



Connecting Knowledge

Evaluation

of the first phase of the pilot initiative
"Technical Assistance Facility
for Danube Region Projects" (TAF-DRP)
of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

23/12/2014



This report is conducted within the framework of the Evaluation of the first phase of the pilot initiative "Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects" (TAF-DRP) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

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1. The aim of the evaluation of the first phase of TAF-DRP

“TAF-DRP is a pilot initiative of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) which provides technical assistance and expertise for developing Danube Region project ideas into concrete project concepts. Depending on the thematic scope of the selected projects, a professional consultant is contracted to assist project promoters in developing their project ideas into realisable project concepts. Project promoters do not receive any funding. TAF-DRP is coordinated by PAC 10 (Priority Area Coordination 10 of the EUSDR) of the City of Vienna. EuroVienna ensures the operational implementation of the Facility. The total allocation to TAF amounts to € 1.800.000, financed for 95% by the European Commission and for 5% by the City of Vienna. The first two calls for project proposals have already been organised and 35 projects are currently supported. 2 more calls are foreseen in 2015-2016.” (Source: RD3., see page 6).

In September 2014 DSN-Connecting knowledge, Kiel (Germany) received the order to conduct the “Evaluation of the first phase of the pilot initiative “Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects” (TAF-DRP) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)”. Task of the interim evaluation was::

- to learn from the previous processes and its results,
- to carry out on the basis of the evaluation results possible corrections or optimization processes for the extension phase (phase 2) until 2016, and
- to prepare the transfer of the pilot initiative into a regular continuous operation

To achieve this, this short evaluation:

- evaluated the process and results of the previous years 2013-2014,
- developed recommendations for the extension phase for the control of phase 2 of the pilot initiative

Based on these results:

- a system of indicators, which allows a better information basis for an evaluation of phase 2 of the pilot initiative is developed.

First deliverable of the evaluation process was the evaluation plan. It has had the purpose to ensure that the evaluators and the TAF-DRP bodies responsible for the evaluation of the first phase of TAF-DRP reached a common understanding of the way the evaluation of TAF-DRP should be evolved. The plan described the main steps of the evaluation of the first phase of TAF-DRP. The plan was based on the

- “Invitation for offers” of the EU-Förderagentur GmbH, Vienna.
- offer of DSN, Kiel, to carry out the evaluation of 18th of September 2014
- the contractual agreement between the EU-Förderagentur GmbH, Vienna, and DSN, Kiel, to carry out the evaluation, concluded on 15th of October 2014.

Target groups of the report are the TAF-DRP bodies of the TAF-DRP pilot initiative.

The report focuses on the main findings (!) and recommendations (✓) of the evaluation process which are highlighted with symbols in the margin. In addition, opinions taken from the interviews give an impression of the different perspectives stakeholders have. The report summarises the findings and recommendations of the interim evaluation in an easy to read way.

2. Conclusion and recommendations at a glance

In general the TAF-DRP facility is regarded as a very suitable tool for the development of cooperation projects. The satisfaction with the TAF-DRP management (see component (5) on page 8) and the consultants is all in all very high. Suggestions relate primarily to the management of expectations (the clarification of the order of the consultants), the reporting and the process of selection of the projects.

Please find below an overview of the recommendations of this report, which are explained in detail in the following chapters.

1. A future tendering process should be carried out in English language.
2. The consultancy contract must be sufficiently flexible so that the consultancy services can be adapted to the needs of the project without much effort.
3. The development of the “project contract” with the consultant should be divided into two phases: into an inception phase and into an implementation phase.
4. The first central task of the consultants is to find out and to manage the expectations of the project partners.
5. The clarification of the project consultancy services must be the focus at the beginning of each project work. The results must be documented in the inception report, and submitted to the TAF-DRP management. The inception report has to be part of the contract.
6. Together with the pre-selection results of each call, the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) have to deliver the TAF-DRP management a list of the contacted potential applicants, and a list of received applications.
7. The number of pre-selected projects per Priority Area should be increased to 3 or 4.
8. The TAF-DRP management could support the PACs in the search for applicants by providing a small information package for the PACs.
9. A description of the change agent, who could push the project forward, and the description of the specialists (on partner level) of the supported projects should be added in the application form.
10. The selection process should be completed by a phone interview between the TAF-DRP management and the beneficiary to get a better understanding of the starting position of the project.
11. The TAF-DRP management should from time to time take part in project meetings.
12. The quality of the work of the PACs could be improved by a stronger guidance of the TAF-DRP management.
13. The TAF-DRP reporting should be reorganised by relatively small changes (to delete the interim report in the actual form and replace it by an interim interview).
14. The PACs should no longer be able to act as applicants in the TAF-DRP facility.
15. The selected project ideas must already have a good basis for the development of a funding application.
16. The selection of project ideas should focus on those project ideas that want and can (because of an open call) develop and submit a funding application.

3. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation has had a methodology mix comprising elements of two evaluation methodologies:

- document analysis
- interviews with TAF-DRP actors

Document analysis

The evaluation of the first phase of TAF-DRP was based on a number of relevant documents (RD):

- RD 1. Functioning of the advisory committee, May 2013
- RD 2. Application form Call 2, 18.02.2014
- RD 3. Fact Sheet (2 pages), TAF-DRP – Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects, June 2014
- RD 4. Fact Sheet, Statistics Call 1 & 2, June 2014
- RD 5. Guidance to complete the application form – Call 2, 18.02.2014
- RD 6. Guidelines for PACs and Applicants, Version 02.2014 – Call 2
- RD 7. List of priority area coordinators, October 2014 (internal document)
- RD 8. List of responsible consortium experts per thematic lot, October 2014 (internal document)
- RD 9. Overview of TAF-DRP Projects Call 1 & Call 2, June 2014
- RD 10. Presentation of funding options for project development in the Danube Region: State of play of the Danube Implementation Facility by Dr. Kurt Puchinger, Coordinator for Priority Area 10, Coordination of the Danube Implementation Facility, ca. July 2014
- RD 11. Presentation of the Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects, First call–May–September 2013
- RD 12. Presentation of the Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects, Review of the first call – lessons learnt and next steps - presentation and minutes of the meeting, 03.12.2013 Vienna
- RD 13. TAF-DRP Progress Report to the European Commission, reported period: from 01/2014 to 06/2014
- RD 14. Project documents (application, letters, reports, ...) of the project “Master of Danube Studies”

The document analysis was the main basis for the development of the interview guide.

Interviews with TAF-DRP actors - Objectives

The main objective of the involvement of TAF-DRP actors by interviews was to gain a deeper insight into the TAF-DRP structures and processes. The evaluators incorporated by 17 interviews the opinions and recommendations of the actors into the evaluation results.

The interview partners were experts directly involved in the first phase of the TAF-DRP implementation. The interviews were carried out in November 2014. The 17 interview partners were selected with the support of the management bodies of the TAF-DRP facility (PAC 10 Vienna and the EuroVienna GmbH). The final selection was decided by the evaluation team.

The interviews were held with:

- **PAC 10 Vienna (Managing Authority)**
1 interviewee. TAF-DRP-Role: general coordination of the TAF-DRP, decision making, reporting to the European Commission
- **EU-Förderagentur GmbH**
1 interviewee. TAF-DRP-Role: fiduciary management of the budget
- **EuroVienna GmbH (Implementing body)**
1 interviewee. TAF-DRP-Role: operational handling
- **PACs**
3 interviewees. TAF-DRP-Role: pre-selection of TAF-DRP project applications
- **Beneficiary**
8 interviewees. TAF-DRP-Role: received the consultancy services together with their project partners
- **Consultants**
3 interviewees. TAF-DRP-Role: Expert per thematic lot

Not interviewed were members of the TAF-DRP advisory committee. In the first phase of the pilot initiative this committee had the planned role to give advice to the pre-selected project proposals (to the organizations, project ideas, project relevance). It is not foreseen for the second phase to maintain the TAF-DRP advisory committee as such, due to the diversity and complexity of the project contents to be commented. This was decided already before the evaluation of the first phase started.

The interviews were carried out as telephone interviews. Each interview was held by one person. The interview duration was between 20 and 45 minutes. The questions were sent in advance to the interview partners as pdf by E-Mail. One interviewee answered the questionnaire in written form, due to time problems.

4. Scope and structure of the evaluation

Based on elaborations of the relevant background documents as well as on experience with other evaluations, the evaluators examined the following seven main components of the process chain of TAF-DRP:

- (1) **Consultant Selection Procedure**
 - questions about the selection procedure of the consultants, which was carried out through a public tender
- (2) **Application processes**
 - questions about the promotion of the pilot initiative and the applying for funding
- (3) **Decision-making processes**
 - questions about the selection process of the supported projects

(4) TAF-DRP structures

- questions about the different actors involved in the TAF-DRP pilot initiative and their roles

(5) TAF-DRP management

- questions about the day-by-day management of the TAF-DRP pilot initiative. The TAF-DRP management in this report is defined as: PAC 10 Vienna, the EU-Förderagentur GmbH and the EuroVienna GmbH. PAC 10 Vienna is the MA (Managing Authority) of the TAF DRP facility.

(6) Achievement of objectives

- questions, if the foreseen objectives of the TAF-DRP pilot initiative were achieved

(7) Consultant Services

- questions about satisfaction with the work of the consultants

The interviewers gave the interviewees the possibility to provide further comments or hints.

The following recommendations take up the findings mentioned above. They intend to solve the addressed issues based on the feedback given by the interviewees as on the desk research carried out by the evaluators.

5. Component: Consultant Selection Procedures

Was the consultant selection process satisfactory?

The tendering for the selection of TAF-DRP consultants was carried out through a European wide tender. Task of the consultants is to provide technical assistance to the selected projects. The tender documents were created in German language. The offers had to be submitted in German language. The tendering procedure management was organized by the EU-Förderagentur GmbH and supported a.o. by the legal department of the City of Vienna.



