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Better application process for Central Baltic Programme

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to discover how to develop the application process in Central Baltic programme. To understand how the process can be developed the thesis was looking for answers for following questions: how to develop a process, what are the good practices in the application process and what are the challenges of the application process? The result of the thesis was a process description of the Central Baltic programme application process and suggestions for developing the process better for next programme period.

Theory of the thesis was compiled of definition of a process, public administration process, process description and process development. The study was a qualitative study that used case study as an approach. The source material for the study has been collected from the lead applicants with a questionnaire, from the Central Baltic Project Team with a group discussion and collecting information about different application process' as document analysis from other randomly chosen other Interreg programmes.

The main result of the study was that the Central Baltic application process itself is functioning well and it didn't need big improvements. Only some details needed attention. The Project Team and lead applicants had similar thoughts about the problematics and good aspects about the process. For example, the intervention logic of the programme was unclear for some applicants. The problems were not substantial and can be solved by providing more information and supporting tools for the applicants.

Key words

process development, project funding, application process, ERDF

CONTENT

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about developing better application process for Central Baltic Programme for next programme period 2021-2027. Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 is a European Union funding instrument for supporting cooperation across borders at the Central Baltic area. The planning of the next programme period is in process hence it is important to collect the know-how and experiences in order to transfer good practices to the next period.

The aim of the thesis is to find out how the process could be developed; what is good about the process and what is challenging. The application process means in this thesis a process that the project funding applicant goes through when a call is running at a funding programme. Answers to the research questions are looked for with the help of a process description and development theory combined with collecting experience from people who are familiar with the application process. The end result of the thesis is a process description and improvement suggestions that can be taken into consideration at the next programming period. The users of the process description are programme managers and the Project Team.

The subject of this thesis came quite naturally. I was doing my practical training at the Central Baltic Programme at fall 2019 and during that time the last call for project funding of the programme was running. I was participating to the work of the Project Team and I familiarised with the application process at that time. When the application process was running, I thought this would be an interesting topic for my thesis. Because the next programme period is 2021-2027 the timing was more than right to collect knowledge, feedback and know-how from the current programme to benefit the planning of the next programme period.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND THESIS BACKGROUND

2.1 Research problem

This thesis consists of introduction, theory, empiric phase and conclusions. The introduction part gives background for the study and presents the aim of the study and the research problem. Theory phase contains presentation of the client Central Baltic Programme and Interreg programme and also short introduction to the European Union cohesion policy. Then theory about processes is presented; what is a process, how they are described and how process' can be developed. At the empiric phase the research methods and data collection methods are presented. At the research results the implementation of the research is described, and the results are presented. The conclusions present the end conclusions about the thesis.

This thesis is a study project for the Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020. The aim is to create a process description and make improvement suggestions for developing the Central Baltic programme application process better for the next programme period 2021-2027. The goal is to collect good practices from the current application process, improvement suggestions and challenges of the process and based on these make improvement suggestions. Main question in this thesis is: How to develop the application process in Central Baltic Programme? Answer for the research problem is found out with the help of following sub-questions:

- How to develop a process?
- What are the good practices in the application process?
- What are the challenges of the application process?

This thesis is a qualitative study that uses case study as an approach. The data collection methods are document analysis, questionnaire and a group discussion. The result is a process description and improvement suggestions for the Central Baltic Programme management and Project Team for the next period.

2.2 Thesis background

This thesis is done for the Interreg Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020. The next programme period is 2021-2027 thus it is relevant time to collect information and experience to benefit the next programme. The Project Team and project applicants have lot of experience on application process and it would be wise to gather the good practices for the future.

The application process in this thesis means a process that the project funding applicant goes through when a call is running at a funding programme. Generally, it includes preparing an application form, consultations with programme representatives, participating workshops and seminars organised by funding programmes and submitting an application form. The application process can be two-step or one-step process. In two-step process there is a first selection of the projects. After the first step selected applicants continue to the second step. Usually two-step process is preferred and the two-step process is under investigation in this study. The assessment of the projects has been outlined away from the deeper analysis in this thesis. Otherwise it would have broadened too much.

In Central Baltic Programme funding is available to apply when a call is pronounced. During 2014-2020 programme period there has been five calls and all of them except the last call were two-step procedure. The 5th call schedule was so tight that it was decided to use the one-step procedure. Usually the two-step procedure takes almost an year from pronouncing the call to the funding decisions made. (Numminen personal communication 12.12.2019)

Funding is applied for projects that project applicants implement. Central Baltic project is an operation that is limited by its objectives and tasks, its duration and its budget. Objectives and tasks of the project must be clearly defined and usually project is implemented to try a new method or solution using external funding. Central Baltic project's duration is usually 2-4 years but despite the limited lifespan of a project, it is crucial to consider the sustainability of the project activities and achievements. Successful project results will live on after the project has ended. Central Baltic project must have cross-border challenge to solve and cross-border cooperation must bring added value to a project. Cooperation with participant countries and partners must be joint, this means joint implementing, staffing, development and financing. (Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 2019, 5-7)

3 CENTRAL BALTIC PROGRAMME 2014-2020

Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 is a European Union cross-border cooperation programme which goal is to finance high quality projects with European Development Funds in Finland (including Åland), Estonia, Latvia and Sweden. The Central Baltic Programme administration is in Turku, Finland. Programme has funded 112 projects by the beginning of January 2020. The current programme is the fifth programme and the first period was in 1990-1993. (Central Baltic Programme website 2020.)

Funded projects aim to solve common challenges together and cross borders. At least two countries from the programme area must be project partners at the project. Project partners can be public organisations, NGO's and private partners according to relevance in project implementation. The projects must have thematic focus in one of the four Programme Objectives (later PO) and cross-border cooperation as a clear added value to address common challenges. The four PO's that are supported by the programme are: *Competitive economy*, *Sustainable use of common resources*, *Well-connected region* and *Skilled and socially inclusive region*. Each PO is broken down to so-called Specific Objectives (later SO) and each of the PO has 2-4 SO's. The SO's must contribute to the result indicator defined by the programme. The result indicators capture the change that the programme wants to achieve in the region. The specific SO's and result indicators are seen below at the Table 1. (Central Baltic Programme website 2020. Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020, 8.)

Table 1. Programme priorities, specific objectives and result indicators (Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020)

Priority	Specific Objective	Result indicator
P1: Competitive economy	1.1 New Central Baltic knowledge intensive companies	Number of joint or co-operating knowledge intensive enterprises
	1.2 More entrepreneurial youth	Number of established joint student companies
	1.3 More exports by the Central Baltic companies to new markets	Number of cluster co-operations exporting to new markets
P2: Sustainable use of common resources	2.1 Natural and cultural resources developed into sustainable tourist attractions	More sustainable joint natural and cultural heritage based tourist attractions
	2.2 Sustainably planned and managed marine and coastal areas	Share of marine and coastal areas with improved management
	2.3 Better urban planning in the Central Baltic region	Share of urban areas covered with integrated urban management
	2.4 Reduced nutrients, hazardous substances and toxins inflows into the Baltic Sea	Amounts of nutrients, hazardous substances and toxins inflows into the Baltic Sea
P3: Well connected region	3.1 Improved transport flows of people and goods	Travel time of passengers Transport flows of goods
	3.2 Improved services of existing small ports to improve local and regional mobility and contribute to tourism development	Share of Central Baltic small ports with good services
P4: Skilled and socially inclusive region	4.1 More people benefiting from stronger Central Baltic communities	Communities with improvements
	4.2 More aligned vocational education and training programmes in the Central Baltic region	Share of aligned vocational education and training (VET) programmes in the Central Baltic region

The staff of the Central Baltic programme consist of Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat. Managing Authority is responsible of ensuring the effective implementation of the programme in accordance with the Programme Document and the relevant EU Regulations. Establishing the implementation systems, structures and procedures of the programme are responsibilities of the Managing Authority (MA) and also monitoring the implementation of the programme and projects. Joint Secretariat (JS) is responsible for the day-to-day management and implementation of the programme. Project applicants and project partners can get guidance and support in application and project-related matters from the Joint Secretariat. (Central Baltic Programme website 2020.)

