation studies are being carried out more systematically than in the 1989-93 period, but are still not universal. In the UK, for example, interim evaluation is largely limited to Scotland, while the other UK regions propose to produce enhanced annual reports instead.

Overview of interim evaluations in Objective 2 areas

Objective 2 region	Monitoring Committees	Evaluations	Report submission
Austria	4 (SPD)	4 external	2 reports (late 1997)
Belgium - Flanders	2 (SPD)	1 external	4 yearly reports - 1 report Nov. 1996
Belgium - Wallonia	2 (SPD)	1 external	1 report (March 1997)
Denmark	2 (SPD)	1 external	1 report (draft September 1996)
Finland	1 (SPD)	1 external	1 report (early 1997)
France	19 (SPD)	17 external (2 to be selected)	7 reports done, 10 expected (May/June 1997)
Germany	1 national 5 regional sub-committees	5 external 5 internal	March/April 1997

Italy	11 (SPD)	5 external selected so far	2-4 reports?
Luxembourg	1 (SPD)	1 external	First report June 1996, second February 1997
Netherlands	5 (SPD)	3 external	Reports done September 1996
Spain	1 CSF 7 regional sub-committees	3 external selected so far	1 report expected June 1996
Sweden	5 (SPD)	5 external	2 reports expected
UK	13 (SPD)		2 reports

The *timetable* over which the interim evaluations are being conducted varies significantly between regions, ranging from 4-6 months in Aquitaine and Western Scotland to around a year in Austria, NRW and Fyrstad in Sweden. Regions such as Aquitaine, North Jutland and NRW started the evaluation in April 1996 with the aim of using the results for reprogramming purposes while new Member State have tended to start later, reflecting a later programme launch.

Timetable of Objective 2 interim evaluations

	1996 (April-December)									1997 (January-December)											
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Aquitaine																					
Rhône Alpes																					
Western Scotland																					
South Wales																					
Fyrstad																					
Ängermanlandskusten																					
Nordjylland																					
Saarland (ERDF)																					
Saarland (ESF)																					
Nordrhein Westfalen																					
Steiermark																					
Niederösterreich																					
Päijät-Häme																					
South Karelia																					

No standard approach exists to *managing* the evaluation process. The basic terms of reference provided by the Commission were generally adapted to suit particular national and regional circumstances. Certain national government authorities have established an overall evaluation framework or common guidelines, such as the Scottish Office and Department of Environment guidance notes in the UK. With its lack of previous evaluation culture, Austria has established an evaluation resource and research centre, and organised more specific exchange of experience meetings for evaluators of different Objective areas.

The majority of regions use some form of advisory group or steering committee to accompany the evaluation. These range in remit from effectively running the evaluation study and promoting communication on evaluation issues (eg. Aquitaine) to having more of an advisory or consultative function (such as those in Austrian, Denmark, Sweden).

1.4 Aims and Coverage of the Studies

The *aims and objectives* of the current group of interim evaluations vary considerably, reflecting the political and administrative priorities of the

programme management authorities. Six sets of objectives can be identified which appear to varying degrees in all the individual evaluations:

- progress monitoring, or the measurement and assessment of outputs to date;
- impact assessment;
- review of the relevance of the programme in relation to its objectives;
- assessment of management performance;
- development of an evaluation framework for the *ex post* evaluation; and,
- proposals for adjustments to the programme or individual elements within it, if required.

The depth of the evaluation also varies, ranging from data collection exercises to comprehensive assessments of progress and performance. Partly due to problems with programme implementation, many evaluations appear to be primarily focused on the process of Structural Fund management. Indicator development is often designed more to improve impact evaluation at a later date.

Two interesting approaches can be seen in the Danish and North Rhine Westphalian (NRW) evaluation studies. In Denmark, a *thematic* focus was integrated into the study, resulting from the wish to focus on issues of key concern to the programme partnership. The interim evaluation was divided into two parts - a general evaluation common to both Objective 2 areas and a thematic element specific to each programme. In NRW, the evaluation remit included an analysis beyond the current programming period to incorporate the long-term results of earlier periods. As in Austria, the evaluators also compared the NRW programme with other Objective 2 programmes to identify the widest possible number of potentially transferable alternatives.

In relation to the objective of *programme modification*, it is notable that some regions have been cautious about committing themselves to significant corrective actions. This is generally related to the issue of time - either that there is too little time for any major changes to come into effect or, as is the case in Austria, that substantial administrative time is required to agree and implement even minor amendments.

1.5 Results

The variable timescales of the interim evaluation exercises across the Member States mean that evaluation *results* are not ready for many regions. However, results are available for North Jutland, Western Scotland and Aquitaine, as well as initial findings for the Swedish, Finnish and German Objective 2 regions. The aim here is simply to highlight a few of the region-specific findings, covering both positive and negative aspects which have emerged.

On the positive side, the North Jutland programme, for example, has funded good quality and imaginative projects and improved the usage made by firms of further training. In the West of Scotland, Sweden and Finland, despite the late approval of the programmes, the evaluations show that implementation is running well, in many cases making up for lost time. The Saarland evaluation

results point to successful projects under the environmental priority, which have shown physical improvements and qualitative - although unquantifiable - effects.

The evaluations have also highlighted difficulties with programme management structures or processes. As in many regions, the West of Scotland has experienced problems in implementing ESF, the nature of the system apparently reducing the quality and quantity of training conducted and hindering an effective strategy. The level of frustration with the system was shown to be high. Problems highlighted in other countries include the barrier to implementation posed by the sectoral divisions in the Finnish administrative system and the lack of innovative projects generated.

It is too early to discuss how most regions have acted to *disseminate* the results of interim evaluation. The Communication Plan produced by MEANS is likely to be too elaborate for most regions, although the group's more general suggestions, such as tailoring different types of document for different audiences and phasing the dissemination process to suit key committee deadlines, are more practical. Some regions already inform the media of progress, although experience has shown that there is often relatively little press interest in this area.

The way in which interim evaluation can be used to *improve programme management and implementation* and can be seen in a number of areas. First, where the evaluation was carried out early enough, the results were used to influence the strategic direction of the new programmes. In Aquitaine, for example, the evaluation led to the priorities and measures of the new 1997-99 programme being more structured and focused. Second, results have implications for programme management structures, for example the speeding-up of the payment system and the medium-term goal of decentralising financial management systems in Sweden. Third, the credibility of the programmes can be improved within the wider regional partnerships, some regions considering the participation of partners in the evaluation process as one of the principal benefits of the exercise. Fourth, greater awareness among partners has affected project selection procedures (in North Jutland, for example), leading to greater focus and consideration of project size, smaller firms and longer-term employment effects. Finally, a common conclusion from interim evaluation studies was the need for monitoring and evaluation systems to be improved.

1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, interim evaluation is contributing to increased awareness and understanding among national, regional and local actors of the purpose, conduct and potential value of evaluation. This wider knowledge has had further positive ramifications on the quality of the programmes themselves. However, questions remain about the desirability or value of interim evaluation in some countries or regions - reflected in the fact that certain regions have not undertaken a full interim evaluation and an evaluation culture is far from universal.

Against this background, the future of evaluation has improved but is still not secure. The perceived excessive demands of the Commission may be viewed

negatively and future evaluation will require greater focus, relevance and continuity. More emphasis on thematic aspects, either process issues or specific themes, as well as a longer-term approach to evaluation would both be beneficial. Alternative options include a single in-depth study per programming period, timed to feed into the *ex ante* evaluation for the next programme and incorporating elements of current interim and *ex post* evaluations. Finally, regions might be more encouraged to act on evaluation results if the substance and timing of the process were more relevant, with stronger support from Commission services and rapid approval of changes arising from the evaluation exercise.

2. ÉVALUATION INTERMÉDIAIRE DES PROGRAMMES D'OBJECTIF 2

2.1 Introduction

L'importance de l'évaluation intermédiaire, actuellement effectuée ou en cours dans la plupart des régions d'Objectif 2, réside dans son potentiel à avoir une influence immédiate sur la façon d'opérer et sur l'équilibre des programmes en évaluant la mise en œuvre jusqu'à présent. Cet exposé offre une brève vue d'ensemble des approches souvent très divergentes de l'évaluation intermédiaire, et couvre des aspects comme les motifs, l'état actuel, les objectifs, les résultats initiaux et les options pour la diffusion des études. Un exposé plus long traite de ces questions de façon beaucoup plus détaillée et analyse de façon plus approfondie le cadre et la pratique de l'évaluation, les résultats initiaux (le cas échéant) des évaluations intermédiaires dans un certain nombre de domaines ainsi que leurs possibilités de diffusion.

2.2 Les motifs de l'évaluation intermédiaire

La Commission européenne considère l'évaluation intermédiaire comme représentant un aspect clé du processus de suivi, pouvant, par exemple, mettre en lumière des faiblesses éventuelles dans les systèmes de suivi et les données et fournir des informations précieuses sur le progrès de la mise en œuvre - chose particulièrement importante pour les nouveaux Etats-membres. Dans certains cas, elle a guidé l'approche des programmes pour la période 1997-99. La Commission envisage aussi l'évaluation intermédiaire comme un atout potentiel dans le cadre de la gestion des programmes.

2.3 Organisation de l'appréciation intermédiaire

Dans le cadre de l'examen de l'*état actuel* du processus d'évaluation intermédiaire dans les régions d'Objectif 2, trois éléments principaux peuvent être soulignés: la portée des évaluations, leur calendrier, et leur gestion. S'agissant de la *portée*, les études d'évaluation sont effectuées plus systématiquement qu'au cours de la période 1989-93, mais ne sont toujours pas universelles. Au Royaume-Uni par exemple, les évaluations intermédiaires sont largement limitées à l'Ecosse, tandis que les autres régions se proposent de produire des comptes rendus annuels plus détaillés.