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the consultant selection process within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The interviewees described the consultant selection process within the TAF-DRP facility as “very good”. The EU-tender procedure and the selection process was a heavy workload; but had no particular challenges.
- The interviewees see some potential to improve the consultant selection process, due to the fact that the tender documents were created only in German language and that the offers had to be submitted in German language.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. If the facility is going to be continued after the second phase, the **tendering process** should be carried out **in English language**. This would in particular enable an easier participation of consultants from all countries.
2. The description of the tendered tasks should be adapted in the next tender documents on the basis of the experiences gained in the first two phases. This has to be done with the aim of customizing the different needs of the beneficiaries in the projects.

Was the consultancy contract satisfactory?

A total of three consultancies were commissioned with the consultancy services of the TAF-DRP facility. The consultancy services could cover technical, legal, financial, economic or conceptual/ methodological issues. The selected consultants signed a framework agreement and submitted –after getting project information - individual offers for each project, which they were invited to accompany. The consultants received a “project contract” for each assigned project.



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the consultancy contract within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees described the consultancy contract within the TAF-DRP facility as “very good”.
- The framework agreement is considered as suitable.
- Sometimes there are differences between the signed and the delivered services.
- It was mentioned that the needed consulting services “project development” are not described clearly in the project contract. Consequence: unclearness about the services for the beneficiary and their project partners.
- Sometimes it was the expectation (of the beneficiary and their project partners) that the consultants are responsible for the complete project development. In most cases a structural support of the projects was foreseen. This led sometimes to dissatisfaction on both sides – on the side of the beneficiaries and also on the side of the consultant.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The most important and needed consulting services are becoming only evident in the inception phase of the project. The contract has to be sufficiently flexible so that the consultancy services can be re-defined after the individual needs of the project are known.
2. The clarification of the project consultancy services must be the focus at the beginning (in the inception phase) of the project work. This requires a clear procedure agreed between TAF-DRP, beneficiary and consultant.
3. The **development of the “project contract” with the consultant should be divided into two phases**. Phase “a” should be the inception phase, phase “b” the implementation phase (see figure on page 11). The consultant should submit a very short, formal offer for the inception phase. The amount of needed time will depend on the projects status. The offer for phase 2 should be submitted to the TAF-DRP management together with the “new kind” of inception report (see below), in which the tasks of the consultants are defined.
4. Phase 1: In the inception phase the needed activities of the consultants for the project partners have to be defined. In the first three weeks of the project, the consultant should develop a first version of the inception report. This should be done on the basis of the existing documents and a **structured telephone interview between the beneficiary and the consultant**. The inception report should document the maturity of the project idea and should contain the definition of the project plan. The project plan should contain the results to be achieved, the project process, the time plan, and the necessary activities of all project partners and the consultant. This version 1 of the inception report must be

submitted to all project partners. Two or three weeks later an inception meeting with all project partners and the consultants should take place to discuss and adapt the inception report to the needs and necessities of the project, and the realistic possibilities (the existing resources) of the consultancy work. The consultants have the task to always moderate between wishes, needs and possibilities. After the inception meeting the consultants should adapt the inception report and send this version 2 to the project partners. The report has to be accepted by the project partners (unless they send adaptation wishes) within 10 days.

5. After the acceptance of the inception report version 2 (or 3, if adaptations were necessary) by the project partners, the inception report has to be sent to the TAF-DRP management. The **inception report** with the defined consultancy services has to be (as an Annex) **part of the contract**.

6. Component: Application processes

Is the information provided satisfactory?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The information provided is available on the website of TAF-DRP.. For additional and specific information it was possible to contact the Implementing body (EuroVienna GmbH) directly.
- The interviewees were asked to assess the information provided within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees described the information provided within the TAF-DRP between “very good” and “excellent”.
- The application documents and guidelines are assessed as good and helpful.
- The short application form was considered as very suitable.
- The beneficiaries also pointed out the helpful support of the implementing body during the project application phase.
- Positively rated were the workshops organised by the TAF-DRP management and the direct and prompt feedback given by the Implementing body in the event of urgent questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendations

Is the process of applying for projects clear?

All applicants submitted their application to the Priority Area Coordinator (PAC) responsible for the relevant EUSDR topic. PAC10 launched two calls (May 2013 and February 2014). The application process was in the responsibility of the eleven PACs. They had to organise the application process by themselves. The PACs were responsible for the announcement of the call and for receiving proposals.