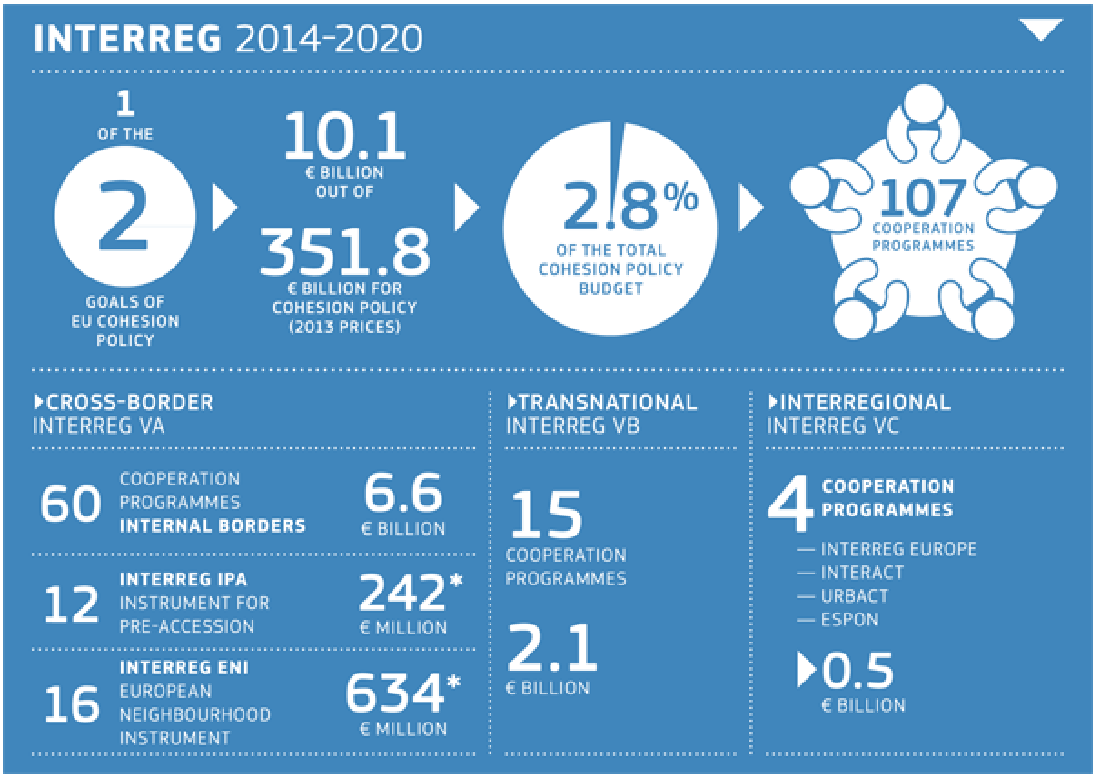
In addition, Central Baltic programme has National Contact Points, monitoring Committee and Steering Committee. National Contact Points are a network that supports the work of Joint Secretariat and Managing Authority in the programme countries. They deliver information about the programme to the regions and information from the regions to the programme. The Contact Points are located in Helsinki, Mariehamn, Stockholm, Norrköping, Tallinn and Riga. (Central Baltic Programme website 2020.)

Both the Monitoring Committee and the Steering Committee are composed of national, regional, local and social representatives of the participating countries/Åland. The Monitoring Committee takes decisions on the programme level, solves any irregularities and decides on the programme setup. The Steering Committee is responsible for the selection of projects for programme financing. (Central Baltic Programme website 2020.)

3.1 Interreg

The Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 is a part of the European Territorial Cooperation framework (later ETC). The ETC, better known as Interreg, is one of the two goals of cohesion policy besides investment for Growth and Job. Interreg programmes provide a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. The programmes duration is seven years. (Central Baltic Programme website 2020.)

Interreg was developed in 1990 as a Community Initiative in with a budget of just EUR 1 billion covering exclusively cross-border cooperation. Later, Interreg has been extended to transnational and interregional cooperation. (European Commission website 2020.) Interreg cross-border cooperation supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them. Transnational cooperation involves regions from several countries of the EU forming bigger areas. The aim is to promote better cooperation and regional development within the Union by a joint approach to tackle common issues. Interregional programmes are geographically "pan-European" that covers vast areas. Picture 1. summarises the Interreg programme 2014-2020 in few figures. (Interreg website 2020.)



Picture 1. Interreg 2014-2020. (European Comission website 2020)

85 million EU citizens (37 % of the population) live on border areas. The areas are often peripheral, underdeveloped or marginalised areas and sometimes the borders are

historical scars. The main aim of cross-border cooperation is to reduce the effect of borders as administrative, legal and physical barriers, tackle common problems and reveal untapped potential. Interreg programmes cover a variety of border regions: some work with maritime areas, other with internal EU land borders or borders shared with candidate countries. Most programmes are bilateral, but some consist of more than two neighbouring countries. (European Commission - Directorate General for Regional Policy 2011, 12.)

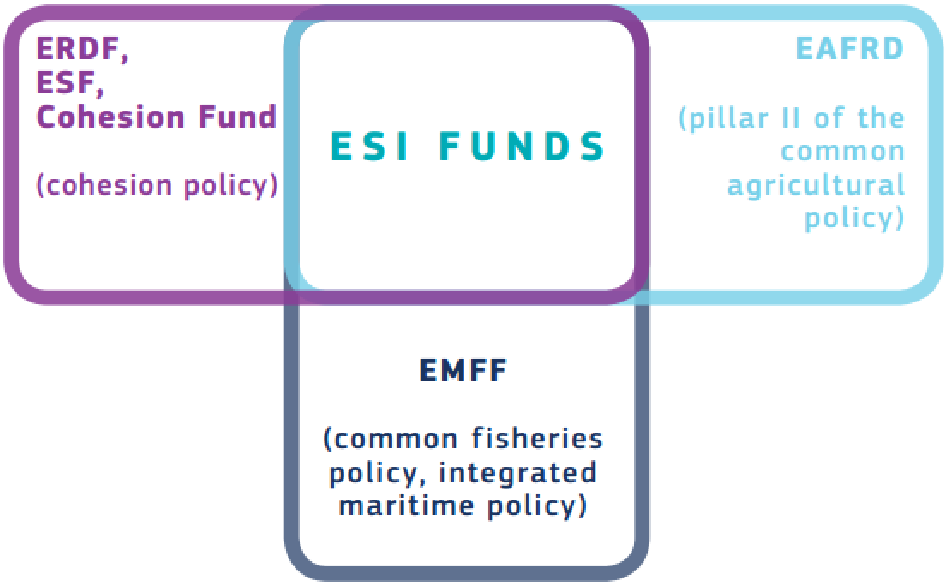
Interreg 2014-2020 is based on 11 investment priorities laid down in the European Regional Development Fund Regulation contributing to the delivery of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. From each of the cooperation programmes budget at least 80 % has to concentrate on a maximum of 4 thematic objectives of the eleven EU priorities. (European Commission website 2020.) As said before, Interreg is one of the key instruments of the European Union supporting cooperation across borders through project funding. Interreg is funded by European Regional Development Fund (later ERDF). (Interreg website 2020.)

3.2 Cohesion policy and European Regional Development Fund

EU cohesion policy is designed to advance an overall harmonious development of the EU by strengthening its economic, social and territorial cohesion. The policy aims to improve overall quality of life of the people in the EU. When implementing the cohesion policy, it promotes job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth and sustainable development across regions and cities. The majority of cohesion policy funding is concentrated on less developed regions of the EU aiming to help reduce economic, social and territorial disparities. Cohesion policy is established on the basis of seven-year funding periods. The current period 2014-2020 has allocated 352 billion euros and that is almost one third of the total EU budget. (Eurostat 2019, 18.)

Cohesion policy is delivered through several funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. Together with the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime And Fisheries Fund (EMFF), they make up the European Structural

And Investment Funds (ESIF). In picture 2. is seen all the ESI funds. (European Commission web page 2020.)



Picture 2. ESI funds. (European Commission 2015)

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) concentrates its actions on innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the low-carbon economy. The resources allocated to each of these depends upon the region in question: for example, in more developed regions, at least 80 % of any funding should focus on at least two of these priorities, whereas in less developed regions this share is 50 %. (European Commission 2015, 201.)

The aims of the ERDF are defined at the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (later TFEU) in Article 176: “The European Regional Development Fund is intended to help to redress the main regional imbalances in the Union through participation in the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind and in the conversion of declining industrial regions” (Consolidated Version of The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 26.10.2012, 2012/C 326/01, 176).

In addition Article 174 TFEU states that particular attention is to be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps. These include the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions. (Consolidated Version of The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 26.10.2012, 2012/C 326/01, 174.)