Vue d'ensemble des évaluations intermédiaires dans les régions d'Objectif 2

Régions d'Objectif 2	Comités de suivi	Évaluations	Soumission de rapports
Allemagne	1 comité national 5 sous-comités régionaux	5 externes 5 internes	mars/avril 1997
Autriche	4 (DOCUP)	4 externes	2 comptes rendus (fin 1997)
Belgique - Flandres	2 (DOCUP)	1 externe	4 comptes rendus annuels - 1 compte rendu nov. 1996
Belgique - Wallonie	2 (DOCUP)	1 externe	1 compte rendu (mars 1997)
Danemark	2 (DOCUP)	1 externe	1 compte rendu (projet septembre 1996)
Espagne	1 CCA 7 sous-comités régionaux	3 externes sélectionnés	1 compte rendu attendu en juin 1996

		jusqu'à présent	
Finlande	1 (DOCUP)	1 externe	1 compte rendu (début 1997)
France	19 (DOCUP)	17 externes (2 à sélectionner)	7 comptes rendus terminés, 10 attendus (mai/juin 1997)
Italie	11 (DOCUP)	5 externes sélectionnés jusqu'à présent	2-4 comptes rendus?
Luxembourg	1 (DOCUP)	1 externe	Premier compte rendu juin 1996, second compte rendu février 1997
Pays-Bas	5 (DOCUP)	3 externes	Comptes rendus effectués en septembre 1996
R.-U.	13 (DOCUP)		2 comptes rendus
Suède	5 (DOCUP)	5 externes	2 comptes rendus attendus

Le *calendrier* des évaluations intermédiaires varie de façon significative selon les régions, allant de 4 à 6 mois en Aquitaine et dans l'ouest de l'Ecosse à environ un an en Autriche, en RNW et dans le Fyrstad en Suède. Les régions comme l'Aquitaine, le Nordjylland et la RNW ont commencé l'évaluation en avril 1996, avec pour but d'utiliser les résultats pour la nouvelle programmation, tandis que les nouveaux Etats-membres ont eu tendance à commencer plus tard, ce qui reflète un lancement de programme plus tardif.

Calendrier des évaluations intermédiaires d'Objectif 2

	1996 (avril-décembre)									1997 (janvier-décembre)											
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Aquitaine																					
Rhône-Alpes																					
Ouest de l'Ecosse																					
Sud du pays de Galles																					
Fyrstad																					
Ängermanlandskusten																					
Nordjylland																					
Sarre (FEDER)																					
Sarre (FSE)																					
Rhén. du N.-Westph.																					
Styrie																					
Basse-Autriche																					
Päijät-Häme																					
S. Karelia																					

Il n'existe pas d'approche standard s'agissant de la *gestion* du processus d'évaluation. Le mandat de base de la Commission a été généralement adapté aux circonstances nationales et régionales particulières. Certaines administrations nationales ont établi un cadre global d'évaluation ou des directives communes, comme les notes fournies à titre d'indication par le Ministère des affaires écossaises et le Ministère de l'environnement au Royaume-Uni. N'ayant pas d'expérience préalable en matière d'évaluation, l'Autriche a établi un centre de ressources et de recherches en matière d'évaluation, et a organisé des réunions plus spécifiques d'échange d'expériences pour les évaluateurs des régions d'Objectifs différents.

Dans la plupart des régions, une sorte de groupe de conseil ou de comité directeur va de pair avec l'évaluation. Sa compétence peut aller de l'organisation effective de l'étude d'évaluation et de l'encouragement de la communication sur les questions d'évaluation (par exemple en Aquitaine) à une fonction davantage axée sur le conseil ou la consultation (comme en Autriche, au Danemark et en Suède).

2.4 Objectifs et portée des études

Les *buts et objectifs* des évaluations intermédiaires actuelles varient considérablement, reflétant les priorités administratives et politiques des administrations chargées de la gestion des programmes. Il est possible d'identifier six catégories d'objectifs présents à des degrés divers dans toutes les évaluations individuelles:

- suivi des progrès, ou mesure et évaluation des résultats à ce jour;
- évaluation de l'impact;
- examen de la pertinence du programme par rapport à ses objectifs;
- évaluation des performances de l'administration des programmes;
- développement d'un cadre d'évaluation pour l'évaluation *ex post*; et,
- propositions d'ajustement du programme ou d'éléments distincts au sein de celui-ci, si nécessaire.

Le degré de profondeur de l'évaluation varie également, allant des collectes de données à des évaluations complètes des progrès et des performances. En partie en raison de problèmes de mise en œuvre, de nombreuses évaluations semblent principalement axées sur le processus d'administration des Fonds Structurels. Le développement d'indicateurs vise souvent davantage à améliorer l'évaluation de l'impact à une date ultérieure.

Les études d'évaluation au Danemark et en Rhénanie du Nord-Westphalie (RNW) révèlent deux démarches intéressantes. Au Danemark, un axe *thématique* a été intégré dans l'étude, ce qui découle du souhait de se concentrer sur des problèmes représentant une préoccupation majeure pour le partenariat du programme. L'évaluation intermédiaire a été divisée en deux parties: une évaluation générale commune aux deux régions d'Objectif 2 et un élément thématique spécifique à chaque programme. En RNW, la portée de l'évaluation faisait intervenir une analyse dépassant la période actuelle de programmation pour incorporer les résultats à long terme des périodes précédentes. Comme en Autriche, les évaluateurs ont aussi comparé le programme de la RNW avec d'autres programmes d'Objectif 2 pour identifier le plus grand nombre possible d'alternatives transférables.

En ce qui concerne l'objectif de *modification de programme*, il est à noter que certaines régions hésitent à s'engager à prendre des mesures correctives significatives. Ceci est généralement lié à une question de temps, soit qu'il n'y ait pas assez de temps pour que des changements importants puissent prendre effet, soit, comme dans le cas de l'Autriche, qu'un important délai administratif soit nécessaire pour approuver et mettre en œuvre des modifications, même mineures.

2.5 Résultats

Les durées variables de l'exercice d'évaluation intermédiaire dans les différents Etats-membres font que les *résultats* de l'évaluation de nombreuses régions ne sont pas prêts. Cependant, les résultats sont disponibles pour le Nordjylland, l'ouest de l'Ecosse et l'Aquitaine, ainsi que les résultats initiaux pour les régions d'Objectif 2 en Suède, en Finlande et en Allemagne.

L'objectif ici est simplement de mettre en lumière quelques-uns des résultats spécifiques à une région particulière, couvrant les aspects positifs et négatifs qui ont été révélés.

Sur le plan positif, le programme du Nordjylland, par exemple, a financé des projets de bonne qualité et originaux, et a amélioré l'utilisation de la formation continue par les entreprises. Dans l'ouest de l'Ecosse, en Suède et en Finlande, malgré l'approbation tardive des programmes, les évaluations montrent que la mise en œuvre se passe bien et que, dans de nombreux cas, le temps perdu est en train d'être rattrapé. Les résultats de l'évaluation de la Sarre indiquent des projets réussis dans le cadre de la priorité protection de l'environnement, qui se sont traduits par des améliorations physiques et des effets qualitatifs mais non quantifiables.

Les évaluations ont aussi révélé des difficultés au niveau des structures ou processus d'administration des programmes. Comme de nombreuses autres régions, l'ouest de l'Ecosse a rencontré des problèmes dans la mise en vigueur du FSE, la nature du système réduisant apparemment la qualité et la quantité de la formation effectuée, et s'opposant à une stratégie efficace. Le niveau de frustration occasionnée par le système est apparu comme étant élevé. Parmi les problèmes révélés dans les autres pays, il faut citer l'obstacle à la mise en œuvre posé par les divisions sectorielles dans le système administratif finlandais et l'absence de projets innovants générés.

Dans le cas de la plupart des régions, il est trop tôt pour discuter des mesures prises pour *diffuser* les résultats de l'évaluation intermédiaire. Le projet de communication produit par MEANS risque d'être trop élaboré pour la plupart des régions, bien que les suggestions plus générales, comme celle consistant à adapter les différents types de documents à différents publics et à étaler le processus de diffusion en fonction des dates butoirs des principaux comités, soient plus pratiques. Certaines régions informent déjà la presse de l'évolution, bien que l'expérience révèle que ce domaine suscite peu d'intérêt de la part de la presse.

La façon dont l'évaluation intermédiaire peut être utilisée pour *améliorer la gestion et la mise en œuvre des programmes* apparaît dans divers domaines. Premièrement, là où l'évaluation a été effectuée assez tôt, les résultats ont été utilisés pour influencer la direction stratégique des nouveaux programmes. En Aquitaine, par exemple, l'évaluation a entraîné une structuration et un centrage accrus des priorités et mesures pour le nouveau programme 1997-99. Deuxièmement, les résultats ont des implications pour les structures d'administration des programmes, par exemple l'accélération du système de paiement et l'objectif à moyen terme de décentralisation des systèmes de gestion financière en Suède. Troisièmement, la crédibilité des programmes peut être améliorée au sein des partenariats régionaux plus larges, certaines régions considérant la participation des partenaires dans le processus d'évaluation comme étant l'un des principaux avantages de cet exercice. Quatrièmement, une prise de conscience accrue entre les partenaires a influencé les procédures de sélection de projets (dans le Nordjylland par exemple), d'où une plus grande focalisation et une meilleure prise en compte de la taille des projets, des plus petites entreprises et des effets sur l'emploi à

plus long terme. Enfin, le besoin d'améliorer les systèmes d'évaluation et de suivi est ressorti en conclusion de toutes les études d'évaluation intermédiaire.

2.6 Conclusion

En conclusion, l'évaluation intermédiaire contribue à une prise de conscience et à une compréhension accrues parmi les acteurs au niveau national, régional et local de l'objectif, de la conduite et de la valeur potentielle de l'évaluation. Cette connaissance accrue a eu d'autres répercussions positives sur la qualité des programmes à proprement parler. Reste cependant à savoir si l'évaluation intermédiaire est désirable ou utile dans certains pays ou régions, incertitude reflétée par le fait que certaines régions n'ont pas effectué d'évaluation intermédiaire complète, et que les évaluations sont loin de rentrer dans les mœurs.