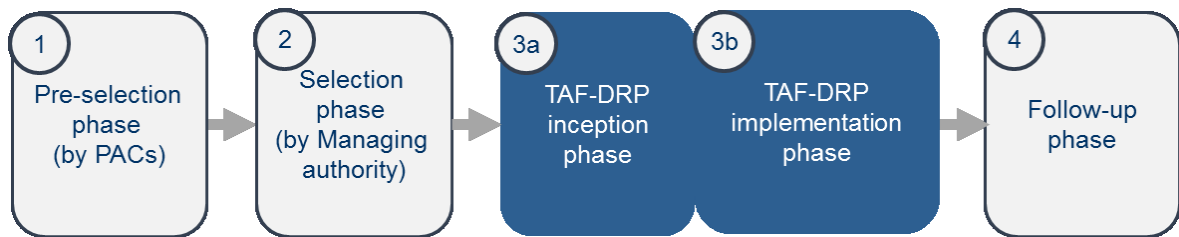


Figure: Phases of a TAF-DRP project



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the process of applying for projects within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. The interviewees described the process of applying for projects within the TAF-DRP between “extremely” and “very” clear.
- The interviewees mentioned that the application process is clearly defined in the guidelines.
- The TAF-DRP management has no systematic overview about the call for proposals and the application processes of the different PACs.
- Due to the fact that the TAF-DRP actions are financed by public funds, the process of notification that project proposals must be submitted to the PACs was not always clear for third parties. The way and manner of the announcement of the two calls for proposals was not transparent.
- Some interviewees mentioned that the TAF-DRP instrument is not very well known in the region (“TAF-DRP is something for insiders”).
- Sometimes there was an overlap between the PACs and the beneficiaries, because the organisation of the PACs took part in the call for proposals and was pre-selected by the PACs.
- A slightly higher participation in the calls would be welcome.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A very offensive, wide announcement of the funding opportunity is not recommended by the evaluators as part of the pilot facility. A wide announcement would lead to a high number of applications, and this would be out of proportion to the available - relatively low - financial resources, and the consequence would be a high number of rejections. The administrative burden, the number of supported projects and the required number of cancellations would be out of proportion.
2. A solution to improve the transparency of the tendering procedure would be the implementation of a **call for “project proposals”** submitted to a defined number of potential applicants.
3. This defined number of potential applicants would have to be determined jointly by PAC 10, the TAF-DRP management and the PACs. The common dialogue is important to ensure the subsequent implementation, and to integrate the existing experiences of the different bodies into the determination of the number of invited potential applicants.
4. Together with their pre-selection results of each call the PACs should deliver the TAF-DRP management **a list of the contacted potential applicants and a list of received applications.**

5. The number of pre-selected projects should be increased to 3 or 4 per Priority Area.
6. The TAF-DRP management could support the PACs in the search for applicants by providing a **small information package for the PACs** (with possible procedures, call types, selection criteria, etc.). This information package could be presented and discussed together with the discussion about the defined number of potential applicants (see above).

Is the process of applying appropriate in your view?

This question aims, in particular, at assessing whether the effort for the application process was appropriate in relation to the expected level of support.



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the appropriateness of the process of applying within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees described the process of applying within the TAF-DRP facility between “extremely” and “very” appropriate.
- The interviewees remark that the relation between the application procedure and the expected level of support is appropriate.
- One applicant had difficulties with completing, editing and saving the .pdf form.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

7. Component: Decision-making processes

The discussion with the interviewees on the decision-making process was based on three questions. The question “Are the decisions understandable?” was in general answered with “very” (understandable) and the related hints have been given for other questions. Consequently the evaluators are describing here only the “General Findings” and “Recommendations” to the other two questions of this issue.

The Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) are in charge of the pre-selection of project ideas from their respective area. Every PAC had in every call for proposals the right to propose two projects to the Managing Authority (MA) (first level decision). The final decision was made by the Managing Authority (MA) (second level decision).

Is the process of approving projects transparent enough in your view?

This question aims, in particular, to see whether the process of approving was transparent for the approved and refused project applicants. When looking at the results one has to keep in mind that no refused applicants were interviewed.



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the process of approving projects within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees described the transparency of the approving process within the TAF-DRP between “very good” and “good”.

- There is no systematic overview about the reasons of refusal at the level of PACs (first level decision).
- There is no systematic overview, if the rejected applications on the first level were informed by a letter with the reasons for the refusal.
- The rejected applications on the second level were informed by a letter by the MA with the reasons for the refusal.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It must be ensured that all applicants know the **reasons of rejection of an application on both levels**.
2. At the level of PACs (first level decision) all applicants should get a letter with the reasons for the refusal.
3. At the second level all applicants should get furthermore a letter with the reasons for the refusal.
4. The letters of refusal have to be structured alongside the project selection criteria (see below)

Are the selection criteria known and suitable?

The selection criteria are documented in the “Guidelines for PACs and Applicants”



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked if the project selection criteria are known and suitable within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the project selection criteria by the interviewees differs between moderately, very and extremely known and suitable.
- The selection criteria are documented in the “Guidelines for PACs and Applicants” and are well defined.
- The TAF-DRP management and the PACs estimated the level of awareness and the suitability of the criteria as worse known than the beneficiaries did.
- From the TAF-DRP management and the PACs point of view, there is potential to improve the selection criteria.
- It lacks criteria such as the quality of the partnership, the competence level of the partners, or the existing of a change agent, who could push the project forward.
- In some cases there were indications that the criteria are not equally suitable for all thematic priorities.
- In some cases, project ideas were very sophisticated documented. But after the start of the projects it turned out that the starting position was not as good as described. (“Good application – less behind”)



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Due to the fact that sometimes one of the identified problems is the missing of an efficient and powerful implementation structure, the **description of the change agent and the description of the specialists of the supported projects** (on partner level) should be added in the application form and should be (in consequence) a selection criteria.

2. Due to the fact that sometimes the starting position of a project was not as good as described in the application, the selection process should be completed by a **phone interview between the TAF-DRP management and the potential beneficiary** to get a better understanding of the starting position of the project.
3. It should be taken into consideration to include the (for the project) foreseen **consultant into the decision making process**. Based on his/her experiences he/she can help the TAF-DRP management to take a more informed decision.
4. A later, regular program requires a project selection involving the PACs.