4 PROCESS DEFINITION AND PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

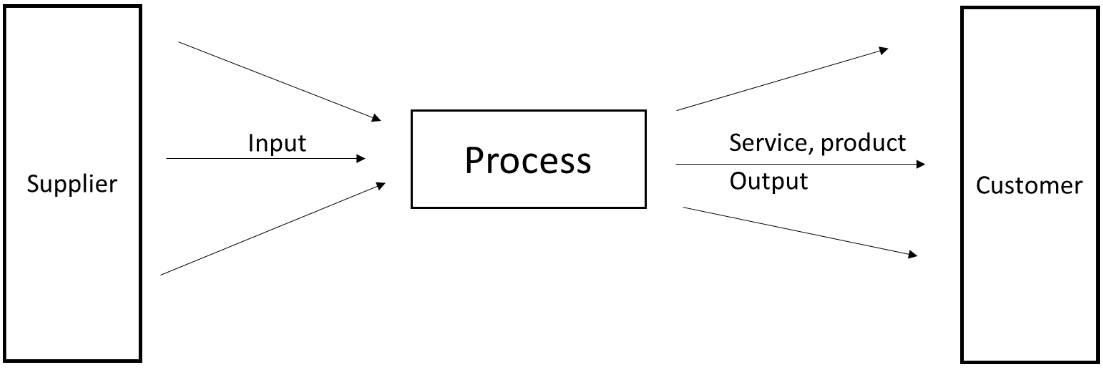
4.1 What is a process?

The word “process” is used in many meanings. Whatever change or development can be understood as a process, for example changing-, development-, understanding-, learning or growing process. According to Laamanen (2001, 19) a process can be defined as a number of actions related to each other logically and the resources needed to execute them that will help to create results of the actions.

In industry that manufactures products it is relatively easy to recognise a process by following the stream of goods. These processes can be described as clear chain of consecutive phases that repeats regularly. The development challenge is to ensure steady flow of the product through the organisation. Organisations that offers services as products, for example travelling, visit to the health centre, customer phone service, the process recognition might get complicated because the process cannot be executed as repeated actions. The phases of the processes can happen in undefined order or they might not happen at all. The challenge in these processes is to maintain experts’ know-how and awareness. (Laamanen 2001, 20-21)

The starting point of process thinking is the customer and their needs. First it is worthwhile to examine actions and model the actions. Modelling the actions is also called defining the process. When processes are described it is reflected with what kind of products and services (output) the customer needs are fulfilled. The process is designed (measures and resources) in a way that it produces the wanted products and services.

It is found out what inputs (information and material) are needed to execute the process and where to get them (suppliers). A process is in a short series of measures and resources like it is demonstrated in picture 3. (Laamanen 2001, 21.) (Laaamanen & Tinnilä 2009, 10.)



Picture 3. A process (Laamanen 2001, 20)

Process descripting has also important long-term effects at organisation. It trains the staff to analyse the work process and helps control the work. Employee can see their own working stage as a part of a whole. It also helps to visualise where the costs of work process are coming and how resources are influencing on process flow. It will bring meaningfulness and changes to working for employees that are participating in process developing. When interested parties are involved in developing it will decrease resistance to change and increase the ability for cooperation. (Jylhäsaari & Lumisaari 1999, 75.)

With process defining organisation can understand what the critical actions in point of view of value creation are. If the process definition has been successful there are following advantages:

1. The customer experiences they had better service.
2. People working in the organisation understands the big picture, their own role in value creation and that influences their motivation and cooperation throughout the whole organisation.
3. The needs of a customer are better understood and their meaning in development decisions is stronger which will lead to better products and services.

((Laaamanen & Tinnilä 2009, 10-11.)

Observing organisations as processes is an option for a way of thinking that emphasises rational structures and controlling and it is broader than individual point of view. The basic idea is that good working process produces good results for organisation. It is also quite a strict starting point. If a process is poorly organised, one employee can't get worthwhile results with great effort. On the contrary good process' produces good results with smaller work contribution. (Aarrevaara, Harisalo, Stenvall & Virtanen 2007, 117.)

4.2 Process in public administrative organisations

Public administration is implementing public politics and because of this managing a public organisation cannot be fully compared to a private organisation. Social responsibility is a good example of the differences of public and private sector. They can mean the similar things, for example saving paper, recycling and advancing the common good over the organisation's basic duties. But a private organisation exists to maximize the profit of its owners, whether it is said out loud or not. For public organisation the concept of social responsibility is more complicated. One interpretation is that good social responsibility for public organisation is to take seriously the duties placed for it and taking the customer-driven point of view in centre of the activities, good quality and measuring the results of the activities. (Virtanen & Wennberg 2007, 49-50.)

From the process management's point of view the public administration processes have three main starting points; customer orientation, impressiveness and efficiency. Customer orientation means that all public activities must be justified through customer needs. Public activities are required to be impressive, for example social and health care units should be able to influence the welfare of the public and prevent illnesses. Public activities should work efficiently, for example handling times and waiting times should be monitored. (Stenvall & Virtanen 2019, 121.)

When processes are managed successfully organisation can function better related to the objectives that are placed. The higher management of public organisation is required skills to manage the big picture. This is because recognising processes at organisation level must be done considering the customer needs from a perspective of expectations for the whole organisation. (Stenvall & Virtanen 2019, 127.)

Typical for public administrative process is that there can be several customers and the same quarter can be in different roles as a customer. Also, the same process can have several customers whose interests can be opposite. Complexity of customership must be taken into consideration when defining public administration processes. At public administration the customer-orientated way of thinking is also impact orientated way of thinking. All actions have societal impact goal. Succeeding in that means the same thing than fulfilling the customer's needs in private sector. (Virtanen & Wennberg 2007, 117.)

The concept of a client is problematic at the context of public administration. The client of many public administrative functions are not the actual clients of the function or those whose needs are aimed to serve. Many public organisations are performing surveillance for example. Immediate clients of surveillance are the targets of surveillance, for example food product producers. However, the actual clients of surveillance are rather the consumers, whose needs the surveillance is serving. (Virtanen & Wennberg 2007, 116.)

Starting point of process-based administration development is the view that public actions are based on law, the actions have higher goals and principals. Also public sector workers and customers have special relationship when compared to the private sector. Especially at public service production the individual's role for process is emphasised. It is because of the special nature of public services and sector that makes the service uniform quality possible. (Aarrevaara, Harisalo, Stenvall & Virtanen 2007, 117)

4.3 Describing a process

When defining a process organisation identifies the central needs of the customer and defines measures to fulfil them. After that organisation appoints the central functional ensembles that are also called as core and support processes'. (Stenvall & Virtanen 2019, 121.) With core process' the core duties of the organisation are performed, duties what for the organisation exists. In the context of public administration core processes mean societal impact processes that creates the societal impact of the bureau or service. Core processes express how the organisation is striving to execute what it is existing to do. For example surveillance is not a core process but it is a part of a process that ensures the safety of a product. (Virtanen & Wennberg 2007, 118)

Support processes establishes conditions for core processes operations. Support processes exists to support the activities of the organisation and they serve organisations internal clients or in other words people who work for the organisation. Support processes can be for example managing, financial administration and human resources. (Kiiskinen, Linkoaho & Santala 2002, 29)

When defining a process, it is a matter of defining the content of a process. This will happen in practice when the central phases of a process are described and the connections between them. Also it is needed to describe responsibilities related to every phase of the process and critical performance factors related to the process. (Virtanen & Wennberg 2007, 121-122.) Although it must be taken into consideration the content and the activities of the process because they are influencing in some extent how and which level the description is reasonable to do. For example, processes that contains lots of uncertainty it's not worthwhile to describe very detailed level whereas processes that have influence on safety must be described in detail. (Blomqvist & Martinsuo 2010, 3-4)

Describing of the process starts often with noticing the need for development. This can mean rationalising the workflow or the need can come from a strategy that is reworking the whole organisation. The starting point must be to understand why the process is defined. Process descriptions must be appropriate, and they must be useful for the operations. (JHS 152 2012, 3-4.)

According to JHS 152 (2012, 4-5) describing a process can be done in five phases;

1. Recognising the process and process owners
2. Choosing the process under description
3. Deciding the purpose of use and level of description
4. Choosing the manner and tools of describing
5. Describing the process

Starting point of process describing is that management of an organisation recognises the process and defines owners for it. After the recognition the process is defined and chosen for description. The process owner decides on what level the process is described. At first it will be clarified why the process is described and what is the purpose of it's use. The purpose of use defines the level of process description. When the level of description is decided the description means and tools are chosen. The more precise level the process is described the more formal description will be. Process description consists of basic information, process chart and activities table which all complement each other. It is important for the information to be clear and logical. The content of process description's basic information is seen below at Table 2. (JHS 152 2012, 4-5.)

Table 2. Process description basic information. (Adapted by Laamanen & Tinnilä 2009, 124)

1. Deployment
- Where is the process deployed? - How does the process start and end?
2. Customers, their needs and requirements
- Who are the customers and stakeholders? - How do they use the process output and what are their requirements?
3. Mission
- What is the mission of the process and how is the fulfilment measured? - What are the critical activities and how the performance in those are measured?
4. Inputs, outputs and service
- What are inputs, outputs and services?

