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The Swiss in Europe or Europe in Switzerland

The Characteristics of Crossborder Co-operation and Methodological Demands on the Evaluation

The paper presents the results of the final evaluation of the Swiss participation on the INTERREG- II Programme. The goals of the Swiss policy of European integration as well as the goals of the INTERREG II- Programme: Both are determined by a 'hidden agenda'. Therefore the focus of an evaluation changes from quantity to quality. At this level of analysis, the process is clearly in the foreground whereby the measurement of results is secondary.

The Swiss government participated on the INTERREG II- Programme of the European Union to promote transborder co-operation. According to the EU's targets, the responsible departmentⁱ decided to commission an intermediate and a final evaluation of the programme. Our paper concerns the final evaluation we conductedⁱⁱ. The structure of the paper is the following:

After some general remarks about how to measure results we look at the political background of the Swiss participation on INTERREG II. Based on the political intentions, we analyse the partly conflicting goals of the Swiss participation and our type of evaluation to meet the requirements of the discrepancies within the goals. We present the main results of the final evaluation. Some general remarks about the methodology of such an evaluation will complete the paper.

How to measure results?

Normally an evaluation is aimed at measuring results. According to the methodological framework given by the European Community one can differentiate between three types of results of an programme or project: The output, the impact and the outcome. To give an example:

We try to measure the success of a political programme which is aimed at improving the added value to the region. We evaluate one of the projects funded in the programme: The establishing of a permanent market stand in a small village to enable local producers to sell their products directly. Evaluating this project we can differentiate between:

- The output which is the direct attributable and visible result of the project, that is to say, the construction of the market stand.
- The impact which combines different effects to be attributed directly to the construction of the market stand. For example: three farmers can sell a certain

amount of products, three parking spaces drop out in the centre of the village, and so on.

- The outcome which summarises all effects, direct and indirect, both intended and not. For example: Increasing the amount of offered goods in the village, increasing the added value of the products offered, the effects on other shops and so on.

It is easy to say that measuring the results is much more difficult than measuring the output - which is obvious. Measuring the results, for example, needs more time after finishing the project because many of the effects appear after a time-lag (e.g., long term financial effects on existing shops).

But measuring the output, the impact and the outcome is one thing. To judge the results, in particular, whether they are able to support the goals of the programme is another thing. With this assessment the difficulties of measuring political programmes turn up.

In many cases the goals of political programmes are vague. Beneath clearly formulated goals we can find 'hidden goals' and intentions. There also exist conflicting goals, clearly formulated or unexpressed. All the goals together are bundled in a kind of compromise while formulating the programme. According to the nature of democracy, it is not a consistent philosophy which creates a consistent programme, rather compromises and the equalisation of interests. Programmes with a high potential of development and change are especially confronted with many different interests. And this issue of the political embeddedness of programmes is the main problem confronted when conducting an evaluation.

The Swiss policy of European integration

The Swiss participation on the European INTERREG 2- Programme is motivated by the fear of being isolated in the middle of Europe. In 1992 the Swiss population voted against joining the European Economic Market Treaty. The rejection by public referendum divided the nation and lead to intense discussions about the national cohesion and the future prosperity. After the referendum, the federal and cantonal governments tried hard to limit the damage.

The main activity of integration are the so-called 'bilateral negotiations' between Switzerland and the EU. But the foreign policy of the Swiss federal government seemed to be in a bind. Externally, the members of the European Community clearly formulated their demands and internally, the cantons called for independence referring to formulating goals and setting priorities of the transborder co-operation agreements.

The federal decision to participate in the INTERREG 2- Programme is announced as a 'offer towards the border regions to develop their relationship to their neighbourhood across the border'.

To provide support the cantonal and regional level, the crossborder co-operation will be completed by measures to maintain the cohesion between the cantons and regions. This also is common practice in Switzerland. There always is a tendency of being divided on the one hand in three zones of different languages and on the other hand in a lot of cantons with a high sovereignty and a strong demand to enlarge their competencies.

