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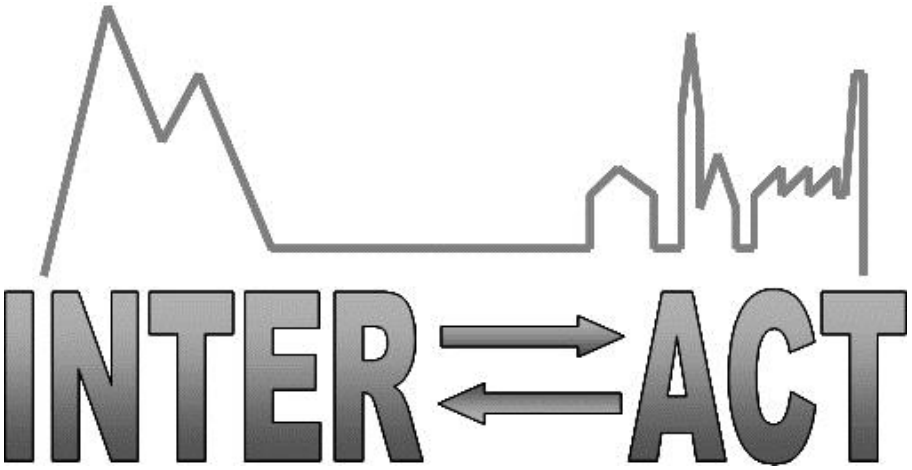

D4.4 - TA report

Project No.262693– INTERACT

FP7-INFRASTRUCTURES-2010-1

Start date of project: 2011/01/01 Duration: 48 months
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Lead partner for deliverable: UOULU
Author: Kirsi Latola, Hannele Savela

Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the Consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the Consortium (including the Commission Services)	

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Publishable Executive Summary

As planned in the DoW six TA calls were conducted during the project's lifetime. This included an additional targeted call for summer 2013 to stations operating at Boreal forest areas and in subarctic regions. All TA calls and their evaluation, the eligibility checking of the applicant user groups and summarized evaluation scores given by the Transnational Access Evaluation Board (TA Board) were conducted by the WP4 coordination. The decision on successful applicants and recommendations of the number of person days for access were made by the TA Board. The TA Board evaluated all proposals focusing on four evaluation criteria: 1) scientific quality of planned research, 2) scientific merits of the user group leader, 3) relevance for the INTERACT goals and 4) value for money. The scientific quality and particularly the innovation and novelty of the proposed research were the most important criteria in the access recommendations. During the projects life time, 7 366 days were used from the 17 475 applied for by all 20 stations. In addition, national funding from different sources in Canada and the US National Science Foundation allowed EU and Russians scientists to access stations in North America. For the first time therefore, INTERACT achieved pan-arctic transnational access.

Providing transnational access of 20 INTERACT stations included among others support for identification of study sites and populations of species to be studied (if necessary), laboratory facilities and sample analysing if possible, tutoring and handling the equipment, free access to library (if available) and data repositories and overall support for conducting the research. The accommodation and meals were included in the access in most cases. This WP worked very closely with station managers (WP2). Also, increased collaboration amongst stations was derived from user groups who visited several stations. These mechanisms added to the integration of science and infrastructure within INTERACT.

As an additional value an "Arctic Research" blog site was established for promotion of INTERACT Transnational Access, the research results obtained and stations providing access. The site contained 26 blogs kept by researchers visiting the stations with support of TA, by station managers providing TA at their stations, and by the TA management team to promote access possibilities to potential TA applicants. The INTERACT Arctic Research blog site gained circa 12 000 viewers annually and increased thus the visibility of the INTERACT worldwide.

Feedback was collected from both TA user groups and stations providing access. The TA user group feedback was collected as part of the project reporting and station feedback at the end of field season in 2014 as anonymous online feedback and in paper forms distributed and collected in the final INTERACT consortium meeting. The qualitative data was analysed and results show overall success of the Transnational Access scheme and clearly state the importance of TA in facilitating Arctic research. In particular all station respondents agreed that the TA scheme provided stations with new users, new research topics, greater visibility, new collaborations and support for sustaining future stations operations.