Dans ce contexte, l'avenir de l'évaluation est meilleur mais reste incertain. Les exigences de la Commission, perçues comme excessives, peuvent être envisagées sous un angle négatif et une évaluation à venir exigera une plus grande concentration, une plus grande pertinence et davantage de continuité. Il serait bon d'accentuer davantage les aspects thématiques, qu'il s'agisse de questions de processus ou de thèmes spécifiques, et d'adopter une approche à plus long terme de l'évaluation. Parmi les autres options, citons une étude unique approfondie par période de programmation, prévue pour s'intégrer dans l'évaluation *ex ante* pour le programme suivant et incorporant des éléments des évaluations intermédiaires et *ex post* actuelles. Enfin, un processus ayant une substance et un calendrier mieux adaptés, avec un soutien accru de la part des services de la Commission et une approbation rapide des changements découlant de l'évaluation, seraient peut être davantage de nature à inciter les régions à tenir compte dans leurs actions des résultats de l'évaluation.

3. ZWISCHENEVALUIERUNG VON ZIEL-2-PROGRAMMEN

3.1 Einführung

Die Bedeutung der Zwischenevaluierung, die derzeit in der Mehrzahl der Ziel-2-Gebiete im Gange ist, liegt in ihrem Potential, durch die Bewertung der bisherigen Umsetzung sofortigen Einfluß auf die operationelle Ausrichtung und das Gleichgewicht von Programmen nehmen zu können. Diese zusammenfassende Arbeit gibt einen kurzen Überblick über die oft stark unterschiedlichen Ansätze zur Zwischenevaluierung und erfaßt Aspekte wie Gründe, derzeitigen Status, Ziele, erste Ergebnisse und Verbreitungsoptionen für die Studien. Die längere Arbeit befaßt sich weit ausführlicher mit diesen Themen und analysiert gründlicher den Rahmen und die Praxis der Evaluierung, die ersten Ergebnisse (sofern vorhanden) der Zwischenevaluierungen in einer Reihe von Gebieten sowie die Möglichkeiten für ihre Verbreitung.

3.2 Die Gründe für die Zwischenevaluierung

Die Europäische Kommission betrachtet die Zwischenevaluierung als maßgeblichen Teil des Begleitprozesses. Sie kann z.B. Schwächen der Begleitsysteme und Daten beleuchten sowie wertvolle Informationen über die Fortschritte der Umsetzung liefern - was besonders für die neuen Mitgliedsstaaten wichtig ist. In einigen Fällen gab sie Anhaltspunkte für den Ansatz zu den Programmen für 1989 -99. Die Kommission betrachtet die Evaluierung auch als potentielle Hilfe für das Programmanagement.

3.3 Organisation der Zwischenevaluierungen

Bei der Betrachtung des Zwischenevaluierungsprozesses in Ziel-2-Gebieten lassen sich drei Hauptelemente herausstellen: der Umfang der Evaluierungen; ihr Zeitplan; und ihr Management. Was den *Umfang* anbelangt, so werden Evaluierungsstudien nun zwar systematischer als im Zeitraum 1989-93 durchgeführt, sind aber immer noch nicht global. Im Vereinigten Königreich z.B. ist die Zwischenevaluierung weitgehend auf Schottland beschränkt, während die anderen britischen Regionen statt dessen ausführlichere Jahresberichte vorschlagen.

Überblick über Zwischenevaluierungen in Ziel-2-Gebieten

Ziel 2 Region	Begleitausschüsse	Evaluierungen	Eingereichte Berichte
Österreich	4 (EPPD)	4 extern	2 Berichte (Ende 1997)
Belgien - Flandern	2 (EPPD)	1 extern	4 Jahresberichte - 1 Bericht Nov. 1996)
Belgien - Wallonien	2 (EPPD)	1 extern	1 Bericht (März 1997)
Dänemark	2 (EPPD)	1 extern	1 Bericht (Entwurf September 1996)
Finnland	1 (EPPD)	1 extern	1 Bericht (Anfang 1997)
Frankreich	19 (EPPD)	17 extern (2 zu wählen)	7 Berichte eingereicht, 10 zu erwarten (Mai/Juni 1997)
Deutschland	1 nationaler 5 regionale Unterausschüsse	5 extern 5 intern	März/April 1997
Italien	11 (EPPD)	5 extern bisher gewählt	2-4 Berichte

Luxemburg	1 (EPPD)	1 extern	Erster Bericht Juni 1996, zweiter Februar 1997
Niederlande	5 (EPPD)	3 extern	Berichte im September 1996 erstellt
Spanien	1 GFK 7 regionale Unterausschüsse	3 extern bisher gewählt	1 Bericht im Juni 1996 erwartet
Schweden	5 (EPPD)	5 extern	2 Berichte erwartet
Vereinigtes Königreich	13 (EPPD)		2 Berichte

Der *Zeitplan* für die Durchführung der Evaluierungen variiert beträchtlich je nach Region - von 4-6 Monaten in Aquitaine und Westschottland zu etwa einem Jahr in Österreich, NRW und Fyrstad in Schweden. Regionen wie Aquitaine, Nord-Jutland und NRW begannen mit der Evaluierung im April 1996, um die Ergebnisse für Umprogrammierungszwecke verwenden zu können, während neue Mitgliedsstaaten im allgemeinen später begannen, was den späteren Programmbeginn reflektiert.

Zeitplan der Ziel 2 Zwischenevaluierungen

	1996 (April-Dezember)										1997 (Januar-Dezember)											
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	
Aquitaine																						
Rhone Alpes																						
Westschottland																						
Südwaes																						
Fvrstad																						
Angermanlandskusten																						
Nordjylland																						
Saarland (EFRE)																						
Saarland (ESF)																						
Nordrhein-Westfalen																						
Steiermark																						
Niederösterreich																						
Päijät-Häme																						
Südkarelin																						

Für das *Management* des Evaluierungsprozesses gibt es keinen Standardansatz. Die von der Kommission gestellten Grundbezugsbegriffe wurden im allgemeinen den besonderen nationalen und regionalen Umständen angepaßt. Bestimmte nationale Regierungsbehörden stellten einen allgemeinen Evaluierungsrahmen oder gemeinsame Richtlinien auf, wie die Anweisungen des Scottish Office und des Umweltministeriums. Mit seinem Mangel an Evaluierungserfahrung hat Österreich ein Zentrum für Evaluierungsmittel und -forschung eingerichtet und mehr spezifische Zusammenkünfte zum Erfahrungsaustausch für Evaluierer verschiedener Zielgebiete organisiert.

Die Mehrzahl der Regionen verwenden eine Art von Beratungsgruppe oder Lenkungsausschuß zur Begleitung der Evaluierung. Deren Aufgabenbereiche variieren von einer effektiven Leitung der Evaluierungsstudie und Förderung der Kommunikation zu Evaluierungsfragen (z.B. Aquitaine) zu einer mehr beratenden Funktion (wie in Österreich, Dänemark, Schweden).

3.4 Ziele und Umfang der Studien

Die Ziele und Zwecke der derzeitigen Gruppe von Zwischenevaluierungen variieren beträchtlich, entsprechend der politischen und administrativen Prioritäten der Programmanagement-Behörden. Dabei lassen sich sechs

Zielgruppen identifizieren, die in unterschiedlichem Maße in jeder einzelnen Evaluierung erscheinen:

- Vollzugskontrolle oder die Messung und Bewertung der bisherigen Ergebnisse;
- Wirkungsanalyse;
- Prüfung der Relevanz des Programms in bezug auf seine Ziele;
- Beurteilung der Managementleistung;
- Entwicklung eines Evaluierungsrahmens für die *Ex-post*-Evaluierung; und
- Vorschläge für Anpassungen des Programms oder gegebenenfalls einzelner Elemente desselben.

Die Intensität der Evaluierung ist ebenfalls unterschiedlich, von einer reinen Sammlung von Daten zu umfangreichen Beurteilungen von Fortschritt und Leistung. Teilweise aufgrund von Problemen bei der Programmumsetzung scheinen sich viele Evaluierungen in erster Linie auf den Prozeß des Management der Strukturfonds zu konzentrieren. Die Entwicklung von Indikatoren soll oft eher die Evaluierung der Wirkung zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt verbessern.

Zwei interessante Ansätze lassen sich in der dänischen und nordrhein-westfälischen (NRW) Evaluierungsstudie erkennen. In Dänemark wurde eine *thematische* Ausrichtung in die Studie integriert, da man sich auf Fragen konzentrieren wollte, die von ausschlaggebender Bedeutung für die Programmpartnerschaft waren. Die Zwischenevaluierung wurde in zwei Teile aufgeteilt - eine allgemeine Evaluierung für beide Ziel-2-Gebieten, und ein thematisches Element, das für jedes Programm spezifisch ist. In NRW beinhaltete die Evaluierungsaufgabe eine Analyse über die derzeitige Programmperiode hinaus, um die Langzeitergebnisse früherer Programmperiode miteinzubeziehen. Wie in Österreich verglichen die Evaluierer das NRW-Programm auch mit anderen Ziel-2-Programmen, um die größtmögliche Anzahl potentiell übertragbarer Alternativen zu identifizieren.

In bezug auf das Ziel der *Programmodifizierung* ist erwähnenswert, daß einige Regionen sich nur sehr vorsichtig zu bedeutenden korrektiven Aktionen verpflichten. Dies wird im allgemeinen als ein zeitliches Problem gesehen - daß entweder zu wenig Zeit für größere Änderungen besteht oder, wie im Falle Österreichs, daß wesentliche Verwaltungszeit erforderlich ist, um selbst kleinere Änderungen zu vereinbaren und umzusetzen.