- How to manage information?
5. Process chart
- What are the critical activities? - How to visualise the process with a chart?
6. Responsibilities
- What are the most important roles and teams? - What are the most important activities and the critical decisions to be made?

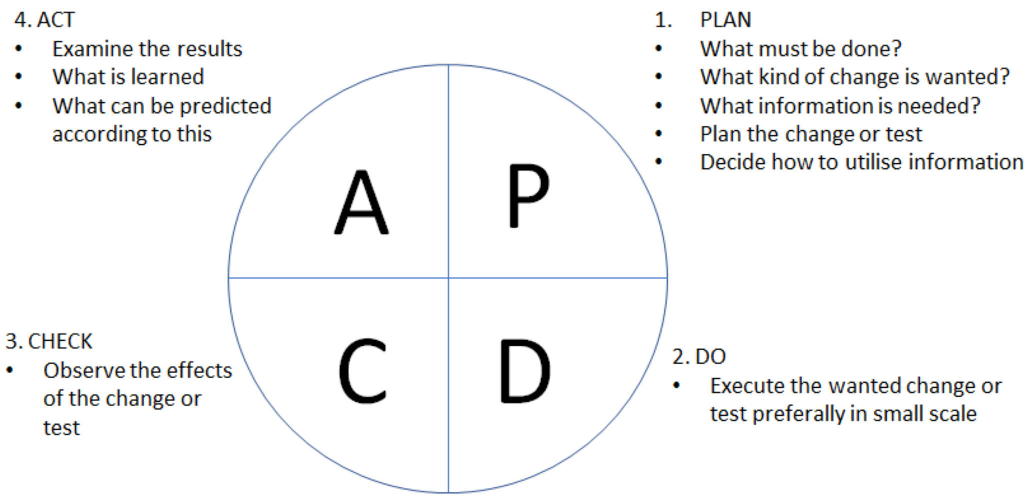
4.4 Developing a process

Quality services demans quality processes and that's why it is wanted to recognise the problematics and remove them by evaluating processes than just waiting for the customer feedback afterwards. When the processes are recognised it is possible to increase their fluency and cut unnecessary phases and costs. The process developing goals are typically to develop the process in such way that the process performance time is decreased, handling and delivering times are shorter, customer waiting time is shorter and complexity of the process is reduced. (Jylhäsaari & Lumijärvi 1999, 74.)

The extent of the process development can vary from wide development projects to continuous changes. Usually it starts with a problem to which the solution is searched for. A wide development project can include for example introduction of new procedures but often it is about improving some section of the process. (JHS 152 2012, 3.)

When defining the developing process Rantanen & Toikko (2009, 56-57) pay attention to the five activities of the development activity. First, developing requires **justification** when it is taken a stand on what and why is something under development. Then the actual development needs to be **organised** and it is decided who is doing what and with what resources. Third, development requires naturally the actual **execution** of the development activities. After that, **evaluation** of the activities is connected to the development. And last the outcome of the development is strived to **disseminate**.

Developing a process can be approached as social change from the point of view of the people or technical change from a point of view of systems. Both views are needed for successful developing. Process development has several basic principles to which process describing, measuring, analysing and testing the solutions are typical. The basic principles are illustrated at Deming's circle at picture 4 that is one of the most used developing concepts in the world. (Laamanen 2001, 209-210.)



Picture 4. Deming's circle. (Adapted by Laamanen 2001, 210)

Lean Six-Sigma DMAIC approach uses almost the same kind of logic. Lean Six-Sigma (later LSS) DMAIC is structured, systematic and phased approach to solve problems in an existing process, product or service. It is a process improvement framework focused on maximising both efficiency and effectiveness. DMAIC, which stands for Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control is systematic analytical approach that is the underlying concept of most LSS projects. (Cole 2011, 6.)

DMAIC has five phases: Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control. The Define phase starts with identifying a problem that requires a solution and ends with a clear understanding of the scope of the problem. The purpose of the Measure phase is to gather baseline information about the process that will be improved. The Analyse phase helps to understand the trends and areas to improvement. At Improve phase the knowledge is taken into action and improvements are implemented. At Control phase monitoring is placed to sustain the improvements. (Shankar 2009, 1, 11, 41, 67, 95.)

In this thesis process developing approach is to follow Rantanen and Toikko logic (justify, organise, execute, evaluate, disseminate). The implementation of the five phases follows the logic of the thesis and the phases happen naturally during this thesis. Also, the logic fits well in the thesis timetable.

5 RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 Qualitative research

This thesis is a qualitative study. Qualitative research is situation-based and unique. The idea of qualitative research is to understand and interpret and possibly simulate the phenomena under the research. With simulation it can be created for example organisations, process', diagrams and product development's target definitions. For this a conceptual frame, a framework is needed and through that the phenomena and information collected about it is observed. When material is collected for qualitative research it strives for versatile source material. It can be included interviews, original documents, observations and notes. (Pitkäranta 2014, 27.)

Qualitative research concentrates on examining the individual cases and an essential for the case is emphasising the point of view of the people who are participating and the interaction between the research worker and individual observation. The goal of qualitative research can be i.e. obtaining new knowledge, description of a phenomena, deepening of an understanding or interpretation of a phenomena. (Juuti & Puusa 2011, 47-48.)

This thesis is a qualitative study and it fulfils the most typical features of a qualitative study according to Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2009, 164):

- The nature of the research is to collect information comprehensively.
- It favors people as an instrument for collecting information.

- Use of qualitative methods of obtaining information (interviews, survey, document analysis).
- Target group has been chosen appropriately.
- The research plan forms as the research is proceeding.

5.2 The approach of the research

A case study is a good approach for development when the aim is to generate development ideas and proposals. The target of a research (or case) could be for example a service, an action, company or a part of a company, a process or a product. A case study produces information about the present state of a phenomena in its true situation and operational environment. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2015, 52.)

It is essential that the case can be outlined reasonably clearly out of another context. Defining the case is the most critical phase of the case study. It can happen before or after the material has been collected. It is the researcher themselves who is defining the case. They must justify why a certain way to define a case is useful or reasonable. (Eriksson & Koistinen 2014, 6.)

A case study strives to produce profound and detailed information about the case that is under research. With the help of a case study it is possible to understand the target of the development comprehensively in its realistic operational surroundings. A case study often answers the questions “why” and “how”. The research is not striving for statistical generalisation, but the case is studied considering local, temporal and social situations and connections. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2015, 52-53.)

The most typical feature of a case study is that using many kinds of methods it is possible to gain profound, versatile and comprehensive picture of the case. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2015, 55.) It is possible to do both qualitative and quantitative research as case study or combination of both but often it relates to qualitative research. Also many kinds of analysing methods are used in case study. (Eriksson & Koistinen 2014, 5)

A case study is a good approach for this thesis because the aim is to generate development ideas, and it strives to produce information about the present state of the process. The aim is not to make generalisations but to research the unique situation. Many kinds of methods of data collection are used to gain profound and comprehensive picture about the current state of the process.

5.3 Methods of data collection

Data collection methods used are document analysis, a questionnaire and a group interview. The aim is to gather information about the application process from the programme Project Team and from the project applicants. This way it will be ensured that both views are taken into consideration when developing the application process. If only programme project team's view is under research, it would not serve the project applicants and vice versa. In addition, information about some other Interreg programme's application processes is also gathered to compare them to Central Baltic programme's application process.

Data collection methods that are used in this thesis were chosen because it is believed that they will deliver the best possible outcome. The aim of using many methods is to increase the coverage of the study and decrease the errors of credibility.

5.3.1 Document analysis

Document analysis is a method that strives to make conclusions based on material that is brought to written form. Documents that are under examination can be for example written interviews, web pages, magazine articles, diaries, speeches etc. The aim is to analyse documents systematically and create verbal and clear description about the matter that is under investigation and development. With document analysis the material strives to organise as compact and clear as possible. The purpose of the analysis is to create added value. It will bring clarity to the material so clear and reliable conclusions can be made. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2015, 136.)

Document analysis was done to 14 out of 79 Interreg programmes (excluding Interreg IPA and Interreg ENI programmes) in January 2020. The programmes under analysis were chosen based on how easy it was to find information about the application process. Information was searched at the programme's websites. Some of the programmes didn't have easily found page or documentation about the application process and it was not reasonable to use much time for searching the information. Whereas there were programmes which had the information easily available. Programmes under analysis were different kinds of programmes under Interreg programme: cross-border, transnational and interregional programmes. The goal was to collect information about the process' until the saturation point was reached. The information was collected in Excel-form based on the information available in the website. The basic phases at the application process' were written down. The template for gathering the information including the programmes analysed is found at the appendices, Appendix 1.