1. Providing Transnational Access to INTERACT sites

1.1. Transnational Access management and coordination

The Thule Institute at the University of Oulu in Finland led the WP4 and had the full responsibility of the funding administration and overall Transnational Access management. The work was conducted by the WP4 manager Dr Kirsi Latola and WP4 coordinator Dr Hannele Savela who was hired through an open process (Deliverable D4.1).

The management of the WP4 made sure that the efficient and transparent systems were used in all activities within the Transnational Access, particularly in conducting the TA calls, in the evaluation and decision making process, in TA user guidance and following reporting and feedback. This was secured with open calls and by providing an open online access to all relevant information including eligibility rules, evaluation criteria, and granted projects. The online application system was promoted in calls and was openly available for everyone registered in the system, as well as to the TA Board members (MS4) and WP4 coordination upon registration. All TA applications and evaluation summaries have been archived, and for transparency all user group report summaries are openly available at the INTERACT website.

The WP4 manager had an overall responsibility for the work package. She provided guidance if needed and took part in all TA application and decision making processes as well as all other activities related to the WP. The WP4 coordinator's task was the practical management of the TA, and the daily operations including communication with the TA users, stations, TA Board and the INTERACT lead coordinator. The WP4 coordinator was responsible for arrangements and promotion related to TA calls, TA Board meeting arrangements, and the overall reporting and running of WP4, such as:

- Regularly updating the website with information on how, when, where Transnational Access can be applied for, selected projects, feature articles and interviews, FAQs and downloadable information,
- preparing guidelines on practical issues for both users and stations,
- collecting the project reports from TA user groups and updating the website on selected projects,
- collecting the information and lists of the published scientific papers based on TA visits,
- drafting an internal progress report, as well as periodic report for the Commission and using PROGECTA (D1.1) for the management of WP4 related tasks, milestones and deliverables,
- arranging TA Board meetings and taking minutes from the meetings,
- guiding, promoting, and engaging in continuous dialogue with station managers, potential TA applicants, INTERACT central coordination (WP1) and other relevant stakeholders.

WP4 coordination organised six TA calls and their evaluation, checked the eligibility of the applicant user groups and summarized evaluation scores given by the Transnational Access Evaluation Board (TA Board; MS4) for their meetings. The decisions on successful applicants were made by the TA Board which discussed the evaluation results in their meetings and made the recommendations for the user groups with the number of person days for access (for more detailed info see section 1.3). The WP4 coordinator checked the stations' availability, particularly if stations

involved had limited space for hosting several user groups at the same time. The WP4 coordinator was the main contact person between the station managers (WP2) and users, and provided them the guidelines about reporting the access used, travel and accommodation and meals reimbursements, reporting the publications and all other practical issues related to the access visits.

The WP4 coordinator has prepared materials for both management of Transnational Access and for outreach (see section 2.3.) throughout the project period including guidelines and instructions related to reporting and travel reimbursements for both user groups and stations providing access. The guidelines and instructions have been delivered both by e-mail (through e-mailing lists created for the purpose) and by internet downloads provided at the INTERACT website (D1.3).

The WP4 coordination kept an up-to-date Access database for the Commission, including the List of User Projects, List of Users, List of Publications, and the Selection Panel Form. All user groups sent project reports summarizing their main aims and achievements from the access visit to both the WP4 coordinator and to the station they visited. The travel reimbursements of the user groups were paid only after the project report was received. The feedback received from visitors in their reports has been compiled and is presented in section 2.3. In addition the visitors were advised and asked to fill in the "User Group Questionnaire" at the European Commission website.

In order to get the first user groups to the field already during the first field season of INTERACT's operation, a Webropol online application form was created. The Webropol application form was used for the first and second TA calls. However, in order to be able to conduct an online evaluation in the same system with the application submissions in an efficient and smooth way, a new online system was created and used from the third call to all following calls conducted during the project period. The application system was integrated within the INTERACT website with guidelines, FAQ and information about the TA offered - see http://www.eu-interact.org/transnational-access/tacall/. The online application and evaluation portal was only accessible via registration and login and was password protected.

1.2.Transnational Access calls, evaluation and decision process

As planned in the DoW, six TA calls were conducted during the project. During the first year, separate calls for the summer and winter seasons were organized. However, due to the relatively small number of applications for the winter season and a relatively large time being used for evaluations, summaries, TA Board meetings and decisions, it was decided that the access to both winter seasons and the following summer seasons would be applied for and decided on in the same call.