3.5 Ergebnisse

Die unterschiedlichen Zeitpläne der Zwischenevaluierungen in den Mitgliedsstaaten bedeuten, daß für viele Regionen noch keine Evaluierungsergebnisse vorliegen. Doch gibt es Ergebnisse für Nordjütland, Westschottland und Aquitaine, sowie erste Resultate für die schwedischen, finnischen und deutschen Ziel-2-Regionen. Das Ziel hier ist einfach, einige der regionspezifischen Ergebnisse herauszustellen, wobei sowohl die dabei auftauchenden positiven als auch die negativen Aspekte herausgestellt werden.

Auf der positiven Seite hat das Nordjütlandprogramm z.B. einfallsreiche Qualitätsprojekte finanziert und die Nutzung von Weiterbildung durch Unternehmen verbessert. In Westschottland, in Schweden und Finnland zeigen trotz der späten Genehmigung der Programme die Evaluierungen, daß die Umsetzung gut läuft und in vielen Fällen die verlorene Zeit aufgeholt wird. Die Evaluierungsergebnisse des Saarlands deuten auf erfolgreiche Projekte im Hinblick auf die Umweltpriorität hin, die räumliche Verbesserungen und qualitative, wenn auch nicht quantifizierbare Effekte zeigen.

Die Evaluierungen haben auch Schwierigkeiten mit den Strukturen oder Verfahren des Programm-Management herausgestellt. Wie viele andere Regionen hat der Westen Schottlands Probleme mit der Umsetzung der ESF erfahren, da das System anscheinend die Qualität und Quantität der durchgeführten Ausbildung reduziert und eine effektive Strategie behindert. Dabei zeigte sich eine starke Frustration mit dem System. Probleme, die in anderen Ländern herausgestellt wurden, sind u.a. die Behinderung der Umsetzung durch die sektoralen Divisionen im finnischen Verwaltungssystem und der Mangel an innovativen Projekten .

Es ist noch zu früh, um zu diskutieren, wie die meisten Regionen die Ergebnisse der Zwischenevaluierung *verbreitet* haben. Der Kommunikationsplan, der von MEANS erstellt wurde, ist wahrscheinlich für viele Regionen zu kompliziert, wenngleich die allgemeineren Vorschläge der Gruppe wie eine Zuschneidung verschiedener Dokumentenarten auf verschiedenes Publikum und die Einführung von Verbreitungsphasen, die den Fristen der Hauptausschüsse entsprechen, praktischer sind. Einige Regionen informieren bereits die Medien über den Fortschritt, obwohl in diesem Bereich erfahrungsgemäß wenig Interesse von seiten der Presse besteht.

Wie Zwischenevaluierungen verwendet werden können, um das *Management und die Umsetzung der Programme* zu verbessern, zeigt sich in einer Reihe von Gebieten. Erstens werden, wenn die Evaluierung früh genug ausgeführt wurde, die Ergebnisse dazu verwendet, die strategische Richtung der neuen Programme zu beeinflussen. In Aquitaine führte die Evaluierung z.B. zu einer stärkeren Strukturierung und Ausrichtung der Prioritäten und Maßnahmen für das neue Programm für 1997-99. Zweitens wirken sich die Ergebnisse auf die Strukturen des Programmanagement aus, indem sie z.B. das Auszahlungssystem und das mittelfristige Ziel der Dezentralisierung der Finanzmanagementsysteme in Schweden beschleunigen. Drittens kann die Glaubwürdigkeit der Programme innerhalb der weiteren regionalen Partnerschaften verbessert werden, wobei einige Regionen die Teilnahme der Partner am Evaluierungsprozeß als einen der Hauptvorteile der Evaluierungsübung betrachten. Viertens hat das stärkere Bewußtsein der Partner die Projektauswahlverfahren beeinflußt (z.B. in Jütland) und führte zu einer größeren Konzentration und Berücksichtigung von Projektgröße, Kleinbetrieben und langfristige Wirkung auf die Beschäftigungslage. Schließlich ergab sich als eine gemeinsame Schlußfolgerung aus den Zwischenevaluierungen die Notwendigkeit für eine Verbesserung der Begleit- und Evaluierungssysteme.

3.6 Schlußfolgerung

Zusammenfassend läßt sich sagen, daß die Zwischenevaluierungen dazu beitragen, das Bewußtsein und Verständnis unter nationalen, regionalen und lokalen Beteiligten für den Zweck, die Durchführung und den potentiellen Wert der Evaluierung zu verbessern. Dieses größere Wissen hat weitere positive Auswirkungen auf die Qualität der Programme selbst. Doch stellen manche Länder und Regionen auch weiterhin die bleibende Zweckmäßigkeit und den Wert von Zwischenevaluierungen in Frage - was sich an der Tatsache zeigt, daß bestimmte Regionen keine volle Zwischenevaluierung unternommen haben, und Evaluierungen noch keineswegs global zu finden sind.

Vor diesem Hintergrund hat sich die Zukunft der Evaluierungen zwar verbessert, ist aber immer noch nicht gesichert. Die übermäßigen Forderungen der Kommission werden vielleicht als negativ betrachtet, und weitere Evaluierungen werden größere Konzentration, Relevanz und Kontinuität erfordern. Größere Betonung thematischer Aspekte, entweder Verfahrensfragen oder spezifische Themen, sowie ein langfristige Ansatz zu Evaluierung wären beide von Vorteil. Alternative Möglichkeiten wären eine einzige gründliche Studie pro Programmperiode, die zeitmäßig so abgepaßt ist, daß sie in die *Ex-ante*-Evaluierung für das nächste Programm übergeht, und Elemente der derzeitigen Zwischen- und *Ex-post*-Evaluierungen enthalten. Schließlich könnten die Regionen stärker dazu angeregt werden, auf Evaluierungsergebnisse zu reagieren, wenn die Substanz und die Zeit des Verfahrens relevanter wären, mit stärkerer Unterstützung von seiten der Kommissionsdienste und schneller Genehmigung von Änderungen, die sich aus der Evaluierung ergeben.

Thematic Paper

The Interim Evaluation of Objective 2 Programmes

The Interim Evaluation of Objective 2 Programmes

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the three types of evaluation of EU regional development programmes, interim evaluation is in many respects the most important. In theory, it is the only evaluation phase that can simultaneously assess the effects of a programme and influence its operational orientation and balance. By contrast, *ex ante* appraisal can only make informed projections concerning the effect of programmes, while *ex post* evaluation can rarely influence operational decisions. As expressed in the Structural Funds' implementing regulation, interim evaluation is intended to reinforce the monitoring process, enabling adjustments required in the course of programme management to be made.

More so than previously, the practical decision whether to undertake interim evaluation in Objective 2 areas has been left to local partnerships, some of which have been reluctant to take on an additional administrative burden, especially in view of the delayed start of the 1994-96 programming period. For the 'old' Member States, the *ex post* evaluation of the 1989-93 programming period was only completed in late 1996, overlapping with the preparation and protracted negotiation of the 1997-99 programmes. Nevertheless, with the exception of some UK regions, it appears that most Objective 2 programmes are undergoing some form of interim evaluation.

Among those Objective 2 regions engaged in mid-term review or intermediate evaluation, it is evident that there is substantial variation in terms of the objectives, timescale, coverage, sophistication and independence of the evaluation studies being conducted. The studies range from simple secondary data collection exercises to substantial interview-based surveys of programme performance and effects. Especially in some 'new' Member States, the interim evaluation is being used to establish a framework for more comprehensive and systematic assessment at *ex post* evaluation stage.

The following paper provides a review of the progress of interim evaluation among Objective 2 regions. It begins by identifying the current status of evaluation in selected regions and discusses the rationale and objectives of the studies commissioned. The paper then considers the organisation and methodologies of the evaluations, concluding with a review of the preliminary results to emerge and the lessons learned. The research in this paper is based on fieldwork interviews conducted (during February and March 1997) with participating regions in IQ-NET, as well as with other Member State authorities, Commission services and researchers.

2. THE RATIONALE FOR INTERIM EVALUATION

The starting point for assessing the rationale for interim evaluation is the regulatory position. In recent years, the Structural Fund regulations have been

used to strengthen monitoring and evaluation (going beyond purely financial accounting), reflecting the emphasis given to evaluation by the European Commission and other concerned institutions such as the Court of Auditors, the European Parliament and the Council. The monitoring of the Structural Funds is a statutory obligation set out in the Framework and Co-ordination Regulations and with specific provisions inserted into Single Programming Documents (SPDs) and Community Support Frameworks¹.

These provisions clearly state that Community structural operations are subject to prior appraisal, monitoring and *ex post* evaluation to appraise their impact with respect to the objectives of the Funds and to analyse their effects on specific structural problems. Based on the 1993 amendments to the Council Co-ordination Regulation (Article 25), the monitoring of SPDs is to be backed up by interim evaluation so that any adjustments required to the programme and operations may be made.

Interim evaluation - Commission requirements based on Articles 25 and 26, EEC Council Regulation

(Monitoring) is backed up by interim evaluation, so that any adjustments required to the CSFs and to operations in progress may be made.

Interim assessments include a critical analysis of the data collected through monitoring, including those forming part of annual reports.....[and].... measure the extent to which the objectives pursued are gradually being attained, explain any discrepancies and forecast the results of the operation. They also express a view about the validity of the operation in progress and its relevance to the objectives selected.

Where an operation lasts for more than three years, a mid-term evaluation is undertaken after the third year of implementation so that any adjustments required can be made. Monitoring and interim assessments are the responsibility of the Monitoring Committee and are based in particular on financial, physical and impact indicators defined in the CSF and the operation concerned.

From an EU perspective, it is clear that interim assessment is meant to form an important part of the monitoring process. This is explicitly restated in the Commission guidelines on monitoring and interim evaluation: “the main purpose of interim evaluation is to improve the monitoring mechanism and arrive at a tool which can be useful for decision-making and effective management”².

¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Council Regulation (EEC) No 2081/93 of 20 July 1993 amending Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 on the tasks of the Structural Funds and their effectiveness and on the co-ordination of their activities between themselves and with the operations of the European Investment Bank and the other existing financial instruments (Framework Regulation)*, Article 6, and *Council Regulation (EEC) No 2082/93 of 20 July 1993 amending Regulation (EEC) No 4253/88 laying down provisions for implementing Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 as regards co-ordination of the activities of the different Structural Funds between themselves and with the operations of the European Investment Bank and the other existing financial instruments (Coordination Regulation)*, Articles 25 and 26, Official Journal of the European Communities No L 193;31.7.93.