Information was gathered about which are the main stages of the application process, what is the role of JS in the process, is the application form electronic and/or in paper, is the process two-step or one-step procedure, how many calls there have been by January 2020 and which are the interesting or different aspects in the process.

5.3.2 Questionnaire for the applicants

A questionnaire is a common method of collecting material. Questionnaire can also be called a survey which implicates that the questionnaire is standardised in other words conditioned. Conditioned means that all the respondents are asked the same questions and in a same manner. When the questionnaire form is sent in writing for the respondents the respondents answers also in written form. The advantage is that large group of people can be reached but the risk is that the respondent percent can be low. (Vilkka 2015, 94.)

The advantage of a questionnaire is that it is possible to collect a large amount of research material from a large group of people and ask the same questions from all of them. It is quick and effective method. The weakness of the method is that the information produced might be superficial and you never know how serious the respondent has been answering the survey and how aware of the subject they are. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2015, 121.)

A questionnaire was chosen as a method because with a questionnaire it is possible to reach many people at once easily. The questionnaire was executed as online survey and it was sent for 69 lead applicants of the 5th call at the same time as a feedback questionnaire about the 5th call made by the info team of the Central Baltic programme. The questionnaire was sent to the applicants on February 12 and to answer by March 6. The questionnaire was sent to only 5th call applicants because they have a good recall of the application process. The questionnaire form was made with Lyyti-service and the link to the survey was sent via e-mail. The questionnaire received five answers. Questions and the covering letter of the questionnaire are found at the appendices, Appendix 2.

5.3.3 Interview of the project team

The interview of the Central Baltic project team was executed as a group interview. An interview is the best way to get answers for the research problem because the interviewees can express their views freely and the interviewer can react to the answers and it is possible to ask clarifications if something is unclear.

An interview is a flexible method and it is suitable for many research purposes. In an interview people are in verbal interaction with each other’s thus it is possible to direct the data collection in the situation. It is also possible to understand motives behind the answers and rearrange the themes of the interview. Advantage of the interview is that when the subject in question will produce complex answers and answers that point to many directions it is possible to clarify them. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 34-35.)

The chosen method for the interview is a theme interview. It is between a structured and open interview. In structured interview the order and form of the questions is entirely fixed, and the open interview is more like a conversation and has no fixed outline. The topic area in theme interview exists but the questions don’t have precise form or order. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 208-209.)

The project team is interviewed as a group. There are seven people at the project team. A group interview is a conversation which goal is relatively free-form. The participants are commenting issues rather spontaneously, making observations and produce diverse information about the subject in hand. A group interview is an easy way to get information quickly and simultaneously from several respondents. Group dynamics may prove to be challenging and power hierarchies might influence on who will speak at the group and what is said. In this case the interviewer must be alert and ask comments directly to other participants if only one or two participants are dominating the conversation. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 61-63.)

A group interview is the best way to gather information about the application process from the project team because it is too time consuming to interview team members one at a time. Also in a group situation team members are able to hear each other's opinions and point of views and can reflect on that and take the conversation further.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

The empiric study is done in three steps:

1. Collecting information about the Central Baltic application process from the applicants and the Project Team. To collect additional information from other Interreg programme's application processes.
2. Analysing the problematics, improvement suggestions and good practices of the application process.
3. Producing application process description and improvement suggestions based on the analysis.

First I will take a deep look at the application process and methods of defining a process. I will interview the Project Meam manager of the Central Baltic programme to understand the details and the order of the process. The application process will be defined and described. I will familiarize with some of the other Interreg programme's application processes to compare them to Central Baltic application process in order to get a bigger picture about what kind of processes are in use.

After defining the application process, I will have a group discussion with the Central Baltic project team about the process. The process will be gone through phase by phase to find out the problematics, improvement suggestions and good practices. I will also create a survey for project applicants to find out these issues from a point of view of the applicants.

When problematics, improvements and good practices are brought out I will make improvements suggestions for the Central Baltic application process. I will take into consideration the Project Teams and the project applicants views when making the suggestions to the process.

The result of the thesis is a process description and suggestions for improving the application process. The process description includes basic information table, process chart and activities table. These can be found at the appendices in the end of the thesis. The results will be presented to the staff of the Central Baltic programme in a group meeting.

6.1 The Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 application process

The process description in this chapter is based on an interview with the Central Baltic Project Team Leader and a group discussion with the whole Project Team. The basic information of the process is found at the appendices, Appendix 3. The process chart is in Appendix 4 and the activities table of the process is Appendix 5. The process has been outlined from a point of view of an applicant and details of the assessment phase of the projects have been left out from the process description.

The Central Baltic programme application process is a two-step process that starts when a call is pronounced. The programme informs the applicants and stakeholders at the programme website. When the call is pronounced the documents supporting the application process are published at the website. The documents are *Guide for filling* *in the application form*, *Project idea form* and the *Programme Manual.* Also the programme website contains lot of information about the process.

The applicant can start the process by filling the Project idea form and submitting it to Project Managers and Coordinators of the Joint Secretariat (later JS) and participating to a consultation with the JS. The applicant can also wait until participating in the applicant seminar and decide after that if the Central Baltic programme is the right fit for funding the project. At the applicant seminar the applicants are informed about the project intervention logic, partnership and developing a work plan, drafting a budget, attachments and submitting the application. There is also opportunity to participate to a consultation with the JS.

After the applicant seminar the eMS is opened 2-3 months before the first application deadline. The eMS is Central Baltic e-Monitoring System online application where the applicant fills in the application form. At the first step the applicants fill the application form only on a strategic level. The applicant fills in at the application form the project overview, partnership and project description. It is emphasised to the applicants that the project development is not meant to do at the eMS but in other form (for example Word, Excel) that feels natural for the applicants.

The applicant is preparing the application form during this time from pronouncing the call to the first deadline. During this time, it is possible to participate on consultation by the JS at any time of the process. The applicant contacts the JS and the consultation can be done by e-mail, phone or via Skype.

The applicant submits the application form and required annexes before the first deadline. After the deadline the JS starts to assess the applications. During the assessment the applicant can’t change the application form. The JS assesses the applications and makes suggestions for Steering Committee that selects the projects that can continue to the second step. The Steering Committee is assembled from representatives of the Member States and the Steering Committee decides which projects will be funded after the second step.

The Steering Committee will place recommendations and conditions for the selected projects. The recommendations are to be fulfilled voluntarily but the conditions are compulsory to fulfil in order to enter the second step. After informing the projects that can continue to step two, the eMS will be open again for applicants and they can continue to work on the application. They will fulfil the conditions and take into consideration the recommendations and it is possible to participate on consultation with the JS. The applicants can now fill in the form the budget and a work plan. The applicant submits the application form and annexes before the second deadline.

6.2 Application process in selected Interreg programmes

There was 14 out of 79 Interreg programmes under analysis and all of them provided easily accessible information about the application process at their website. 9 out of 14 programmes had two-step application process. Usually at the first step at least a project idea or expression of interest is submitted. The first application contains reduced amount of information from the full application form. Projects for the second step are in most cases selected by the programme (Joint Secretariat, Monitoring Committee or Steering Committee). In some cases, the decision is made on the grounds of points that the application receives on the assessment. Few of the programmes just provided recommendation to continue or not to continue the application process and let the applicants to decide whether they wanted to continue the process or not.

Although in the programmes that one step procedure was in use, the programmes provided some amount of feedback about the project ideas. All the programmes were at least strongly recommending sending the project idea to JS for feedback. In some programmes the consultation is compulsory and if the project idea has not gone through the consultation the project application will be ineligible.

Only one programme’s application process was somewhat different than other programmes. This progamme had a preparatory project funding available for short 6-month project which is available for developing the idea more in depth. After that they can apply the full project funding during the project call. The preparatory project call is running continuously when usually the project calls are pronounced for certain time period.

Many of the programmes has a project idea database and/or partner search in use. Project idea database is on the website where everyone can go through the ideas. Project ideas can be submitted publicly, or they can be marked as confidential when it is not seen by others. Partner search is usually available at the programme website but in some cases, it is also found in LinkedIn. Central Baltic programme also has a partner search at the website. Information how effective and used these databases are is not unfortunately available. It is not studied also in Central Baltic programme. This could be a good subject to study in the programmes.

The role of JS is quite similar in all of the programmes. JS provides feedback and consultations but in some programmes the JS assistance is limited to technical questions and intervention logic to avoid any conflict of interest. In most cases project ideas will get feedback when asked and in some cases it also compulsory. JS gives feedback in writing, via telephone or online calls and even in personal meetings. Tools for supporting the application process varied. The most used are manuals, documents and consultations. Also seminars and workshops are common. In addition livestreams, webinars, info days and online question forums were also mentioned.