The TA calls executed during the projects' lifetime were:

1. March-April 2011 (for summer season 2011)
2. August 2011 (for winter season 2011 – 2012)
3. November-December 2011 (for summer season 2012)
4. October 2012 (for winter 2012/13 and summer season 2013)
5. February 2013 (targeted call for summer season 2013 for access to the Boreal stations)
6. August-September 2013 (for winter 2013/14 and summer season 2014).

Due to under-representation in the received applications of the stations operating in Boreal forest areas and in subarctic regions, a targeted call was made in February 2013 for summer 2013. In the call, access could only be applied for visits to six stations; Kevo Subarctic Research Institute, Finland, Kolari Research Unit, Finland, Bioforsk Soil and Environment, Svanhovd, Norway, Shapsa-Mukhrino Field Station, The Russian Federation, Faroe Island Nature Investigation, Faroe Islands and Oulanka Research Station, Finland. These stations had at that time the biggest portion of unused access days left. The promotion of the call was particularly targeted to the research institutes, universities and European research networks focusing on boreal and subarctic regions.

WP4 coordination prepared call announcement leaflets for each call (Fig. 3) and distributed those in national and international scientific congresses and events (including ASSW, Arctic Frontiers, GEO), and in INTERACT consortium meetings (for the station managers and main coordination to distribute). An electronic version was also prepared and sent via email lists and website to potential users in research networks and organisations. Call announcements were also published and shared online via email lists and websites by IASC, IASSA, EBP, LTSER, APECS, Mountain research initiative, GEO cold regions and GEO ecosystems, Cordis Wire and others. The information about the coming calls and announcements of open calls were also sent to previous INTERACT TA applicants and users who also spread the word, but more importantly some previous applicants applied for access for continuation of their research in other INTERACT stations for comparing processes and phenomena across the diverse northern region. The call announcements were circulated at least twice, for example first a pre-announcement ("save the date") followed by the actual call announcement at the opening of the call.

The establishment of the TA selection panel named as the "TA Board" was one of the first tasks by WP1 in co-operation with WP4 at the beginning of the project in 2011. In order to get the stations' scientific experience heard in the process as well as to commit to the project it was decided that five TA Board members would represent the INTERACT stations offering Transnational Access; North Atlantic (Scotland, Faroe Islands, Iceland; three stations), Greenland (four stations), Norway and Sweden (four stations), Finland (four stations) and the Russian Federation (five stations). In order to guarantee relevant high-level scientific expertise and the transparency in the evaluation process the other half of the TA Board members were independent experts, selected based on their scientific background in order to get as wide knowledge on the scientific questions that INTERACT users were assumed to address. Thus the TA Board consisted of the INTERACT station representatives and external members representing various fields of research relevant for INTERACT. The TA Board composition remained the same throughout the project (with one new member Ruth Hindshaw, a member nominated by APECS, who was added in 2013), which proved to be a good solution for the decision-making process (new applicants vs. returning applicants, similar research questions etc.) and the evaluation process as a whole (system familiarization).

The composition of the TA Board (MS4)
INTERACT station representatives:

- Jan Dick (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Scotland, UK) representing North Atlantic stations (Scotland, Faroes and Iceland),
- Morten Rasch (Greenland Climate Research Centre, Greenland), representing Greenlandic stations,
- Riku Paavola (Oulanka Research Station, Finland), representing Finnish Stations,

- Christer Jonasson (Abisko Research Station, Sweden – until the end of September 2013), representing Swedish and Norwegian stations,
- Wladimir Bleuten (Mukhrino Field Station, Russian Federation), representing the Russian stations.

External independent members:

- Philip Wookey (Biological & Environmental Sciences, University of Stirling, Scotland, UK),
- Warwick Vincent (Department of Biology, Université Laval, Canada),
- Christian Koerner (Institute of Botany, University of Basel, Swizerland),
- Hugues Lantuit (Permafrost Association, Germany),
- Ruth Hindshaw (University of St. Andrews, Scotland, UK, APECS representative).
- Terry Callaghan (INTERACT Coordinator) Chairman of the Board

The TA Board evaluated all proposals using scores from one to five (poor to excellent) based on four evaluation criterias:

- Scientific quality of the planned research (novelty, innovation and feasibility, overlaps or conflicts with existing research)
- Scientific merits of the user group leader (professional quality, young researcher vs. researcher with merits)
- Relevance for the INTERACT goals (added value)
- Value for money (costs vs. new scientific knowledge)

The maximum score given by a TA Board member to an applicant was 20. Each proposal was evaluated independently by at least five members. In the calls for the summer season that ended up with a high number of applications (max of 87 applications per call) the WP4 coordination grouped applications to be evaluated by individual TA board members. Ideally the TA Board members evaluated the applications close to their own scientific field. The WP4 coordination summarized all applications by stations in a ranking order (using average and median scores), with a cut-off value for potential recommended projects set to 13. The same cut-off was used in all TA calls for consistency in the access decision process. TA Board discussed all applications, regardless of their scores, to make sure that all applicants were treated equally and to keep the transparency of the process. In the TA board meetings, the scientific quality and particularly the innovation and novelty of the proposed research were discussed and the quality of the science was the most important criterion in the access recommendations. In addition the young scientists and new users were highlighted as well as research that would be conducted at several stations to gain a comparative aspect and improve collaboration. The effort for encouraging young scientists to apply for access was conducted jointly with APECS (Association of Polar Early Career Scientists). This was successful as in the end 44% of the granted access users were young scientists (graduate students and post-docs). In the end, one fifth of the user groups visited several stations while the maximum number of stations that any one group visited during two field seasons was seven.

The TA Board recommendations were always confirmed by stations based on the feasibility of the proposed study (e.g. abundance of the species to be studied) and availability of relevant facilities and adequacy of the station premises to host the users at the given time. The INTERACT stations that offered access varied notably in their accessibility as some were very small and/or located in

remote areas where charter flights or helicopter rides were needed for accessing the sites. In addition, some stations had their own application forms and systems that TA users were also obligated to fill in. Therefore it was necessary that stations were in contact with all selected user groups for agreeing on the procedures needed (if relevant, e.g. permissions, application forms, booking charter flights) and the exact time and duration of the visits. The travel reimbursement forms also varied between stations (beneficiaries) offering access and therefore the handling of travel claims and reimbursement was conducted by the stations themselves.

The TA scheme timeline for every TA call was:

- decision on the timing of the next call to be opened, followed by the pre-announcement,
- opening of the call and the online application system (including registration to the system), promotion of the call on various forums, and promotion to previous applicants and the INTERACT consortium,
- application submission period, answers to questions,
- collation of the applications, eligibility check, and listing of the applications to be evaluated by TA Board members,
- applications evaluation period, TA board members work and submit their scores in the online system,
- compilation of the evaluation scores and comments,
- meeting of the TA Board to discuss applications and agree on the recommended user groups,
- compiling information on the recommended groups and forwarding this to the stations for their access decisions,
- notification about the access decisions to applicants (also for unsuccessful ones),
- information about the practical issues (station specific) to the accepted user groups and stations,
- confirming the dates and duration of the visits by visitors together with stations, followed by conducting the visits,
- project reports sent to the WP4 coordinator and station manager by the user group leader
- after accepting the report, travel claims sent to stations for reimbursements,
- compiling the Access Database (per reporting period), including the list of users, publications and feedback for the EC and for future reference.

2. Transnational Access results

2.1. Access provided

Transnational access provided by 20 INTERACT stations (Fig. 1) included among others support for identification of study sites and populations of species to be studies (if necessary), laboratory facilities and sample analysing if possible, tutoring and handling of the equipment, free access to library (if available) and data repositories and overall support for conducting the research. The accommodation and meals were included in the access in most cases.