² European Commission, *Common Guide for Monitoring and Evaluation*, Brussels.

However, the statutory obligation is mainly intended for operations which last longer than three years (and is particularly applicable to Objective 1 programmes), and the Commission has been keen to stress that interim evaluation is not compulsory. At the same time, Commission services have encouraged Objective 2 regions to undertake 'mid-term reviews' wherever possible, for several reasons. First, the quality of monitoring systems and data in many regions is still considered unsatisfactory, a point reinforced by the 1996 *ex post* evaluation exercise. Second, the Commission is interested in assessing how the 1994+ programmes are proceeding, especially those launched for the first time in the 'new' Member States. Third, Commission services would like to obtain information that could guide their approach to the 1997-99 programmes, particularly in promoting the new areas of emphasis - job creation, RTD, environment and equal opportunities.

Equally, considerable stress has been placed on the fact that interim evaluation should be seen as an asset to programme management and not solely as a response to Commission requests or regulatory requirements. In its first 'handbook' for programme managers and partnerships published in 1995, *Organising Intermediate Evaluation: Practical Advice for Programme Managers*, the MEANS group³ set out what could reasonably be expected from interim evaluation. In addition to providing the Commission with more reliable information on the state of programmes, intermediate review and evaluation has the potential to provide programme managers with improved management information and thereby more effective programme implementation⁴.

3. ORGANISING INTERIM EVALUATION: THE CURRENT STATUS

3.1 Coverage

The degree to which interim evaluation is being carried out across the Objective 2 regions is variable. Although evaluation studies are being carried out more systematically than was the case during the 1989-93 programming periods, the current coverage is very patchy. Belgium (apart from Liège and Aubange), the Netherlands and France have comprehensive evaluation coverage; among German Objective 2 regions, external evaluations are being conducted for major programmes, but only internal assessments for the smaller-scale Objective 2 programmes. Finland is effectively conducting an *ex post* evaluation for the 1995-96 Objective 2 programme; similar to the approach in Austria and Denmark, it is a single evaluation covering all of the Objective 2 regions in the country. Sweden is evaluating Objective 2 programmes in two groups, encompassing three northern and two southern Objective 2 regions. In the UK, interim evaluation is largely limited to

³ MEANS (Methods for Evaluating Actions of a Structural Nature) is a European Commission funded research programme, based at C3E in Lyon, aimed at improving Structural Fund evaluation methods.

⁴ MEANS (1995) *Organising Intermediate Evaluation in the Context of Partnerships*, Practical Advice for Programme Managers, MEANS Handbook No.1, European Commission - C3E, Lyon.

Scotland, the other UK regions proposing to produce enhanced annual reports instead.

The variability in practice is partly attributable to national and regional government decisions about the value of the interim evaluation at this stage in the programme cycle but also reflects the differences in emphasis placed on interim evaluation by the geographical units in DG XVI. The coverage of interim evaluation among Member States, according to Commission information, is shown below (see *Table 1.1*).

Table 1.1: Overview of interim evaluations in Objective 2 regions

Objective 2 region	Monitoring Committees	Evaluations	Report submission
Austria	4 (SPD)	4 external	2 reports (late 1997)
Belgium - Flanders	2 (SPD)	1 external	4 yearly reports - 1 report November 1996
Belgium - Wallonia	2 (SPD)	1 external	1 report (March 1997)
Denmark	2 (SPD)	1 external	1 report (draft September 1996)
Finland	1 (SPD)	1 external	1 report expected early 1997
France	19 (SPD)	17 external (2 to be selected)	7 reports done, 10 expected (May/June 1997)
Germany	1 national 5 regional sub-committees	5 external 5 internal	Expected March/April 1997
Italy	11 (SPD)	5 external selected so far	2-4 reports?
Luxembourg	1 (SPD)	1 external	First report June 1996, second February 1997
Netherlands	5 (SPD)	3 external	Reports done September 1996
Spain	1 CSF 7 regional sub-committees	3 external selected so far	1 report expected June 1997
Sweden	5 (SPD)	5 external	2 reports expected
UK	13 (SPD)		2 reports

Source: European Commission, DG XVI, internal document

3.2 Timetable

A further striking difference among Objective 2 regions is the timetable over which interim evaluations are being conducted (see *Table 1.2*). The length of evaluation studies ranges from 4-6 months in the case of Aquitaine and Western Scotland to around one year for the Austrian Objective 2 regions, Nordrhein Westfalen and Fyrstad (Sweden). Aquitaine, Nordjylland and Nordrhein Westfalen began their interim evaluation in April 1996, allowing the results of the studies to be used for reprogramming purposes; the same applied to the Netherlands where the interim evaluations were undertaken concurrently with the *ex ante* appraisals. At the other end of the spectrum, the new Member State evaluations have generally only just begun and are not due for completion until later in 1997, reflecting the later start date of the

programmes. The varying timetable also reflects operational factors such as the process of agreeing terms of reference with Commission services or national authorities (in Poitou-Charentes this was particularly prolonged), problems with commissioning the studies and the organisational requirements of establishing evaluation committees.

Table 1.2: Timetable of Objective 2 interim evaluations

	1996 (April-December)										1997 (January-December)											
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	
Aquitaine																						
Rhône Alpes																						
Western Scotland																						
South Wales																						
Fyrstad																						
Ångermanlandskusten																						
Nordjylland																						
Saarland (ERDF)																						
Saarland (ESF)																						
Nordrhein Westfalen																						
Steiermark																						
Niederösterreich																						
Päijät-Häme																						
South Karelia																						

3.3 Management

There is no standard approach to managing and organising evaluation. The regulatory position is that interim assessment is the responsibility of Monitoring Committees. The MEANS handbook is more specific:

- Monitoring Committees should establish an “evaluation mandate” which defines operational responsibility for the evaluation, including budgetary resources, timing of the evaluation and the selection and positioning of the evaluation team;
- the evaluation mandate should incorporate a “degree of distance between programme managers and those carrying out the evaluation” to ensure that the evaluation team is not overly influenced by the views of the programme manager; and
- Monitoring Committee members should “adopt an active approach to evaluation”: either by setting up an *evaluation steering group*, comprising external evaluation advisers from universities/consulting firms with expert knowledge of evaluation methods and techniques, and which can mediate between the Monitoring Committee and evaluation team; or by establishing an *evaluation sub-committee* drawn entirely from the Monitoring Committee and representing decision-makers, programme managers, and target groups.

In practice, Member States have taken different approaches to managing and organising evaluation studies, reflected in the involvement of national authorities in establishing the framework for evaluation and the role of the Monitoring Committees and specialist groups at regional level.

3.4 EC and national evaluation frameworks

The European Commission provided regions with basic terms of reference which were adapted by national and regional authorities to suit their own circumstances. In most cases, the Commission services participated in the Monitoring Committees (and often also evaluation sub-committees) which drew up evaluation guidelines and terms of reference.

In several countries, national government authorities have established an overall evaluation framework or common guidelines for evaluation. In the United Kingdom, the Scottish Office and Department of the Environment formed a sub-group to produce a guidance note *Framework for the Evaluation of Area-Based European Structural Funds Intervention* for all government departments; the guidelines explain the purpose of evaluation and the steps to be considered, and they provide a framework for setting terms of reference for each type of evaluation. In Scotland, more detailed guidance was provided by the Scottish Office which prepared draft terms of reference for intermediate evaluation, in consultation with programme managers. A similar approach was adopted in France where DATAR produced a *Vade Mecum for the Structural Funds* backed up by a specific guidance note on interim evaluation (agreed with the Commission) and held a series of seminars with programme managers. DATAR has also encouraged regional managers and partnerships to build links with the long-standing government regional evaluation units which provide substantial expertise and resources for evaluating government policies.

The provision of central support and resources has been taken a stage further in Austria. The *Österreichisches Raumordnungskonferenz* (ÖROK - Austrian Regional Planning Conference) and Federal Chancellery have invested heavily in promoting evaluation awareness and interest since evaluation does not have an established culture or tradition in Austria. All Structural Fund evaluations are being co-ordinated by ÖROK and involve a range of federal and regional interest groups; exchange of experience meetings between the evaluators for Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5b have been organised, and a central resource 'Checkpoint EVA' has been created by the Federal Chancellery.

Austria: "Checkpoint EVA"

Checkpoint EVA is an initiative of the Federal Chancellery to promote new thinking in the field of evaluation. It has three main foci:

- *a library of evaluation literature based in a Vienna research institute which brings together reference material on evaluation techniques and studies from throughout Europe, as well as providing a depository for all evaluation studies conducted in Austria;*
- *a discussion group, comprising experts in the evaluation field; and*
- *a consultancy service, aimed at evaluators and public officials.*

3.5 Regional management of evaluation

The majority of regions have used some kind of advisory group or steering committee to supervise or accompany the evaluation process (see *Table 1.3*). In France, central government recommended that all regions should establish specialist committees to supervise and guide the evaluation programme; these would be sub-committees of the Monitoring Committees and would comprise the *préfet de région*, and representatives of the economic and social council among others. This recommendation has only been partly adopted in Objective 2 regions and with variable success.

Aquitaine established a ten-person steering committee representing the regional council and SGAR (where the *Mission Europe* is based), the economic and social council of Aquitaine, chambers of commerce, local *département* councils, decentralised offices of the state and the Structural Fund monitoring office established in the region. The sub-committee appears to have been effective in promoting communication on evaluation issues, refining the evaluation methodology, supervising the progress of the study and suggesting modifications on the basis of local knowledge. The sub-committee also discussed the conclusions of the study before presenting them to the wider Monitoring Committee, thereby eliminating inaccuracies at an early stage and ensuring the credibility of the final report. By contrast, the experience of Rhône-Alpes was less positive: a committee to monitor the evaluation was established but broke down, partly due to poor relations among key partners.