8. Component: TAF-DRP structures

The discussion with the interviewees on the TAF-DRP structures was based on four questions.

Is the size of the TAF-DRP Management sufficient for an efficient management of the facility?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the size of the TAF-DRP Management within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. Overall, the interviewees described the size of the TAF-DRP Management as necessary and sufficient.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

Are the roles and divisions clearly, logically and efficiently implemented? and How satisfied are you with the quality of the work of the different bodies? and How satisfied are you with the quality of the work of the Implementing body (EuroVienna GmbH)?

The evaluators combined these three questions, because the answers have had a high degree of overlaps.



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess the roles and divisions within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the process differs only slightly between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees described the roles and divisions within the TAF-DRP as moderately or very clearly, logically and efficiently implemented.
- The interviewees pointed out the efficient support of the PACs, the Managing authority (PAC 10) and the consultants by the TAF-DRP management (see component (5) on page 8). Positively rated were the good and trustful cooperation between these partners.

- The TAF-DRP management could have had a better insight into the project realities (daily problems with the partnership, with the general project approach, the project etc.).
- The consultants are responsible for the achievement of the defined TAF-DRP project objectives. One main success factor for the achievement is the degree of participation and feedback of the project partners. If the degree of participation and feedback is poor, the consultants do not have a possibility to sanction this behaviour.
- In general the interviewees were very satisfied with the quality and efficiency of the TAF-DRP management. Some interviewees mentioned the short response time, the quality of the responses, the openness for discussions, a very well prepared seminar, and fast delivery of relevant information.
- The satisfaction degree with the PACs slightly differs from not so good ok, and good.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Due to the wish that the TAF-DRP management could have a better insight into the project realities, the **TAF-DRP management should take part in project meetings from time to time**.
2. The consultants have the duty to inform the TAF-DRP management, if the degree of participation and feedback is so poor in the project that the project success is at risk.
3. Consultants and TAF-DRP management have then the duty to discuss the form of **sanction** and then to sanction this behaviour. This should be done during the proposed common workshop (see recommendation 7 on page 17)
4. The respective PACs should be at least informed and if helpful integrated into the sanction process.
5. The quality of the work of the PACs could be improved in general through a **stronger guidance by the TAF-DRP management** (clearer guidance does not mean “more work”). It is to be expected that this recommendation will be welcomed by the PACs (this was a wish of some PACs).

Is the reporting clear and efficient?

The reporting within TAF-DRP is divided into four reports. Three reports have to be developed by the consultants: Inception Report in month 1 of the project, Interim Report (month 3), Final Report incl. all outputs (month 6). A follow-up report has to be delivered by the beneficiary to the Managing Authority (MA) about six months after the end of the TAF-DRP support.

GENERAL FINDINGS



- An evaluation of the follow-up reports was not executed, because at the time of the evaluation no follow-up report was available yet.
- The interviewees were asked to assess the clearness and efficiency of the reporting within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The reporting is clear for the interviewees.
- Concerning the efficiency, the assessment of the process differs between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees described the efficiency of the reporting within the TAF-DRP as slightly efficient.
- It was mentioned that three reports (inception, interim, and final) in the responsibility of the consultants are too much in the actual form. Especially the consultants have the opinion that the writing of reports took too much time of their project time budget. The foreseen two days to write all reports is in their experience not realistic. A reduction of reports is wished by the consultants.
- The TAF-DRP management knows the opinion of the consultancies. The TAF-DRP management in their opinion needs interim information about the status of the development of the projects, to have a possibility to react on developments during the projects implementation.
- In total there is: an unclearness about the relevance of the needed report content, a wish to reduce the number of reports, and the wish for interim information from the Managing Authority (MA) side.
- The evaluator can understand the arguments of both sides.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. The evaluator recommends to **reorganize the TAF-DRP reporting by relatively small changes**.
2. The aim of the reorganization should be to strengthen the information status of the Managing Authority (MA), and to reduce the effort for the consultants.
3. The evaluator recommends: an **inception report** in the above described form. The inception report should be provided after about 6 weeks. This reflects the fact that the **clarification of tasks** is an important and **time-consuming step** in the project development. (see recommendations to question: "Was the consultancy contract satisfactory?", page 9)
4. The evaluator recommends: to **delete the interim report in the actual form**. The report should be replaced by a **mid-term interview** between the TAF-DRP management and the consultant. The interview should follow a structured interview guide. The interview should not be longer than 30 minutes. The main results of the interview should be documented by the TAF-DRP management, and confirmed by the consultant.
5. The mid-term interview could be prepared in advance by a **short questionnaire**, which the consultants can fill in in short time (5-15 minutes), and could be used as the starting point of the interview. In the questionnaire the consultants have to answer questions concerning different aspects of the status of the project development (activities, time schedule, suitability of the activities, adequacy of the partnership, risk-factors, etc.)