Compared to the application process of Central Baltic programme the two step procedure is quite similar than other Interreg programmes' processes that were analysed. They differ only in details such as the role of JS, what kind of information is needed from the applicant in the first step and what kind of tools and documents are provided for the applicants. All the programmes' application forms are filled into an electronic system and annexes are sent electronically and/or on paper.

6.3 Lead applicant questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent to 69 lead applicants of the 5th call at the same time as a feedback questionnaire about the 5th call made by the Info Team of the Central Baltic programme. The questionnaire is found at the appendices, Appendix 2. Three weeks was given for answering time and five answers was received which makes the answering percentage 7. The low amount of answers might be because there were two questionnaires to fill (5^{th} call feedback and application process questionnaire) and the 5^{th} call feedback questionnaire was perhaps quicker to answer. Also, at the same time Central Baltic programme sent a wide survey for all stakeholders of the programme about the programme content and administration and the applicants of the 5^{th} call received that survey too. When there are three questionnaires to fill at the same time from the same sender about pretty similar topics most probably the respondent doesn't answer all of them.

Answers of the questionnaire are analysed same way as interviews because majority of the questions were open and the respondents could tell the answer in their own words.

6.4 Conclusions of the questionnaire

Four out of five respondents stated that the application procedure was pretty difficult and there were few problems at the process. One respondent said the process was easy. Three out of five respondents were applying funding for the first time and two had participated on previous calls. These respondents preferred the two-step application process.

Clear instructions and application structure received positive feedback. The eMS worked well and positive was that the application form could be filled in by more than one person. For one respondent the process was easy because the respondent has participated before, the guidance was good and easily available and the contact with JS was good.

The 5^{th} call was exceptionally one-step procedure and it got some negative feedback. One step process was said to be too risky and expensive especially for a lead applicant, as the planning of the project and the filling in of the application form required a lot of working time, meetings and very detailed planning. The two-step procedure eliminates unsuitable projects at early stage so that time is saved from wasted planning.

One of the respondents stated that the consultation was too light and uncertain and there was no clear guidance. Another respondent expressed that the guidance was very extensive but sometimes it didn’t help because it was not clear what type of information was expected in different fields.

When asked about how to develop the process in the future the respondents mentioned more consultations, to keep two-step process and have lighter first round, develop separate forms to help calculate costs, to make the process simpler and allow flexibility on scheduling, budgeting and planning of the activities.

6.5 Group discussion with the project team

The group discussion with the project team was organised on February 26 at 15.00 to 16.00 in the Central Baltic programme office. From seven members of the team six was present. Process chart that was created beforehand was sent to the project team and that was used as a basis for the discussion. The discussion was recorded, and it was later transcribed. The process chart is in the appendices, Appendix 3. At the group discussion the process became clearer for description, good things were recognised and few problematics at the process were discovered.

6.6 Conclusions of the group discussion

The two-step procedure as a whole was seen as good procedure to choose the projects for funding. The applicants have time to develop the idea and they get feedback in an early stage and ineligible projects will drop out during the first step. The consultations have a big role at the procedure. It is important that the applicants get feedback on their ideas and they can ask questions that they can’t find answers from the guidance. The Project Team is easy to approach, and the team emphasised that the consultations is the best way to get help with the application. The team mentioned that the Central Baltic programme website itself is a good and useful document that contains information to inform the project applicants. Website contains useful documents and one useful tool for the applicants is the project idea form. The form is used as a basis of a consultation and it is a fruitful tool for the applicant to write down and describe the project idea.

Problems that were recognised at the application phase can be divided into two categories; technical and content related. Technical issues are related with the eMS. The logic of eMS can be found as complicated and difficult to follow, especially for newcomers. The content related problems are usually about understanding the intervention logic of the programme. For example, what is the right information for the right category, hierarchy of project outputs, activities and deliverables, how to split the activities, and how the project is supporting the programme result indicators.

At the end of the discussion some of the other Interreg programmes methods was discussed. These methods were; public idea submission, project idea banks, partner search, continuous preparatory project call, calls for different priorities separately, webinars to help applicants, on-line live question forum, workshops and tutorial videos. None of the new methods got the immediate support and few of them are already in use (partner search, videos, workshops). The idea of continuous call without the preparatory project though, got some support but others did not see any advantage from it. Some of the methods (calls for different priorities separately, idea banks) would not bring any added value to the calls in Project Team's opinion.

6.7 How to improve the process

The application process in whole is functioning well according to the Project Team as well as the respondents of the questionnaire and the actions during the process are justified. The two-step procedure is a well-functioning format and it is used in most of the Interreg programmes as well. The process itself doesn't need much of improving, only some details would be good to consider.

The programme website itself was said to be an important document and that is why there should be a communication plan. There are communication activities during the calls and that is why it would be good to have a communication plan for the whole process. Communication activities should start at planning phase to inform the stakeholders that a call will be pronounced in the near future. During the process it would be useful to inform and remind the applicants about the deadlines, seminars, guides and consultations available.

Hopes for eMS and application form were that it would be more simplified and flexible. The problem is that eMS is used in many other Interreg programmes and it should remain somewhat unified and the programmes can’t do too much alterations to the software. It must be unified so that the applicants don’t have to learn new logic every time they are doing an application for funding at the eMS. To avoid information overlaps at the eMS the programme could revise the form carefully to see if something could be combined or removed. In addition, it would be good to look at the Guide for filling in the Application Form to see if more explaining could be done to open the intervention logic of the eMS.

The content related problems concern the intervention logic of the programme. The respondents were hoping for examples and templates and also the Project Team mentioned that the examples and templates would be good tools to have. It would be useful to create few examples of hierarchy of outputs, results and deliverables and also a template to help construct those aspects. Also it would be good to open the mentioned problematic aspects (what is the right information for the right category, hierarchy of project outputs, activities and deliverables, how to split the activities, how the project is supporting the programme result indicators) even further at the Guide for Filling in the Application Form.

6.8 Reliability of the thesis

A study made with qualitative research method can be said to be reliable when the object of the study and interpreted material are compatible and irrelevant or random factors have not been affecting to the constructing of the theory (Vilkka 2015, 196). Qualitative research is not just one tradition because there are many different research methods that are qualitative. And that is why there are different views regarding the reliability of the qualitative research. (Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2018, 118.)

In the last resort a study made with qualitative research method the criteria of reliability is the researcher itself and their honesty because under the evaluation are actions, choices and solutions made by the researcher. The researcher must evaluate the reliability of their study for each choice they have made during the study. Therefore, the evaluation of reliability is made all the time while writing the study. The researcher must be able to describe and justify in the study text the choices they have made. It must be done in a credible way, but nevertheless another researcher can come to a different result without that being considered as a weakness of the research method or weakness of the study. (Vilkka 2015, 197.)

Because there is no unambiguous instructions to evaluate qualitative research reliability the following list can be used as a help when making sure the research is done in a reliable way and that the research report includes the following points:

- The target and purpose of the study: What is being studied and why?
- Researcher's own commitment to the study: Why the study is important? What are the assumptions at the beginning of the study? Have the thoughts changed?
- Gathering the material: How the material has been collected, as a method and as a technique? Special qualities of the material, possible problems and other significant factors.
- Informants of the study: How they are chosen, how they were contacted, how many informants there were?
- Researcher-informant relationship: How the relationship worked? Did the informants read the study before publishing it?
- Duration of the research: What was the timetable of the study?
- Analysing the material: How the material was analysed? How did it reached the conclusions and the results?
- Reliability of the research: Evaluation why the report is reliable.
- Research report: How the research material has been gathered and analysed?

(Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2018, 122.)

In this thesis the majority of the previous points have been included at the report. It is quite clear that the outcome of a qualitative study may differ if someone else would do the same study at the same way because every qualitative study is unique, and it depends on the researcher's theoretical familiarity and pre-comprehension on the matter. I have strived for a justified report that is written as openly as possible and in a neutral way and I believe it is seen at the report.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The aim of this thesis was to create a process description and make improvement suggestions for the management of the Central Baltic Programme and to be taken into consideration at the planning of the next programme period. The process was outlined from the point of view of an applicant, starting from pronouncing the call to the second step deadline of submitting the application form. The assessment phases in first and second step were left out from the description.

The research method used was qualitative case study because it is a good approach for development when the aim is to generate development ideas and proposals. The research material for the study has been collected from the lead applicants with a questionnaire, from the Central Baltic Project Team with a group discussion and collecting information about different application process' as document analysis from other randomly chosen other Interreg programmes.