Table 1.3: Actors involved in the interim evaluation process

Region	Overall responsibility for interim evaluation	Terms of Reference and Selection of Evaluators	Evaluators	Advisory Groups
Ångermanlandskusten	Monitoring Committee	NUTEK	EuroFutures	Ad hoc national advisory group
Fyrstad	Monitoring Committee	NUTEK	IM Gruppen	None
Western Scotland	Scottish Office	Scottish Office & programme executive	Hall Aitken	Monitoring & Evaluation Steering Group
Nordjylland (+Lolland)	Monitoring Committee	Monitoring Committee	COWI Rådgivende Ingenører A/S	Steering Group
Steiermark	ÖROK	ÖROK	InTeReg, EPRC, BAW	Evaluation working group
Niederösterreich	ÖROK	ÖROK	InTeReg, EPRC, BAW	Evaluation working group
South Karelia	National SPD Monitoring Committee	Ministry of Interior	Turku University	Steering group
Päijät-Häme	National SPD Monitoring Committee	Ministry of Interior	Turku University	Steering group
Nordrhein Westfalen – ERDF	Land Economics Ministry	Land Economics Ministry	NEI, M.Ridder, InWis, Univ. of Bochum	None
Nordrhein Westfalen – ESF	Land Social Ministry	Land Social Ministry	NEI, M.Ridder, InWis, Univ. of Bochum	None
Saarland – ERDF	Land Economics Ministry	Land Economics Ministry	Isoplan	None
Saarland – ESF	Land Social Ministry	Land Social Ministry	Inst. for Practical Research & Educ.	None
Aquitaine	Mission Europe at SGAR	Monitoring Committee	ACT Consultants	Steering committee (subgroup of Evaluation Committee)
Rhône Alpes	SGAR	Monitoring Committee	Sofres	None (now)

A slightly more ‘arms length’ approach is evident in Austria, where all four Objective 2 programmes are being evaluated by one evaluation team, and where a single evaluation working group has been established under the chairmanship of ÖROK. Comprising representatives of the Federal

Chancellery, the Federal Labour Market Service, DGXVI, DGV and the programme managers of the four regions, its remit is to make key decisions about the direction of the project and to provide a forum for intellectual discussion.

The Danish and Finnish situations are similar, but with a more consultative role for the steering groups. The experience of the Objective 2 regions in Denmark has been largely satisfactory: the steering group effectively exercised a role of ensuring that the evaluation - for both Nordjylland and Lolland - complied with the terms of reference (established by the Monitoring Committee) and discussing new ideas and interesting evaluation issues. In Finland, there was also one evaluation covering all the regions and a single evaluation steering group representing government ministries, Commission services and the evaluators. The group appears primarily to have had an advisory role, with limited scope for making decisions or influencing the conclusions of the evaluation report.

By contrast, the Objective 2 regions in Germany have adopted a more direct management approach. The smaller regions are undertaking internal evaluation exercises, conducted by the *Land* government departments responsible for implementing the Funds. The larger Objective 2 programmes (over 40 MECU) have been evaluated externally. In Nordrhein Westfalen, two interim evaluations were conducted - one commissioned by the Economics Ministry for ERDF and one by the Labour Ministry for ESF - although both from the same evaluation team. As in the Saarland, no special advisory or steering committee was created to accompany the interim evaluations, the studies being supervised by the programme management units within the regional government departments.

4. OBJECTIVES OF INTERIM EVALUATION STUDIES

4.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of individual Member States and Objective 2 regions vary considerably, reflecting the political and administrative priorities of the programme management authorities. In practice, it is possible to identify six objectives which are represented to varying degrees among Objective 2 interim evaluations:

- i. *progress monitoring*: the measurement and assessment of the outputs which have so far been achieved;
- ii. *assessment of impact*: a preliminary assessment of impacts where they can be evaluated;
- iii. *review of relevance*: a reappraisal of the appropriateness of the programme and its component parts in relation to the objectives of the programme;
- iv. *assessment of management performance*: an assessment of the efficiency of programme management, implementation and partnership arrangements;

- v. *development of the evaluation framework*: the derivation of indicators or the development of targets (in cases where these are not well-established) as preparation for the *ex post* evaluation study; and
- vi. *programme modification*: proposals for adjustment or ‘corrective actions’ to the programme or individual elements in line with the evaluation results.

In addition, evaluation requirements incorporate a range of secondary concerns such as the environmental impact of the programme, synergies between funds and organisations, the impact on particular sectors or the performance of specific management organisations. The main evaluation objectives among the IQ-NET regions are indicated below (see *Table 1.4*).

Table 1.4: Aims and objectives of interim evaluations

<p>Austria (Niederösterreich, Steiermark)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to measure the progress in realising desired goals, justify any deviations and estimate the results of the intervention</i> • <i>to assess the appropriateness of the intervention and its relevance to the goals</i> • <i>to examine the anticipated development effects related to possible modifications</i> • <i>to examine administrative and financial practice and propose changes to programme implementation</i> <p>Denmark (Nordjylland)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to improve the programme management approach</i> • <i>to improve conditions for the preparation of new programmes</i> • <i>to improve the conditions and the functions of the partnership</i> <p>Finland (Päijät-Häme, South Karelia)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to examine the programme strategies and objectives</i> • <i>to evaluate measures and projects</i> • <i>to assess the implementation of the programme</i> <p>France (Aquitaine, Rhône Alpes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to evaluate the results and impacts expected from the implementation of the programme's measures</i> • <i>to relate these results and impacts to the regional situation and the programme objectives and to advise on the programme's directions</i> • <i>to examine management effectiveness</i> • <i>to assess the internal and external coherence of the SPD</i> • <i>to deduct how the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme can be improved</i> <p>Germany (Nordrhein Westfalen, Saarland)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to analyse the material results of intervention with respect to targets and employed resources</i> • <i>to judge effects, insofar as they are quantified, concentrating mainly on number of jobs and regional convergence</i>
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- *to analyse implementation mechanisms and judge synergy effects between programme components*

Sweden (Ångermanlandskusten, Fyrstad)

- *to assess the effectiveness of the programme implementation to date*
- *to examine the expected effects resulting from Structural Fund intervention*
- *to assess the general capacity of the programmes to reach their stated aims and objectives*
- *to examine the results and impacts achieved with the baseline situation*
- *to establish the effectiveness of programmes in terms of inputs and outputs*
- *to examine the utility of financial and administrative procedures*

UK (Western Scotland)

- *to establish the extent to which the programme is making progress towards achieving its stated objectives*
- *to establish the continuing relevance and validity of the programme rationale*
- *to assess the appropriateness of the processes by which the programme objectives are being met*
- *to examine the synergy between the different European Structural Fund programmes*

4.2 Depth of evaluation

Evaluation studies range from data collection exercises to comprehensive assessments of programme progress and performance. Among the more substantive studies is the interim evaluation being conducted in Austria. As the first attempt to analyse how EU funding is being implemented in the Objective 2 regions of Niederösterreich, Steiermark, Oberösterreich and Vorarlberg, a one-year study is being conducted which will encompass seven 'evaluation blocks': (i) the development of targets and indicators for the programmes, including the definition of indicator tables for individual measures; (ii) an analysis of monitoring system financial and physical output data to assess effectiveness and efficiency; (iii) an analysis of qualitative and quantitative environmental effects; (iv) an assessment of operational practice, including programme management and organisational arrangements for project delivery, the synergy between funds and between SPDs and Community Initiatives; (v) an assessment of the strategic context, notably coherence with national and EU policies, as well as relevance to regional socio-economic developments; (vi) the benchmarking of Austrian Objective 2 programmes with those in other European regions; and (vii) proposals for programme reform and adaptation.

A similar substantial evaluation was proposed for three northern Objective 2 regions in Sweden. Under the evaluation model proposed, the study of Ångermanlandskusten, Bergslagen and Norra Norrlandskusten will encompass: a background analysis of regional baseline data; a process analysis of implementation; project-level questionnaire surveys and case studies of best practice; an analysis of impact at SPD level and project level with a view to identifying total impacts on new jobs, entrepreneurial climate, regional growth and new firm formation; and recommendations for programme development.

4.3 Focus on process

Many programmes appear to have concentrated heavily on evaluating the process of Structural Fund implementation and management, particularly in regions that are still establishing implementation structures, where new management arrangements are felt to be required, or where the timing of the study meant that outcomes could have little influence on policy. The Benelux, Austrian, Swedish and Danish evaluations, for example, have emphasised the development of indicators to improve the evaluation of impact at a later date; and a Dutch project is establishing harmonised indicators between the five Dutch Objective 2 regions to facilitate inter-regional comparisons of progress.

The Western Scotland study also concentrated on process and management issues. Due to the delay in programme and project implementation, the evaluation was not able to make an assessment of the benefits realised by the programme. In addressing issues such as absorption, the payments system and monitoring system, it included a partnership survey of 182 local and regional organisations with experience of the programme. This approach represents wider UK practice: government guidelines state that interim evaluation should be concerned mainly with identifying physical activity and gross intermediate outputs as distinct from net additional outputs or impacts.

In Finland, evaluation has concentrated on administrative and monitoring issues partly because of the major problems experienced with programme implementation: slow transfers of funds from central government to the regions; multiple layers and slowness of decision-making; and unsystematic information processing and storage⁵. A broader assessment of outputs and impacts has been impeded because the programmes are still young, but also because the monitoring system is not yet fully operational, delaying the production of statistics and indicator data.