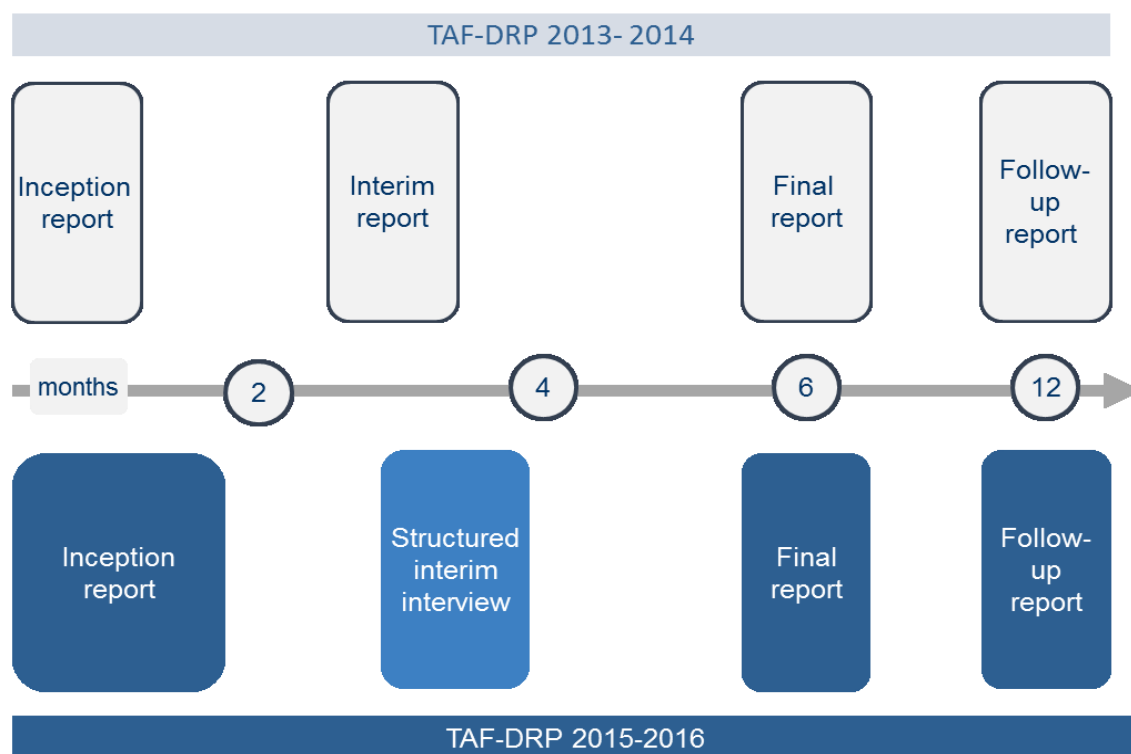


Figure: Existing and proposed TAF-DRP reporting

6. The evaluator recommends a **final report in the current form**.
7. The evaluator recommends to have at the **beginning of 2015 a common workshop** with the three contracted consultancy firms and the TAF-DRP management to discuss the proposals of the evaluator, to go through the report templates, and to agree on the process and the structure of the reports and the mid-term interviews.

Are the disbursement procedures of the funding satisfactory?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- Within the interviewees were asked to assess the disbursement procedures of the funding within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The interviewees were very satisfied with the disbursement procedures of the funding within the TAF-DRP facility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

9. Component: Achievement of objectives

Were the intended target groups reached?

The intended target group of the TAF-DRP facility were public or private organisations, who need assistance “in developing their project ideas into realisable project concepts” (see RD 3

on page 6). The priority was to support the development of ““new entries” with strong needs and new ideas (vs. experienced transnational partnerships)” (see RD 11 on page 8). Another key objective was - called repeatedly - also to motivate new organisations respectively people - that have little experience in developing complex cooperation projects - to submit applications.

GENERAL FINDINGS



- The interviewees were asked to assess if the intended target groups within the TAF-DRP facility were reached in general. The interviewees realized that the intended target groups were reached moderately.
- It is problematic that the PACs (as the responsible persons for the pre-selection of projects) can apply for funding. The role of PACs as an independent reviewer of the proposals submitted is therefore not credible.
- The target group “new and unexperienced applicants” was achieved only to a small degree.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. The **PACs** (respectively the organization/department that hired them) **should no longer be possible applicants** in the TAF-DRP facility. The responsible person for the pre-selection must be independent from own interests.
2. If PACs (respectively their organization) should continue to be a potential applicant, the pre-selection cannot be carried out by the PACs anymore.
3. It is recommended that the **experience of the applying organization is not a criterion for the selection of projects**. Such a criterion can hardly be verified. The experience and knowledge is here more on the personal than on the organizational level. In this respect, the size of the organization is not a sufficient indicator of experience in the development of cooperative projects.

Have the TAF-DRP objectives been achieved?