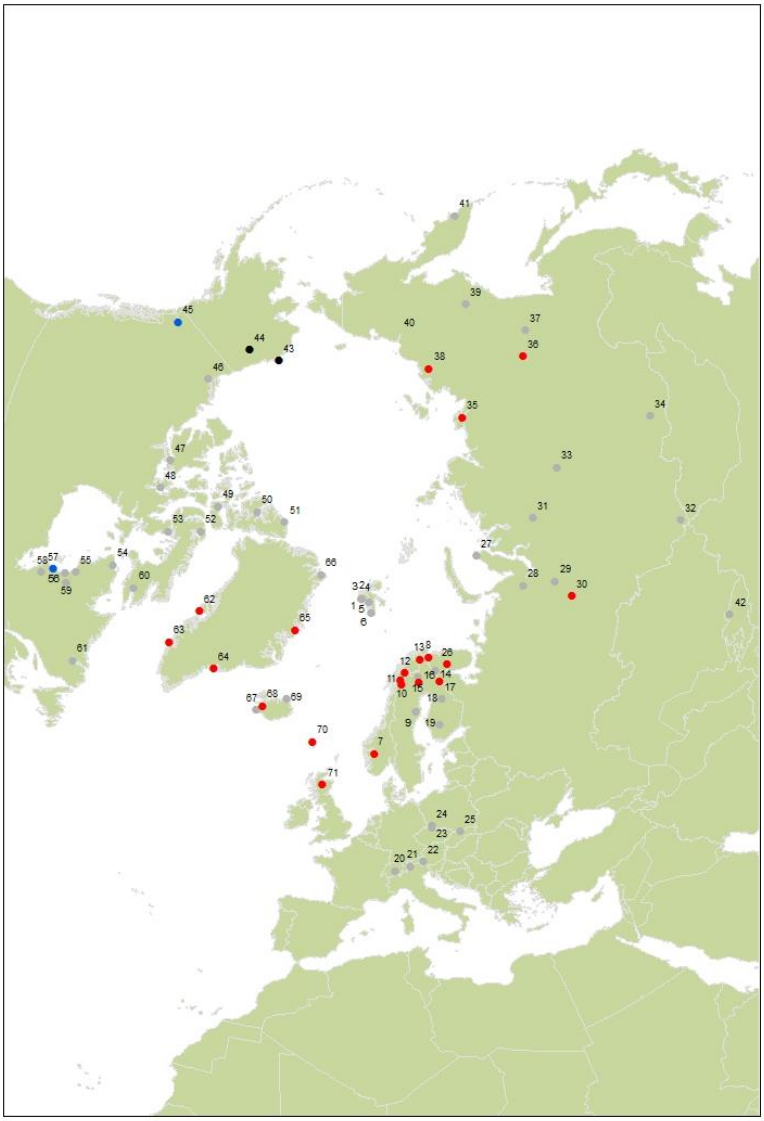

Fig. 1. Stations that offered Transnational Access are represented as red dots, and travel support to North American stations in black and blue dots (stations with black dots funded by the National Science Foundation; and stations with blue dots funded by the Centre for Northern Studies and the Arctic Institute of North America). Other INTERACT stations (partners and observers as of December 2014) which did not offer access are presented as grey dots.

During the projects' life time, 7 366 days were used from the 17 475 applied for, and all 20 stations hosted user groups. Based on scientific evaluation conducted by the TA Board, 64 % of the applicants were successful and granted access. Detailed information on the transnational access applied and provided, and about the publications produced by the TA user groups can be found in the D4.2 Unit of Access delivery and D4.3 Scientific Publications report.

A pilot study on remote access was initiated as an in-kind activity (by each station involved) in 2014 as the *Dryas* project led by the University of Helsinki. This project engaged 16 INTERACT

stations for monitoring the flowering of *Dryas*, sampling the local pollinator community and recording seed production. The Global *Dryas* project was a highly successful project and mentioned in the "IN BRIEF" section of Science 345 (6196), 492-494 (2014).

Another new initiative was started by the North-American INTERACT partners through national funding in Canada and the United States of America (Fig. 1). With this funding INTERACT was able to grant travel funding for European researchers to visit stations in the US (funded by the National Science Foundation to the Barrow Environmental Observatory and the Toolik field station in Alaska) and Canada (funded by the Centre for Northern studies and the AINA to Whapmagoostui-Kuujjuarapik and Kluane Lake research stations). This enabled some INTERACT TA users to conduct circumpolar comparative studies and gain wider understanding of the Arctic changes. These grants were offered in 2012-2014 in Canada and 2014 in the US. Altogether seven projects were supported. Together with the EU funded visits to Russia, INTERACT established for the first time pan-arctic transnational access.