The visible and the hidden goals

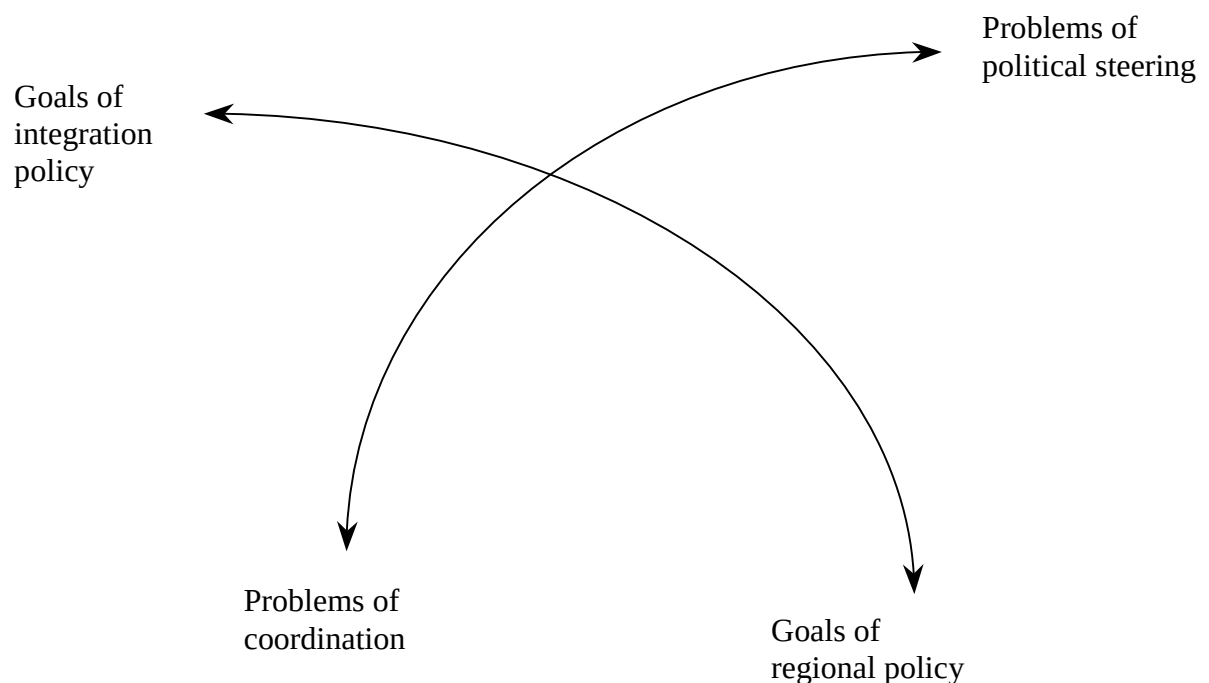
After the referendum the cantonal responsibilities became enlarged. The 'Federal Message on the Cantonal Possibilities to Act in Foreign Policy' should support the existing network of transborder co-operation. But on the other hand the crossborder co-operation was defined as part of the Swiss regional policy which made it a task of the federal level.

The national parliament voted clearly for the participation in the INTERREG 2- programme of the European Community. The main arguments in the debate stressed the 'double-dividend' nature of the programme, the meaning for regional policy as well as for the policy of integration. To stress the effects of regional policy means to immobilise the political opponents of European integration in Switzerland. The conflicting goals with different logic - efficiency versus equalisation - influences the whole participation in INTERREG 2.

The theory behind the assumption of the 'double-dividend' has to do with the coherence of the goals of integration and development. It is based on the consideration that the well-being of Switzerland depends on the well-being of the cantons.

Therefore, if all cantons involved in transborder co-operation (which most of Swiss cantons are) are able to get their regional development going, Switzerland will develop as a whole. But in fact the cantonal interests dominate. The cantons evoke the 'small foreign policy' and their sovereignty in strategically planning transborder co-operation.

Neither at the federal nor at the cantonal level exist criteria how to assess the profit of the transborder co-operation in terms of regional policy. There exists the expectation that measures of integration policy automatically cause positive effects on regional development. With this problems we get two 'curves of tension' dominating the crossborder co-operation:ⁱⁱⁱ



Behind both of the goals listed above, there exist others such as the co-ordination with sectoral and spatial policies which are also provided for in the federal decision to participate on the INTERREG 2- Programme.

The impact on the evaluation

How can this bundle of goals be evaluated? In this case it was not possible to measure the either the results or the direct output of the projects. This is not only due to the fact that the goals are confronted with different demands and theories about

the possible effects caused by the measures but also because the evaluation took place very early in the overall process.

The final evaluation of the Swiss participation on INTERREG 2 should be done within the term of the working programme. It was preferred by the responsible administration to get some more basic results while preparing the Swiss decision in joining the INTERREG 3 Programme 2000 - 2006. Therefore the final evaluation should help to assess the effects at the operational level of the projects in addition to the intermediate evaluation which was concentrated on the strategic level of the programme.

Starting the final evaluation nearly two years before the programme ends means that many projects are currently underway or even in the phase of being authorised. Nevertheless the final evaluation brought to light a lot of important results on the project level. Before presenting the results the methodological approach will be illustrated.

