

Evaluation of the contribution of the axes 3 "Territorial intelligence", 4 "Transition towards a low-carbon Wallonia" and 5 "Integrated urban development" of the ERDF operational programme 2014-2020

Executive summary



LE FONDS EUROPÉEN DE DÉVELOPPEMENT RÉGIONAL
ET LA WALLONIE INVESTISSENT DANS VOTRE AVENIR



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This document constitutes the final report, deliverable of the evaluation mission of the contribution of the axes 3 "Territorial intelligence", 4 "Transition towards a low-carbon Wallonia" and 5 "Integrated urban development" of the ERDF operational programme 2014-2020.

The evaluation process aims to answering the obligation of **accountability**, while emphasising **formative** and **prospective** functions. This exercise is first and foremost in line with the **results-based management approach** promoted by the European Commission for the 2014-2020 programming period. Beyond the accountability objective, the evaluation has a more **forward-looking aim**, since it should make it possible to feed the reflection on the 2021-2027 OP and to initiate a process of reflection on post-2020 developments through recommendations that are more operational than strategic in nature. By integrating an important **learning component**, this evaluation also aims to provide the various actors involved with elements of understanding of the causal chains and mechanisms specific to the various stages of the intervention logic.

This evaluation is based on an in-depth analysis of the programme at several levels:

- 1... At the level of the axes 3, 4 and 5 of the OP as a whole in relation to the other axes of the OP and to regional and European strategies on the Walloon territory;
- 2... At the level of the 7 specific objectives of which it is composed and the 14 measures which are the variations of these specific objectives. 8 families of areas of intervention were drawn up during the scoping phase in order to conduct the evaluation;
- 3... At the level of the project portfolios and the projects that make them up.

The results of the evaluation are based on the following methodological tools

- Scoping interviews;
- Logical and contextual framework analysis;
- Mapping of project portfolios;
- Survey of beneficiaries;
- Stakeholder interviews (functional administrations, intermediary bodies, beneficiaries, monitoring committee members, external bodies);
- Case studies:
 1. Financial instruments 'Carbon Footprint in SMEs' to support energy transition in SMEs
 2. Mobility investments as a vector for urban development
 3. Rehabilitation of brownfields as a driver of economic development in urban centres – the role of GEPART
 4. The development of exhibition halls, a vector of attractiveness for business tourism
 5. Sustaining and developing its urban centre in a sustainable way
 6. What is the contribution of the rehabilitation of public buildings to the reduction of the carbon footprint of territories?

The axes 3, 4 and 5 of the ERDF 2014-2020 Wallonia.2020 OP have enabled the support of **116 projects**, distributed among **51 direct beneficiaries** for a total budget of **631 million euros, 248 of which are financed by the ERDF**. This corresponds to **39% of the total financial envelope** of the ERDF 2014-2020 Wallonia.2020 OP.

The effectiveness, relevance, coherence and efficiency of the axes 3, 4 and 5 of the ERDF 2014-2020 Wallonia.2020 OP and of the 116 actions co-financed from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020 are the subject of this evaluation, which led to the following conclusions:

- **Effectiveness:** the programme is still in the implementation phase, some of the intermediate target values have not yet been reached. **However, the projects contribute overall to the objectives set, and should generate the expected results and impacts.** The majority of the hypotheses formulated for each family of areas of intervention during the scoping of the evaluation have been validated, thus showing that the conditions for change have been put in place by the ERDF-supported projects. The obstacles, as well as the facilitating elements (including participation in a portfolio of projects), are common to all programming.
- **Relevance: the programming is relevant to the challenges of the Walloon territory**, i.e. the improvement of the attractiveness of urban centres, their competitiveness and the reduction of their environmental impacts; the improvement of the living environment for the inhabitants, the energy transition of companies and local authorities, and the creation of a favourable environment for the installation of new households and companies. The types of beneficiaries (mostly public actors) correspond to the objectives of these axes.
- **Coherence: the internal coherence of axes 3, 4 and 5 is satisfactory**, even if there are some overlaps. Indeed, some areas of intervention in the programming of axes 3, 4 and 5 of the ERDF 2014-2020 OP are found in several axes. There is good synergy with the other OP axes. **There is complementarity with existing public schemes at local and regional levels**, and the OP is a tool to achieve the objectives of other strategic documents.
- **Efficiency: ERDF funding is attractive, appreciated and deemed necessary to achieve the objectives set.** However, it remains insufficient to meet all the needs of the projects: the budgets initially planned have been reduced for the majority of the beneficiaries interviewed, which may have caused difficulties.
- **Sustainability: the projects supported are sustainable beyond the ERDF support**, and are part of a long-term territorial development perspective. Without the funding, the projects could not have been carried out with the same level of ambition or the same timeframe.

The following operational recommendations were made at the end of this evaluation:

- 1/ The organisation of projects into portfolios provides added value and allows beneficiaries in the same portfolio to exchange solutions to similar problems. It is therefore desirable to **strengthen the project portfolio approach**, avoiding as much as possible that a project of one priority is the only one of this axis in the portfolio, but also that a portfolio gathers too many projects;
- 2/ For certain fields of intervention, the programming principles are not well adapted to certain ambitions of the Walloon territory and its challenges due to the scope or temporality of certain themes dealt with. It is therefore desirable to **target more themes whose temporality and scope are in line with ERDF constraints**;
- 3/ The timeframe for the rehabilitation of brownfield sites makes it difficult to combine clean-up and development over the same period. Moreover, the level of clean-up varies according to the purpose of the land and it is impossible to ensure funding for expenditure not initially planned during the programming period. It is therefore advisable to **split the sanitation and development operations within the programming**;
- 4/ The level of maturity of the selected projects is not always satisfactory and this can lead to longer implementation times. It is therefore advisable to **select, as a priority, mature projects that have all the necessary rights to enable rapid implementation of the project**;

- 5/ There are budgetary uncertainties at the time of the design of the project fiche and the expenditure items may change significantly during the programming period. Furthermore, the attractiveness of the programme has led to budget cuts, without proportionally reducing the expected results of the project. It would therefore be advisable to **adopt a more flexible financial approach and to ensure that the budget made available corresponds to the expected results;**
- 6/ The indicators proposed by the European Commission are not always close to the reality of the projects. It would therefore be advisable to **select indicators that are easy to understand for the beneficiaries.**