2.2. Outreach

In spring 2012, the WP4 coordination team launched an "Arctic Research" blog site which promoted INTERACT Transnational Access, the research results obtained and stations providing access. The site contained blogs kept by researchers visiting the stations with support of TA, blogs by station managers providing TA at their stations, and a blog by the TA management team to promote access possibilities to potential TA applicants. The site is maintained and updated by the WP4 coordinator. The blog site is located at http://Arcticresearch.wordpress.com/ and it will continue its operation also in 2015. The blog site increased in volume and gained altogether 26 bloggers, with several blogs posted from various sites. Especially young scientists used the opportunity and sent several posts during their TA visits. Some stations located in such remote regions that blog posts were impossible. The INTERACT Arctic Research blog site gained circa 12 000 viewers annually and thus increased the visibility of the INTERACT worldwide.

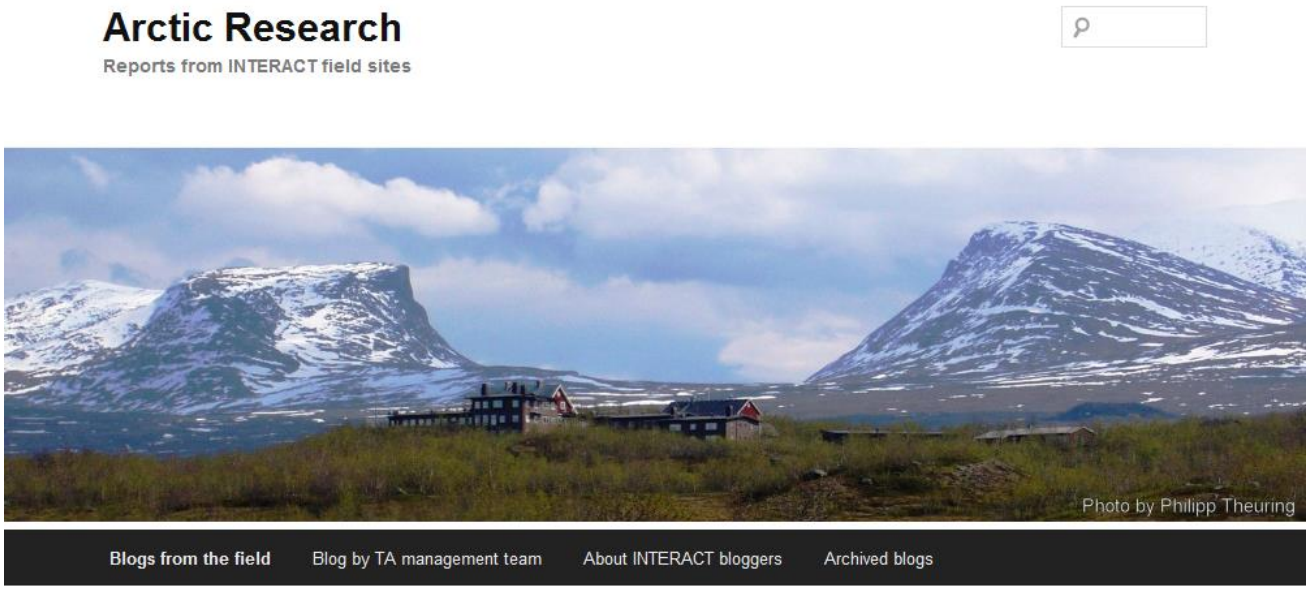

Fig. 2. A screenshot from the INTERACT Arctic Research blog site.

The TA web pages (http://www.eu-interact.org/transnational-access/) have been frequently updated. The site contains information for TA applicants and user groups with downloadable instructions and a FAQ section. The pages also contain information about selected projects and results achieved, and feature articles about stations providing access. The web pages were maintained and updated by the WP4 coordinator.

The promotion of the open TA calls was distributed in several ways and in addition to online promotion, flyers were prepared for promotion of the calls in various scientific meetings and conferences. The flyers were also available online for printing out and sharing on various web based fora.

Fig. 3. Examples of the INTERACT TA call flyers.