The methodological approach

The Swiss Government looked for a general assessment of the effects of its participation on INTERREG 2 in terms of integration policy, regional policy and in terms of national cohesion. But it also looks for strategic and operational issues concerning the implementation of the programme. For this an empirical analysis on the project level has to be done. A questionnaire has been sent to all Swiss actors responsible for a project funded by the INTERREG 2- Programme. The focus of the questionnaire was on

- the type of actors involved in the project,
- the way the actors have been involved in crossborder co-operation before,
- the technical and political obstacles in the design, the proceeding and the implementation of the project,
- the main issues, target groups and the spatial dimension of the projects,
- the expectations connected with the project,
- the continuing of projects after funding by INTERREG was depleted,
- the awareness level of the project, and
- hints to improve the project management.

The results of the questionnaires have been confronted with the strategic analysis on the programme level. This analysis has been done within the intermediate evaluation of the Swiss participation on INTERREG 2 by an interpretation of documents and interviews with the cantonal and federal responsables. The strategic analysis has been actualised to include the ongoing efforts in Swiss European integration policy.

The confrontation of the two levels of analysis – the strategic level of programmes and the operational level of projects – should show to which degree the different and somewhat conflicting goals of the Swiss policy has reached. Out of the results, a workshop with all relevant actors has been held to work out a common estimation of success and gaps. At least the evaluation team sketched the advantages and disadvantages of the kind of policy programme the INTERREG- programme is part of. All together lead to an intense discussion regarding whether and how further participation on INTERREG is useful and desirable according to the Swiss goals on European integration and regional development.

The results of the questionnaire

The following overview presents the most important and sometimes surprising results of the questionnaire on the project level.^{iv}

The type of actors involved

Nearly half of the numbers of persons responsible for the projects are working within the public administration, only ten percent are members of private enterprises. The dominance of the public actors can be stated especially at the border between Switzerland and Germany resp. Austria. Here exist well established crossborder networks within the administration. On the other hand private actors are rather involved in the co-operation between Switzerland and France. Within the public sector the cantonal and partly also the national level dominates clearly above the communal level.

Experiences from the INTERREG 1- programme

Intense experiences can be stated on the Swiss border to Germany followed by the borderline between Switzerland and France. In the trilateral border region around the Upper Rhine Valley, half of the projects are based on elements out of the

INTERREG 1- programme. In contrast, the crossborder co-operation between Switzerland and Italy is still relatively weak.

Political and technical obstacles

The main obstacles of crossborder co-operation are caused by the different national legal and administrative frameworks. Also a lack of knowledge about the proceedings has been quoted. Other critical points are the information policy in general and the necessity of co-financing the grant in INTERREG 2. Problems of different languages or a shortage in collaborators and political support plays a minor role in the existing projects of co-operation. All in all the projects need a lot of administration. Nearly one third of the working time becomes absorbed by organisational issues.

Main issues, target groups and the spatial dimension of the projects

The main issues of the projects depend on the degree of establishment of the crossborder co-operation. At the beginning, studies to set up data bases dominated over projects creating a concrete value-added. Beneath this, every border region has its own attitude depending on the special network of actors. In one region, educational projects are of great importance. In other regions, projects involving the exchange of information and consulting play a major role. In general, projects to generate products and services and projects to influence the legal framework are still in their infancy.

Different target groups are of similar importance within the projects: public administrations, enterprises, private persons, associations, occupational groups and research institutions. Differences between the regions also reflect the state of establishment and the regional attitude. Only 25 percent of the projects relate to the whole border region. Most of them are designed towards parts of the region above the local level.

Expectations connected with the project

The personal expectations of the actors responsible for the projects can be divided in four types: the expectation to promote the development of the region, the expectation to promote special strategies of crossborder co-operation, the expectation to promote the regional identity and the expectation to support goals of different sectoral policies. In spite of the important meaning the questioned actors gave to the goal of

stimulating the regional economy, it can be stated that the 'soft' goals of learning and motivation are predominant. Social affairs in general are of minor importance, matters of ecology and nature conservation rank in the midfield.

Further organisation and financing of the project

One fourth of all projects are said to be continued autonomously after exhausting the grant from INTERREG 2. Nearly half of the projects are aimed at a further grant out of INTERREG 3 or other support programmes. In this question also distinct differences according to the region's experience in transborder co-operation can be seen.

Level of awareness of the project

The level of awareness depends on the way the actors judge their own project's efficiency. Most of the indications are based on estimations, only one fourth are based on empirical surveys or some kind of evaluation.