The TAF-DRP facility supports project ideas into a further stage of project preparation, through the provision of consultant expertise. The TAF-DRP facility supports the preparation of projects which promise a high added value for the EUSDR. The TAF-DRP is an EU grant scheme to develop project ideas relevant to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, into “bankable/fundable” project concepts. (see RD 6 on page 6)

GENERAL FINDINGS



- The interviewees were asked to assess the achievement of the TAF-DRP objectives within the TAF-DRP facility in general. The assessment of the achievement of the TAF-DRP objectives differs only slightly between the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees assessed the achievement of the TAF-DRP objectives as “moderately” or “very” much achieved.
- Overall, it is still difficult at this stage of the TAF-DRP facility to assess the achievement of objectives. The number of completed projects is low. 24 of the 35 approved projects are still running.
- The central aim of the TAF-DRP facility - to support the development of project proposals - is only partially achieved.

- The reason is partly due to the fact that at the time of the project implementation no suitable funding programs have been available for the respective projects.
- This has partly generated disappointments, because the preparation (and delivery) of an application was often the main target of the applicants.
- Despite these disappointments, the instrument seems to have a great popularity. It is the assessment of the TAF-DRP actors that the TAF-DRP projects performed much better than it would have been the case without TAF-DRP support.
- The project topics fit very well with the Danube Region Strategy.
- The degree of achievement of objectives from the beneficiary perspective is not a final judgment on the basis of this evaluation. For this purpose too few of the project partners were interviewed.

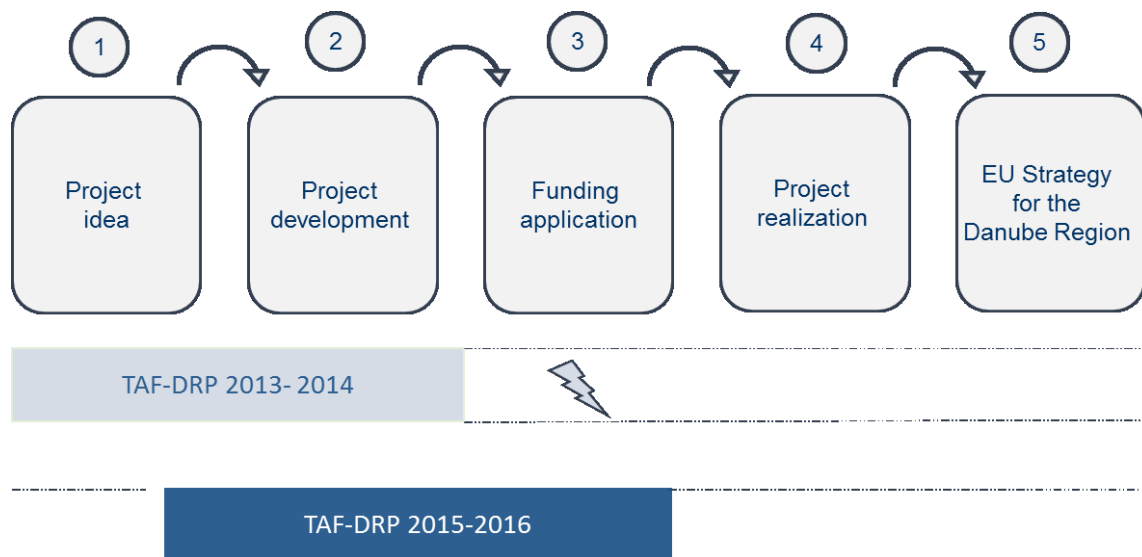


Figure: Existing and proposed focus of the TAF-DRP funded activities

- The degree of satisfaction of the beneficiaries is only one aspect and success criteria. **The main success criteria would be a successful project application.** This would be the basis for the implementation of the Danube Region Strategy with the foreseen actions. This criterion is not fulfilled until now.
- The figure above shows the difference between the TAF-DRP objective (to support the development of project proposals) and the TAF-DRP focus until now (support of project development).
- The existing risk today is that the projects supported by the TAF-DRP facility won't have any resources **in the follow-up phase to write a funding application.** In this case (without funds) many of the developed projects supported by TAF-DRP will not be realized, and in consequence the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) will not be implemented by the TAF-DRP funded projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The following recommendations take up the findings above. They intend to solve the addressed issues based on the feedback given by the interviewees as on the desk research carried out by the evaluators.

1. Success must be measurable. This measurement can be based on the outputs, or the results of the supported projects. The TAF-DRP facility should **use the developed indicator** system to evaluate the success of the TAF-DRP measures.
2. The **selected projects idea must already have a good basis** for the development of a funding application.
3. The selection of projects should **focus on** those project ideas that want and can (because of an open call) develop and submit **a funding application**. A **clear reference to the funding program** must be made already in the project proposal/application.
4. If such a clear reference to the funding program cannot be shown, the clear way and the optional funding programs must be at least described in the TAF-DRP application. Only if the aimed program(s) is (are) known, the project can be developed in a direction that the project will fit into the chosen program.

10. Component: Consultant Services

How satisfied are you with the consultants?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked if they were satisfied with the consultants in general. The assessment of the interviewees of the project selection criteria differs between moderately, very and extremely satisfied.
- In total there were many positive feedbacks about the work and the working culture of the consultants.
- Reason for this high satisfaction was their professional work, their positive working culture, and their good knowledge of the thematic fields and the Danube region.
- More than two face to face meetings with consultants are wished by the beneficiaries. This is needed, because it takes time to close the gap between the level of field practitioners and the scientific level of consultancy experts. Time is needed to clarify on the one hand the tasks of the consultants and the project partners and on the other hand the expected results of the project.
- It sometimes was the expectation of the project partners, that the consultant helps more in practical tasks (like to submit forms, etc.).