The main question in this thesis was how to develop the application process in Central Baltic Programme? The sub-questions to help find the answer were:

- How to develop a process?
- What are the good practices in the application process?
- What are the challenges of the application process?

This thesis answers these questions and reach its goal by creating a process description and improvement suggestions.

The Central Baltic programme application process was defined with the help of the theory of process describing. The content of the process is described and connections between them. Process description consists of basic information, process chart and activities table. The Central Baltic programme application process' basic information table, process chart and activities table were created, and they are found at the appendices.

The process developing approach in this thesis was to follow the logic of justify, organise, execute, evaluate and disseminate phases. The approach fitted naturally with this thesis. The introduction, describing the research problem and describing the theory of a process and process development was the justification of the study. Organising phase was describing the research methods and gathering the resource material. Execution phase was implementing the empiric study; executing the document analysis, questionnaire and the group discussion. Evaluation phase included writing down the research results and reflecting the results on theory. Disseminating the results was presenting the research results for the organisation and the school representatives.

The application process itself is functioning well and it did not need big alterations. Only some fine adjustment was in place. The two-step process is justified as a procedure and it got good feedback from the Project Team and also from the applicants. The Project Team has similar thoughts about the problematics and good aspects about the process. These problems are not substantial and can be solved by providing more information and supporting tools for the applicants.

Studying the application process of the Central Baltic Programme was an interesting subject to study. The research results were pretty much what I expected. I was expecting that the two-step procedure is functioning well, but few adjustments are needed for the process to help the applicants submit a high-quality application. Although I am a little disappointed about the amount of answers to the questionnaire. It would have been good to broaden the sample and maybe give an opportunity to all lead applicants from previous calls to answer the questionnaire. Fortunately, there were more than one method of gathering material to reach a proper and justified outcome.

I had good support from the Central Baltic staff when preparing this thesis, specially from the Managing Authority and Project Team Leader. The study proceeded in the timetable I had created and there were no big problems during the thesis process. One thing that surprised me was that the material about process theory is quite aged. There is not much sources that have been written in the last 10 years. Perhaps these sources are still relevant and there is no need for new theory or the process thinking, and process development is out-of-date.

Application process is a very wide process and I had to outline something out in order to prevent the thesis from broadening too much. The application process contains good and interesting aspects for further studying. For example, has the partner search tool helped to create partnerships and new project ideas. And it would also be interesting to study the assessment phases of the application process because it is very important for the programme to choose the right projects for funding. Only right kind and suitable projects can contribute to the objectives of the Central Baltic programme.

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APPENDIX 1

Template for gathering information about Interreg programme application process’

PROGRAMME NAME	**Procedure**	**Role of Joint Secretariat**	**Submission of a application**	**One-step or two-step**	**Total calls by 1.1.2020**	**Points of interest**
Name of the Interreg programme in question	What are the main phases at the application process	What is the role in process of Joint Secretariat	Is the application form electronical or on paper	Is the process done in one or two step	How many calls have there been	What are the interesting or different aspects of this application process
North Sea Region						
Interreg Europe						
Baltic Sea Region						
Central Europe						
Euregio Meuse-Rhine						
Danube						
North Periphery and Arctic Programme						
France (Channel) England						
Latvia-Liettua						
Mediterranean						
Sudoe						
2 Seas						
South Baltic						
Botnia Atlantica						

APPENDIX 2

The questionnaire and covering letter for project funding applicants.

Dear Central Baltic Lead Applicant/Lead Partner

Thank you for applying for funding from the Central Baltic programme.

In order to improve our services, we would like to hear back from you; how your application process went, how did you find the support and services provided by the programme, and so on.

Here is a link to the 5th call questionnaire: https://www.lyyti.fi/questions/e013814f08

Additionally, we would greatly appreciate if you took some time to answer a questionnaire dealing with the application process in more detail. The answers are used for an applied sciences university thesis prepared by our intern Päivi Kukkonen (paivi.kukkonen@centralbaltic.eu): https://www.lyyti.fi/questions/093d907e8d

Please send your response by **6 March.**

We appreciate your valuable inputs!

Interreg
Central Baltic

Attention by Lyyti

Dear Central Baltic Project Applicant

This is a questionnaire about the Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 application process. The purpose is to gather information about the process, how it is in the point of view of an applicant and how would you like to develope the process in the future.

The information gathered is used in a thesis that aims to improve the Central Baltic application process better and smoother for the next programme period 2021-2027.

We are very grateful for your input and appreciate that you can spare few minutes to answer the questions.

Please send your reponse by 6.3.

Thank you!

If you think the application process as a whole (from project idea to submitting the application form) how was the process? *

- ○ It was easy
- ○ It was pretty easy, few difficulties
- ○ It was pretty difficult, more than few problems
- ○ It was difficult

What didn't work at the application process? What was difficult at the process? Why? *

What was good about the application process? What was easy? Why?

How would you improve application process better and smoother? (For example more seminars, consultations, workshops, guides, peer support, partner search, idea banks or what ever comes to your mind)

Have You applied funding from Central Baltic Programme before 5th call? (all the programme periods taken into account) *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If you have any other comments regarding to the application process, please write them here.

Send answers

APPENDIX 3

Process description: Central Baltic programme 2014-2020 application process basic information

1. Deployment

- The process is used at applicating project funding.
- The process starts when the call is pronounced and ends when the whole application form is filled and submitted.

2. Customers, their needs and requirements

- The customers are project applicants.
- The output is the application which is the base of the project, customers need is to get proper guidance and instructions.

3. Mission

- Process mission is to allocate funding for a project idea.
- eMS and right information are critical activities.

4. Inputs, outputs and service

- Output is the project application, inputs are eMS, information documents, seminars, consultations.
- Information is on eMS, on website, project applicant’s computer.

5. Process chart

- The crude phases are pronouncing the call, information at the website, seminar, consultations, eMS open, first deadline, choosing projects for second step, recommendations and placing conditions, consultations, second deadline and submission of the whole application.

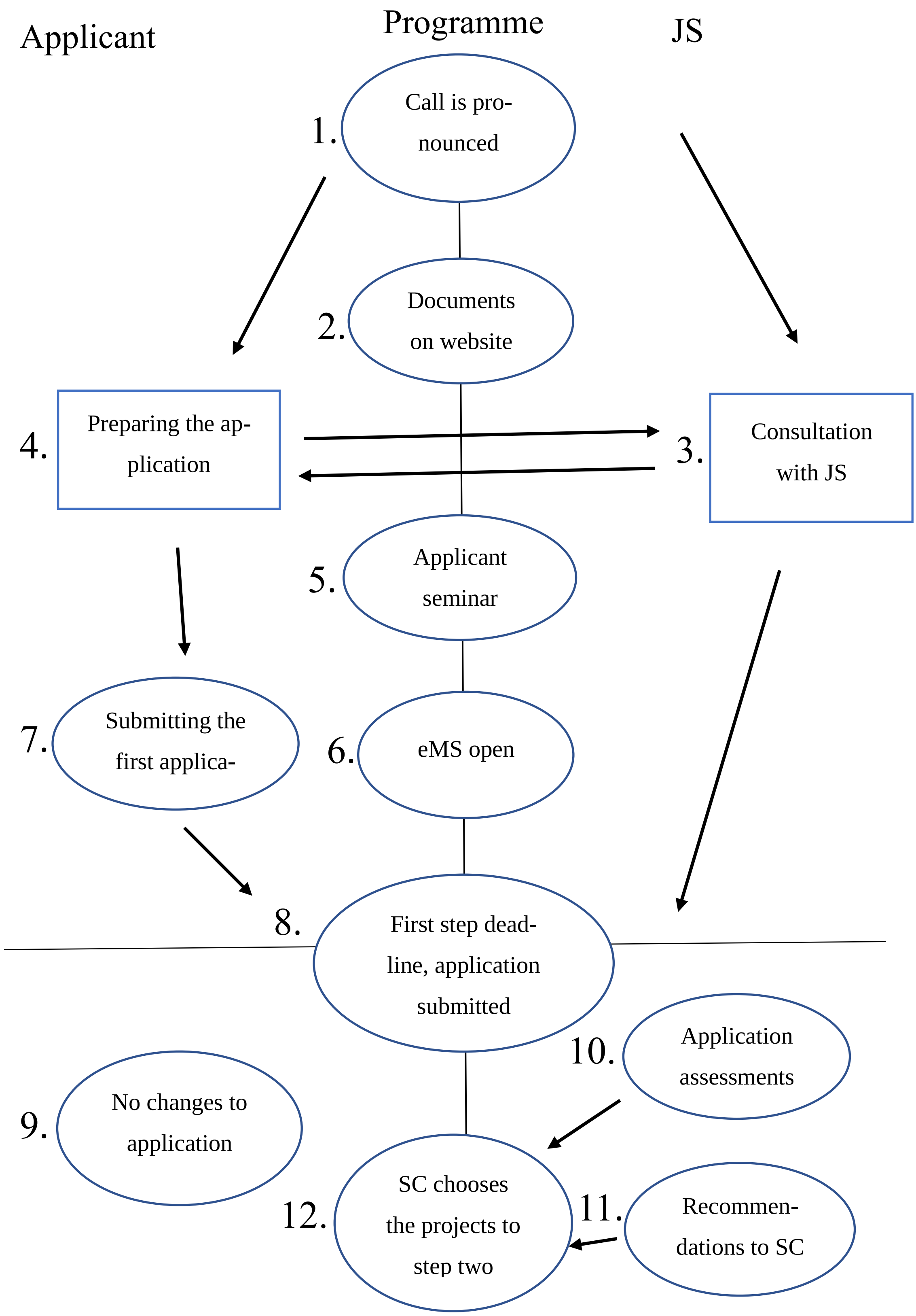
6. Responsibilities

- Important teams are the Project Team, Info-team and IT-team.
- Important activities are eMS, consultations, information on website.