4.4 Thematic focus

A particular characteristic of the Danish evaluation is its thematic emphasis. This stems from the strong interest on the part of local partners to focus on issues of particular concern to the programme partnership rather than a formal exercise to meet Commission requirements. An evaluation of the results of the programme and the structure of the process was considered too ambitious given the programme delays; moreover the structure had been studied under previous evaluations. Hence, the interim evaluation exercise was divided into two parts - a general evaluation common to both Objective 2 regions (Nordjylland and Lolland) and a thematic element specific to each programme. In Nordjylland, the evaluation focused on two themes: (i) the *private sector target group* of manufacturing enterprises which contribute to internationalisation; and (ii) *support for large and small enterprises*, especially SMEs. In each case, the evaluation was to determine whether these programme priorities are appropriate in the light of long-term objectives of growth in production and employment.

⁵ This issue has also been addressed by a separate Organisation Working Group which reported in May 1996.

This approach also characterises some of the French evaluations. The regional development agency, DATAR has prepared a *Vade Mecum of the Structural Funds* which terms interim evaluation as 'évaluation globale' to distinguish it from the thematic studies which are also being promoted as a secondary stage. The Rhône-Alpes study began with a 'global' evaluation to be followed by optional, additional, thematic studies; subjects identified to date include tourism, environmental measures and capital investment support for business - each of which has suffered from insufficient projects being mobilised and proposed. A thematic study on the Drôme part of the eligible geographic area has also been proposed as the programme appears to have been performing less effectively there. Among other countries, the Objective 2 evaluation in Austria also has a thematic element, focusing particularly on technological infrastructure and the new system of regional management offices introduced to mobilise awareness of Structural Fund opportunities and to assist with project applications.

4.5 Breadth of remit

An alternative to in-depth evaluation is the broader approach undertaken in Nordrhein Westfalen. For this programme, the study has been given the remit of looking beyond the 1994-96 period to examine the long-term results of earlier programming periods. As in Austria, the evaluators have been asked to make comparisons between the NRW programme and other Objective 2 programmes, to consider their programme components and implementation strategies, with a view to presenting the broadest possible selection of alternatives potentially transferable to Nordrhein Westfalen. The report must also consider the effects of the RESIDER, RECHAR and SME Community Initiatives and must include an assessment of the effects of all federal and *Land* programmes in the Objective 2 areas, especially their effects on diversification and job creation.

4.6 Caution in modifying programmes

Among the differences between regions, it is notable that some regions are very cautious about committing themselves to an objective involving significant 'corrective actions'. In Nordjylland, the purpose of the evaluation was explicitly *not* to change existing programmes (given the lack of enough time for changes to have any effect) nor to estimate the need for new programmes, although there was a commitment by the programme administration to undertake an evaluation which could make a difference for the 1997-99 programme (see *Section 6.2*). The Austrian authorities have also expressed reservations about making any substantive changes to the Objective 2 programmes given the administrative time that would be involved in agreeing and implementing even minor amendments.

5. EVALUATION RESULTS

Objective 2 areas have been subject to intensive assessment and evaluation over the past few years, encompassing the *ex ante* appraisals for the 1994-96 and 1997-99 programming periods (1995-99 in the new Member States), the *ex post* evaluation of the 1989-93 programmes and now the interim evaluation.

The most recent overview of evaluation results was prepared for the European Commission in 1996, synthesising *ex post* evaluation reports for Objective 2 areas from throughout the EU⁶.

The Synthesis Report concluded that, overall, the Objective 2 interventions played a very significant role in the industrial reconversion process during the 1989-93 period. The programmes were judged to have helped sustain the process of structural adjustment in the regions despite unfavourable macro-economic trends. The short-term impact on unemployment and longer term contribution to industrial restructuring were assessed to be measurable and significant. In addition, non-measurable effects were equally important, especially the stimulus given to the development of regional partnerships and the capacity to plan and manage regional development strategies. Other specific findings included:

- the Objective 2 programme strategies brought a coherence to regional development strategies in many eligible regions that had been lacking previously;
- the Structural Funds had a significant leverage effect - it was estimated that for every 1 MECU of Objective 2 commitments, a further 3.4 MECU was contributed by the Member States themselves;
- whilst the degree of external coherence was high, the Objective 2 strategies often lacked internal coherence, particularly with regard to the integration of ERDF and ESF measures;
- because of the need to commit resources quickly at the outset of programmes, it was not until much later into the period that regional authorities began to introduce formal project selection and appraisal procedures;
- programme monitoring and evaluation practices were very weak, although improving towards the end of the period;
- the 1988 reforms to the Structural Funds provided a strong impetus to the process of partnership building; several partnership models were developed, those with a relatively small number of representatives which had the advantage of being more cohesive and easier to manage, and larger partnerships, which although more representative, were more difficult to coordinate; and
- a considerable adjustment in the Objective 2 strategies took place during the programming period, but this was often done in order to maximise the absorption of available funds rather than because of changing regional development priorities.

These results provide a partial context for the findings of the current interim evaluation phase. Although it is still too early to discuss the key results of interim evaluations for many regions, those for which results are available include Nordjylland, Western Scotland and Aquitaine, and initial findings for

⁶ Ernst & Young (1996) *Ex-Post Evaluation of the 1989-1993 Objective 2 Programmes. Synthesis Report*. First Draft for the European Commission. September 1996.

the Swedish and Finnish Objective 2 regions. Preliminary results only are available for the German and some French Objective 2 regions. The following sections provide a brief summary of the region-specific findings.

- *Nordjylland*

In Nordjylland, projects have been of good quality and imaginative. Most have been stepped up, expanded or improved as a result of Objective 2 funding. The programme is concluded to have had a positive effect on the view and usage made by firms of further training, although there still seems to be limited use of ESF in relation to ERDF - due to limited knowledge by firms of training opportunities offered by the programme (and concern among small firms that educational centres may have too strong an influence on how training funds are spent). In consequence, a more demand-driven approach is recommended.

The internationalisation strategy of the SPD is still considered to be appropriate, with export courses designed to overcome the main obstacles to export being particularly successful. The evaluation did recommend that development projects should focus more on firms' intention to grow and less on immediate export plans. It was also recommended that there be less focus on enterprise size and more focus on the relative size and importance of the project, as well as the growth orientation of the enterprise.

- *West of Scotland*

Several conclusions emerged from the West of Scotland interim evaluation⁷. First, in spite of the late approval of the programme, the partnership has made considerable progress towards achieving the objectives of the plan. There is a high level of absorption, and the programme is expected to meet its job creation/safeguarded target of 20,000 jobs and its physical targets. Second, the operation of the Programme Executive is highly valued by the partners, and there is strong sense of coherence within the partnership; the use of advisory groups for project appraisal is also working well, although in need of review.

Third, there are severe problems associated with the implementation of ESF. The nature of the system appears to be reducing the quality and quantity of training conducted and hindering an effective training strategy. The level of frustration and disillusionment with the system is high and extensive. Reform requires the introduction of multi-annual funding, changes to the payment system and the explicit recognition of the difficulties faced by smaller organisations.

Fourth, the novel 'economic and social cohesion' priority, which promotes community economic development, continues to be problematic for the partnership with a relatively low level of expenditure committed. The poor progress reflects the restricted nature of ERDF eligible activities within an urban deprivation context, where many of the necessary actions have social and other non-economic objectives. Lastly, there is a need to improve the

⁷ Hall Aitken Associates (1997) *Interim Evaluation of the Western Scotland Objective 2 Programme*, Glasgow.

quality of monitoring data available for future evaluations, partly reflecting the difficulties experienced by many partners in calculating the employment effects of projects at the application stage.

- *Aquitaine*

The Aquitaine interim evaluation was designed both to improve programme management and to shape the 1997-99 programme. The evaluators found the 1994-96 programme was being well managed and successfully implemented and confirmed the wisdom of its overall approach. However, the central recommendation was that the SPD lacked strong strategic direction. This has been rectified in the 1997-99 programme with a process of deeper reflection, and clearer articulation of more specific objectives.

Despite the strategic weakness of the 1994-96 plan, its policies were still felt to be appropriate, although they required reorganisation, to reduce duplication and make it easier for businesses to identify the opportunities of relevance to them. The strong emphasis on technology, innovation and the environment is not the most straightforward policy choice and has proved challenging in the short term. However, it was confirmed that it should be continued to enable the region to raise its competitiveness in the medium and longer term.

With regard to implementation, even agencies with limited experience of working with the Structural Funds (eg. in newly eligible zones) have adapted quickly, especially those in close contact with applicants. The programme and its managers are also viewed positively by the wider partnership, which has itself become more cohesive. The monitoring system has contributed here by facilitating the exchange of timely and useful information between partners and programme managers.

Specific problems identified included difficulties in carrying out complex technology-related projects in the time available, and in attracting 'soft' as well as 'hard' investment projects. More positively, there has been considerable success in leveraging private sector funds into the programme.

- *Sweden*

The implementation of the Objective 2 programmes in the Swedish regions is judged to be progressing well, making up much of the time lost by the late approval of the programmes. The preliminary interim evaluation findings in the Swedish Objective 2 regions included the following points. First, the relationship between the Monitoring Committees and Programme Management Committees is perceived by some to be difficult. In part, this is attributable to the senior position of the local political figures in the Programme Management Committee (PMC) compared to members of the Monitoring Committee (MC) who are civil servants and representatives of the social partners; the PMC members appear to resent MC monitoring of their decisions, for example with respect to project selection.

Second, it has been argued that approaches to financial management at NUTEK could be modified, in order to accelerate the payments system and reduce the amount of bureaucracy involved at regional level.

Third, there is some confusion over the eligibility of projects for assistance and the rules of the Structural Funds in general. In particular, problems have

arisen over: projects funded from different measures; training actions funded by the ERDF; and treatment of the internal costs of companies, especially salary costs.

Further specific issues were identified in the regions of Bergslagen, Ångermanlandskusten and Norra Norrlandskusten: a lack of resources in local EU secretariats for project development; a lack of awareness of the programme within the local business community and too few private-sector led projects; a lack of 'good' projects so that most projects which fulfil or nearly fulfil eligibility criteria are awarded automatic funding; low levels of expenditure under the tourism and environment measures; and poor co-ordination between the different Funds, especially ERDF and ESF. In Fyrstad, the interim evaluation's initial findings were broadly supportive of the programme's aims and performance to date, and the partnership was judged to be working well.