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The central task of the consultants in the first weeks of the project is to find out and to manage the expectations of the project partners.** The result of this “management of expectations” has to be described in the inception report. The first version of the inception report (see recommendations to question: “Was the consultancy contract satisfactory?”, page 9) has to be presented to and discussed with the project partners. Result of this process is the common understanding of the project and the tasks of all partners and the consultants.

What are the main benefits of the contracted consultants for your project?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- From the view of the project partners, the benefits of the consultants were:
 - to further develop a project idea,
 - the structuring of a project,
 - the development of a project in a strong alignment with a funding program,
 - the preparing of a funding application,
 - to review the content, activities and budget of project proposals,
 - the definition of needed partners,
 - the competence of the consultants to integrate partners with different interests,
 - to define the necessary project resources to steer an interregional project,
 - the considering of the eligibility criteria,
 - to ask questions,
 - to give detailed information, and in general
 - the complementarity of the competences of the consultants to the competences of the project partners.

- The list of benefits above shows very clearly the relevance of the offered consultancy services for the development of an ambitious interregional project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

What are the main competences that consultants must fulfil in such a project?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- From the point of view of the project partners, consultants need following main competences:
 - to be able to lead international groups with different cultural backgrounds
 - to have technical expertise within the projects scope
 - to have a high flexibility concerning the needed competences and tasks
 - to have experience in writing funding applications
 - to make a project manageable with tangible outputs, milestones, and indicators
 - to develop a realistic project budget according to eligibility
 - to document process results

- The list of main competences above shows a high accordance between the needed competences and the wished benefits of the offered consultancy services for the development of an ambitious interregional project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

Would you recommend the consultant to other projects?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- In general the beneficiaries answered with a clear "Yes"
- The high level of satisfaction was based for example on the valuable results that can be used very well for the further development of the projects.
- Only one interviewed beneficiary was not sure ("I don't know"), because of communication problems in the starting phase of the project. The beneficiary was satisfied with the final result.
- All in all there was a high degree of satisfaction with the work of the consultants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

How helpful were the discussions initiated by the consultants?



GENERAL FINDINGS

- The interviewees were asked to assess how helpful the discussions initiated by the consultants were in general.
- The initiated discussions were seen as very helpful for the project.
- The meetings were seen as the most important elements of the consultancy input within TAF-DRP. The meetings provide a common project understanding and agreement among the parties - discussions via email or skype meetings complemented this.
- The consultants helped e.g. to increase the innovation degree and/or to integrate new partners with additional competences into the project.
- The personal contact between the project partners and the consultant is of high importance for the project success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation

11. System of indicators

For Phase 2 of the TAF-DRP facility the following indicators are proposed by the evaluators. The indicators should reflect the core issues of the TAF-DRP facility. The current status of the facility should be measured by the indicators and should show if targets at “programme” level have almost been achieved.

| No | Indicator at Programme level | Target | Achieved by [date] |
|----|---|--------|--------------------|
| 1 | Number of supported projects per Priority Area | | |
| 2 | Number of received TAF-DRP-applications in the pre-selection phase (applications received by PACs) | | |
| 3 | Number of received TAF-DRP-applications in the selection phase (pre-selected applications received by the IB) | | |
| 4 | Number of developed funding applications at the end of the TAF-DRP project | | |
| 5 | Number of developed funding applications six months after the end of the TAF-DRP project | | |
| 6 | Number of submitted funding applications at the end of the TAF-DRP project | | |
| 7 | Number of submitted funding applications six months after the end of the TAF-DRP project | | |
| 8 | Number of Lead beneficiaries per country | | |
| 9 | Number of involved partners per country (incl. Lead beneficiary) | | |
| 10 | Number of Lead Beneficiaries per type of organization (public, private) | | |
| 11 | Number of project partners per type of organization (public, private) | | |
| 12 | Duration of the TAF-DRP project in months | | |
| 13 | Level of satisfaction with the TAF-DRP project result | | |

The source of the data can be provided by the TAF-DRP management and the final report. The level of satisfaction can be asked from the beneficiary in the follow-up report.

12. Milestones, work plan (incl.timetable)

| Milestone | Date |
|---|------------|
| Receipt requested TAF-DRP documents and information | 13/10/2014 |
| Detailed evaluation plan with the appropriate methodology | 14/10/2014 |
| Meeting in Vienna with PAC 10 | 15/10/2014 |
| Adjusted Evaluation Plan | 23/10/2014 |
| Agreed interviews | 31/10/2014 |
| Conducted interviews | 25/11/2014 |
| Completion of the evaluation report (draft) | 08/12/2014 |
| Presentation of the evaluation report in Vienna with PAC 10 | 09/12/2014 |
| Completion of the evaluation report | 23/12/2014 |

Figure: Work plan of the timetable of the Evaluation of the first phase of the pilot initiative TAF-DRP of the EUSDR

Source: DSN, 2014

13. Contact details

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