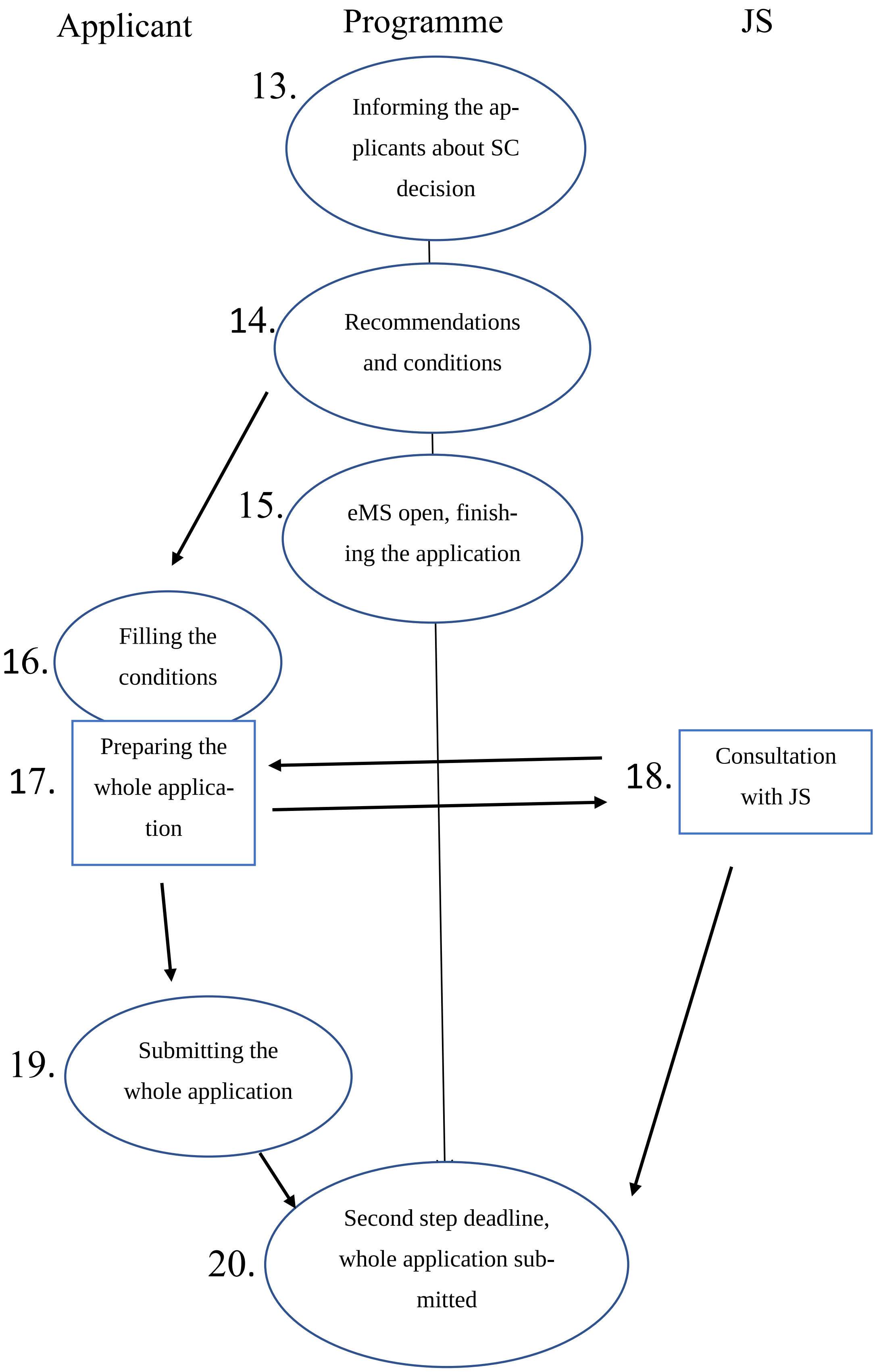
APPENDIX 4

Process description: Process chart of the Central Baltic application process

First step



Second step


Applicant
Programme
JS
13.
Informing the applicants about SC decision
14.
Recommendations and conditions
15.
eMS open, finishing the application
16.
Filling the conditions
17.
Preparing the whole application
18.
Consultation with JS
19.
Submitting the whole application
20.
Second step deadline, whole application submitted

APPENDIX 5

Process description: Central Baltic application process activities table

Phase / activity	Tasks	Responsible	Result / output
1. Call is pronounced	- Informing the stakeholders - Updating the website - Updating the application page on website	- Info team - Project Team	- Updated information on website - Information on other media channels
2. Documents on website	- Updating the documents - Uploading the documents on website	- Project Team - Info-team	- Updated website - Programme Manual - Guide for Filling in the Application Form - Project Idea Form - Annexes
3. Consultations with JS (on-going throughout the whole process)	- Contancting JS - Consultation with JS - Filling in the Project Idea form	- Project Team - Project applicants - Project applicant	- Summary of the consultations - E-mail - Written feedback
4. Preparing the application (on-going throughout the whole process)	- Applicant prepares and develops project idea with partners	- Project applicants: lead partner, project partners	- Project idea
5. Applicant seminar	- Communicating about the seminar - Organising the seminar	- Project Team - Info team - Project applicants	- The seminar - Seminar feedback

	- Participating the seminar		
6. eMS open	- Registration to the eMS - Updating the eMS - Technical support	- IT Team - Project applicants	- Application form
7. Submitting the first application	- Application form is fulfilled for strategy part - Application sub-mission - Including the an-nexes	- Project applicants	- Filled in application form - Annexes
8. First step dead-line, application submitted	- eMS closes after deadline	- IT Team	
9. No changes to application	- Application form "locked"	- IT Team	
10. Application assessment	-- Applications are assessed: technical assessment, content assessment	- Project Team	- Assessment results - Recommendations - Conditions - Suggestions of pro-jects eligible for sec-ond step
11. Recommen-dations to Steer-ing Committee	- Recommendations of the projects to continue to the sec-ond step	- Project Team - Steering Commit-tee	
12. SC chooses the projects	- Steering Commit-tee meeting	- Steering Commit-tee - Project Team	- Decision of the pro-jects that continue

	- SC makes decisions of the projects - SC makes decisions about conditions and recommendations	- Managing Authority	- Decision of rejected projects - Minutes of the meeting
13. Informing the applicants of SC decision	- Informing the applicants about the decisions - Publishing the information on website	- Project Team - Info team	- Updated website - Email for applicants
14. Recommendations and conditions	- Announcing the recommendations - Placing conditions - Meeting with applicants and going through the recommendations/conditions	- Project Team - Project applicants	- Recommendations in writing - Conditions in writing
15. eMS is open	- eMS will be opened for applicants	- IT Team	
16. Filling the conditions	- Applicant fulfils the conditions or doesn't continue to second step - Changes are made to eMS	- Project applicant	- Updated application form
17. Preparing the application form (on-going throughout the whole process)	- Applicant continues to fil the application (Budget, Work packages)	- Project applicant	- Updated application form

18. Consultations with JS (on-going throughout the whole process)	- Contacting JS - Consultation with JS (only technical questions)	- Project Team - Project Applicant	- Consultation summary - Email - Written feedback
19. Submitting the whole application	- Filling the whole application - Submission of the application form Including annxes	- Project applicant	- Filled in application form - Annexes
20. Second step deadline, whole application submitted	- eMS closes after deadline	- IT Team	