The level of awareness of a project depends on the target groups. In general the level is estimated as 'medium' to 'high' within the public administration, certain circles of experts and among people engaged in regional issues. Within enterprises and associations the level is lower and among the broad public the level of awareness is very unsatisfactory. Here nearly half of the actors marked the worst alternative on the questionnaire.

Hints to improve the project management

The hints to improve the administration and transactions within the programme refer to different steps in the life-cycle of a project. The criteria utilised to select and approve the project as part of the INTERREG 2- programme should be more transparent. The proceedings should be speeded up in general. The actors need more advice and less forms. The technical support should be expanded. The information about goals and proceedings of the INTERREG 2- programme should be spread wider. One of the main problems is the very complicating way of financing and co-financing the projects.

Comparing the strategic and the operational level

The hints given by the actors questioned are much more detailed than can be shown with this overview. The general direction of the hints shows the difficulties new private actors have to deal with if they want to join the INTERREG 2- programme.

The goals of integration policy

The hints for improvement, the analysis of the types of actors and projects and the level of awareness revealed that the goal of integration policy only partially be reached. On the one hand, well-working networks can be stated; on the other, the general public is not integrated enough to cause strong effects. But if the expectations of the actors already involved are analysed, the focus concentrates much more towards the goals of integration.

The questionnaires show that 'learning by doing' can support the Swiss policy of European integration at the project level. Problems exist mainly in the preliminary steps of a project. The general goals and proceedings of the INTERREG2- programme should be communicated in a better way.

The goals of regional policy

A direct benefit to the regional economic development through measures within the INTERREG 2- programme is prevented by the structure of the programme. It is built upon the principle of co-financing connected with the prohibition of measures which are able to create a distortion of competition. Therefore, the high influence of the public administration can be explained not only in terms of the power of decision-making (and planning) but also in terms of financial resources.

On the other hand, projects can create networks which exceed the spatial and the expert's borderlines. These networks are able to create an added value concerning knowledge and personal relations. Looking at the expectations of the actors, a different view between the strategic and the operational level can be stated. From the strategic point of view on the Swiss federal level the goals of integration and the goals of regional development are balanced. From the operational point of view on the actor's level the goals of integration are a pre-condition to reach the goals of regional development.

Some general remarks about the methodology

The quality of an evaluation depends on the quality and concreteness of the political goals behind the programmes. Fuzzy goals cannot be translated into criteria and adequate indicators. Therefore they can hardly be measured appropriately. In the final evaluation it was not possible to measure results of the projects. But discussing the obvious or hidden contradictions enables the key actors to improve the overall policy process.

The evaluation team had to deal with invisible conflicts or at least different judgements about priorities and the hierarchy of the goals. The high expectation of Swiss participation on the INTERREG 2- programme on the federal level was accompanied by a relatively vague expectation about what can be reached. Therefore the evaluation team analysed goals out of documents and interviews and formulated them as a bundle of hypothesis. The evaluation team called this approach the 'Hidden Hypothesis Approach' which also has been used in the intermediate evaluation of the Swiss participation on INTERREG 2. These hypothesis has been made the basic assumptions to work out the questionnaire. The goals and empirical findings have been discussed afterwards with the relevant actors on the cantonal and federal level. This kind of evaluation is aimed at creating dialogue and at spurring a process of collective learning.

Thus, the final evaluation did not measure results in terms of output, impact or outcome. Despite this, many useful results have been worked out. The results of the evaluation has been successfully used in preparing the Message of the Swiss government for the Swiss participation to the upcoming INTERREG 3 programme of the European Union. The Swiss government voted for the participation on INTERREG 3 with a clear majority.

ⁱ The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (seco), formerly the federal Department for Economy and Labour (BWA).

ⁱⁱ The intermediate and the final evaluation studies has been worked out by the 'Regional Departement' of the Institute for Public Services and Tourism at the University of St. Gall IDT-HSG, formerly a department of the Swiss Institute for Research in International Economics, Regional Science and Structural Problems (SIASR) at the University of St. Gall (Dr. Alain Thierstein & Manfred Walser) and the Communauté d'études pour l'aménagement du territoire (C.E.A.T.), Lausanne (Michel Rey, Barbara Pfister & Luc Vodoz).

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- iii See also our paper on the intermediate evaluation of the Swiss participation on INTERREG II. Manfred Walser (1998): "The 'hidden hypothesis'- approach in evaluation methodology: a case study from Switzerland's crossborder co-operation policy", presented at the 38th ERSA Conference in Vienna.
 - iv At this time 131 projects with the participation of Swiss actors has been funded in INTERREG 2. Out of them 95 actors answered the questioning which is a return of 73 percent.