- *Finland*

Despite the programme running approximately eight months late, it is considered to be more or less running well. The structure of the programme in terms of priorities and measures appears to be appropriate.

The Objective 2 evaluators have identified four main problems in assessing the impact of the programmes. First, the programme has been hindered by sectoral divisions in the Finnish administrative system which, historically, has involved little cooperation or communication between the sector-oriented Ministries; improved co-ordination is required for effective programme management. Further, the quality of marketing information (mainly language and terminology) was criticised as being too 'official' which enterprises found hard to follow, and the process of decision making is slow, delaying the start of projects.

Second, reporting systems (co-ordinated and operated by the Ministry of Interior) are not working. The monitoring and evaluation system in Finland is based on an automatic data processing system called REUHA, with which there have been many problems. Information about applications and decisions taken filters through the monitoring authorities too slowly and unsystematically, making monitoring of the regions at national level difficult. This has resulted in delays in the production of statistics and a lack of indicator data.

Third, there is a lack of innovative projects: the most innovative projects tended to involve many different partners, in particular, 'package' type projects under the sub-measures for education and training for enterprises.

Lastly, a survey of indicator data in August 1996 estimated that (up to the end of June 1996) measures co-financed by the ERDF had directly brought about the creation of 3,000 new jobs - 30 percent of the target set. Most new jobs were created under measures involving the establishment of SMEs, and development and investment by existing companies. However, the programme targets are too general/vague, and, as far as employment objectives are concerned, the basis from which these figures are calculated is unclear.

- *Saarland*

The initial results from the interim evaluation appear to demonstrate that the programme supports the goals of structural policy in the *Land*, for example, through the types of jobs being created, which are contributing to maintaining competitive industries in the secondary sector, while diversifying the economy in the tertiary sector and strengthening the craft sector. The projects supported under the “economic infrastructure” priority showed diverse marketing strategies and it was seen that industrial sites have been marketed most successfully when given an identifiable “character” and “address”, and a conceptual concentration on specific groups of firms eg. business parks for SMEs or crafts.

A number of successful projects have been identified under the “environment” priority. Despite low levels of funding available for the promotion of environmental projects within firms (0.9 percent of the ERDF budget), these projects have demonstrated physical environmental improvements and qualitative (although unmeasurable) effects. They have contributed to environmental awareness at managerial and employee level within firms, as well as among the general public. FEUS (The Centre for the Promotion of Saarland Firms in European Environmental Projects) was also considered to be working well.

Under the “technology” priority, there is some evidence that projects are contributing to increased innovation in firms (eg. increased numbers of patent applications, a general increase in innovative projects, growth in approved technology projects and growth in technology oriented start-ups).

Finally, under the “business” priority, the spread of sectors participating in firm-specific projects is considered to be contributing to the improvement of the regional economic structure through sectoral diversification.

6. DISSEMINATION AND APPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS

One of the key recommendations of the MEANS handbook is for programme managers and partnerships to give a higher profile to the dissemination and application of evaluation findings.

6.1 Dissemination

The dissemination and use of the results are a key phase of the evaluation process - regions must find a balance between transparency and confidentiality. The MEANS handbook makes several useful points.

- Different documents should be produced for different types of audience eg. early drafts being dealt with by the evaluation sub-committee; special documents for social partners, private actors, and the media. MEANS note that the dissemination process should be structured to achieve positive reactions. For example, within the Monitoring Committee “special care needs to be taken to ensure that discussion of the report and decision of its use takes place under the most favourable circumstances”.

- The dissemination process should be phased, timing the release of evaluation results to suit the deadlines of Monitoring Committee meetings, regional, national and Commission requirements.
- Dissemination should not rely exclusively on the distribution of paper documents, supplementary media potentially comprising press conferences, seminars, action days etc.

In practice, it is too early in the process to discuss how most regions have acted on the results of the interim evaluations, but it does not appear that most regions are (or will be) adopting a communication plan as sophisticated as that suggested by MEANS. Partly this reflects the restricted scope of the evaluation studies conducted, but also the limited level of interest outside the main programme partners. Some regions do regularly inform the media (including local, regional and national newspapers) but have found through experience that there is little press interest in the evaluations.

Most regions have a policy of circulating full copies of the reports to partners, including all relevant Committees, the Commission and implementing agencies. In Aquitaine, it was found useful to have the evaluator present the results to the Monitoring Committee in person, which helped ensure that all key partners are aware of the findings even if they had not read the report. This also occurred in Fyrstad where the initial findings were presented by the evaluators to the Programme Management Committee. Summarised versions were passed to interested groups, peripheral partners, agencies and others.

6.2 Application of results to programme management

There is no obligation for regions to act on the results of the evaluations, although as noted earlier Commission documentation stresses the value of interim evaluation for improving programme management and implementation.

- *Strategic direction.* Among regions such as the Dutch Objective 2 areas, Aquitaine and Nordjylland, the evaluation was conducted early enough to influence the strategic emphasis and structure of the 1997-99 programme. In Nordjylland, one of the outcomes of the evaluation was to modify the orientation of the strategy from 'internationalisation' to 'globalisation', shifting from the (too narrow) focus on exporting firms to the growth potential of domestically oriented enterprises. In Aquitaine, the interim evaluation has led to the new programme being more focused and structured; the result is a 'nested' set of priorities with business development at the core, surrounded by supportive set of business environment measures (technology, research centres etc) which in turn are supported by a third priority addressing the attractiveness of the wider regional environment. Evaluation studies have also enabled problematic priorities and measures to be identified and addressed, for example community economic development (Western Scotland) and tourism (Aquitaine). In the new Member States, substantive strategic changes during the current programming period are likely to be less feasible given the time taken for amendments to be approved by national and Commission authorities.

- *Programme management.* Given that many of the interim evaluations were process-based studies (see *Section 4.3*), the results have obvious implications for programme management, although the degree to which recommendations are likely to be implemented is variable.
- *Partnership building.* One of the most important effects of interim evaluation has been to improve the credibility of programmes with the wider regional partnership and increase their commitment to them. Some regions (eg. Aquitaine) expressed the view that one of the major benefits of the exercise was not the substantive changes stemming from the evaluation results but the partners' participation in the evaluation exercise. This established a conduit for the positive and ongoing exchange of information which has in turn strengthened partnership. The key to achieving these benefits in Aquitaine was the decision to manage the evaluation as an exercise undertaken *by* the programme *for* the programme. In many cases, programme managers have been able to pass messages out to the partnership via the impartial channel of an evaluator. Conversely, the same channel has allowed messages to be passed from the partners to programme managers.
- *Project selection procedures.* Associated with the greater information and awareness among partners is the effect on project selection procedures. Publicity given to evaluation can assist in making actors more demanding about the rationale, structure and content of proposed projects as they become more aware of overall programme aims and potential. Specific changes made to selection criteria in Nordjylland include a greater focus on project size; the demand-side aspects of ESF applications; greater priority being given to small firms; and more consideration of the longer-term employment effects.
- *Monitoring procedures.* A common conclusion from interim evaluation studies was the need for monitoring and evaluation systems to be improved. Supplementing previous studies, the evaluation results will lead to the establishment of new monitoring systems (as in Finland), the identification of new impact indicators (Rhône Alpes, Austrian Objective 2 regions), and the collation of improved monitoring data (Western Scotland).

7. DISCUSSION

As part of the general growth in evaluation activity across the EU, interim evaluation is contributing to a significant increase in awareness and understanding of the value, purpose and conduct of evaluation among national, regional and local actors. There has been a considerable improvement in the scale and quality of evaluation being undertaken and effective structures for cooperation in evaluation have been built. The increase in actors with a knowledge and understanding of evaluation has improved the ability both to deal with the evaluation exercise itself, and to benefit from it, ultimately improving the quality of the programmes.

However, there must still be question marks against the desirability or value of interim evaluation in some countries/regions. The concern over the need for

evaluation and the administrative burden it entails has been reflected in the lack of interim evaluation being undertaken in some regions (eg. England and Wales) and the conduct of 'internal evaluations' in the smaller German Objective 2 regions. The evaluation culture is still not universal. One major concern which remains relates to the poor timing of the present interim evaluation - which, in most cases, was unable to feed into the new 1997-99 programmes (Aquitaine and Nordjylland being two of the few exceptions).

This paper has shown the variability in approach to interim evaluation among Objective 2 areas. In general, they are following similar objectives, with a predominant emphasis on 'process' issues concerned with the performance of management and implementation arrangements, although attempts have also been made to identify effects and even impacts in some cases.

One of the major outcomes of the interim evaluation process has been the continued improvement in monitoring information. Admittedly, there are still considerable difficulties with respect to indicators and data, but the situation is improving.

The impact or applicability of evaluation appears to be related partly to *ownership* of the evaluation process. Where ownership is local/regional, reports appear to be more intensively exploited. As regions become more actively involved in evaluation, and better at specifying terms of reference and commissioning and supervising studies, the usefulness of the evaluations to programme administrations has increased.

The future of evaluation has improved but is still not yet secure. There is a danger of increasing hostility from those opposed to the perceived 'excessive demands' of the Commission and the regulations. Future evolution of evaluation will require greater focus, relevance and continuity in evaluation requirements:

- more emphasis on thematic aspects, either *process* issues of particular concern or on specific *themes* (priorities or measures) where absorption or impact is of particular interest to the programme partners;
- rationalisation of evaluation studies - perhaps just one study per programming period, involving an in-depth study, timed to feed into the *ex ante* evaluation for the next programme and incorporating elements of current interim and *ex post* evaluations;
- a longer-term approach to evaluation - establishment of evaluation frameworks within regions/countries to provide links between evaluation studies, ensure quality control, assist with dissemination etc;
- encouraging regions to act on evaluation results by making the process more relevant in terms of substance and timing but also by ensuring rapid Commission approval of changes arising from evaluation studies (and a positive, supportive approach from the Commission for 'good behaviour').