Multiple materials were prepared during the project's lifetime including guidelines and instructions related to reporting and travel reimbursements for both user groups and stations providing access. The guidelines and instructions have been delivered both by e-mail (through e-mailing lists created for the purpose) and by internet downloads provided at the INTERACT website. Promotional material related to open TA calls has also been prepared and delivered in the form of brochures and flyers (Fig. 3), and through e-mailing

lists and websites of relevant Arctic organizations and networks. The TA calls were also promoted at the Cordis Wire. The WP4 coordination has also promoted INTERACT and Transnational Access and TA calls in scientific meetings, including Group on Earth Observation (GEO) meetings: GEO VIII Plenary meeting in Istanbul (Nov 2011), in the 6th GEO European Projects Workshop in Rome (May 2012), The 7th GEO European Projects Workshop in Barcelona (April 2013), GEO Work Plan Symposium in Geneve June 2013, GEO X Plenary Meeting in Geneve January 2014 and in INCREASE/INTERACT symposium in Copenhagen 9-10 October 2013 and in the Workshop on Arctic and Marine Research Infrastructures (Rome, September 2013). These activities have also increased the networking and co-operation between INTERACT and other Polar, EU and global networks, projects and activities.

Information about TA (status, guidelines, activities, forthcoming calls) was presented in all consortium meetings; the INTERACT Kick-off Meeting in Abisko, Sweden (February 2011), the INTERACT Station Managers' Forum in Hvalsø, Denmark (October 2011), the first INTERACT Annual Consortium Meeting in Svanhovd, Norway (February 2012), the INTERACT 4th Station Managers' Forum in Krkonose Mountains national Park, Czech Republic (September 2012), the second INTERACT Annual Consortium Meeting & 5th Station Managers' Forum at Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, Greenland (March 2013), 6th Station Managers' Forum in Abisko Scientific Research Station, Sweden (September 2013), the third INTERACT Annual Consortium Meeting and 7th Station Manager's Forum at Oulanka Research Station, Finland (February 2014) and Final INTERACT Consortium Meeting and 8th Station Manager's Forum in Hvalsø, Denmark (November 2014).

To celebrate the scientific legacy of the TA scheme and research conducted at the stations, an INTERACT science book is currently under preparation and will be published in 2015 (Fig 4). The Stories of INTERACT Science will be a popular science book, but including state-of-the-art activities relevant for the science community, highlighting the research topics and findings made with support from Transnational Access. The book will be colorful and highly illustrated to attract and help to recruit the next generation of researchers into Arctic research. The book will consist of seven sections entitled Human Dimension, Permafrost, Snow and Ice, Biogeochemical cycling, Freshwater and Palaeolimnology, and Geomorphology; Landforms and Landscapes, Terrestrial ecology; Life in the Cold. The book layout will follow the style of the INTERACT Station Catalogue (http://www.eu-interact.org/station-managers-forum/report-deliverables/station-catalogue/) that has been extremely successful.

Fig. 4. The book "INTERACT Stories of Arctic Science", planned to be published in 2015, will be a highly illustrated popular science book illustrating state-of-the-art research conducted with support from INTERACT Transnational Access and stations.

2.3. Feedback

Feedback was collected from both TA user groups and stations providing access. The TA user group feedback was collected as part of the project reporting and station feedback at the end of the field season in 2014 as an anonymous online feedback and paper forms distributed and collected in the final INTERACT consortium meeting. The qualitative data was analyzed and results show overall success of the Transnational Access scheme from user and stations perspectives and also clearly demonstrate the importance of TA in facilitating Arctic research.

TA User Group Feedback
Open form feedback about TA user groups' experiences on TA was collected as part of the project reporting in 2012 - 2014.

Altogether 90% of the user groups provided feedback in their project report. The feedback received from the user groups was extracted from the project reports to ensure anonymity and analyzed by coding the statements under different categories (qualitative analysis). The proportion of different statements under each category was recorded from

all feedback statements, and in addition the records under different categories were pooled under ten "arrays" (5 "positive" and 5 "negative", as in Fig. 5) representing more general traits in the feedback. This task was conducted by student Mikkel Bue Lykkegaard who is experienced with qualitative analysis. Fig. 5 shows the feedback (both positive and negative annotations) related to the general experience and TA management (WP4 coordination), research policy (TA as a tool to facilitate research) and increased collaboration, and administration of travel reimbursements (e.g. handling and time taken to receive reimbursements), sufficient facilities at the station and logistics and permissions (given information, handling etc.) as a percentage from all answers. 95% of the TA user groups who gave feedback reported an overall positive experience regarding their TA visit. Also the experiences regarding the role of TA in facilitating research policy and collaboration was separately mentioned in over 20% of the answers, and highly praised in several answers:

> *"Without INTERACT TA, we had not been able to achieve even half of what we have achieved now."*

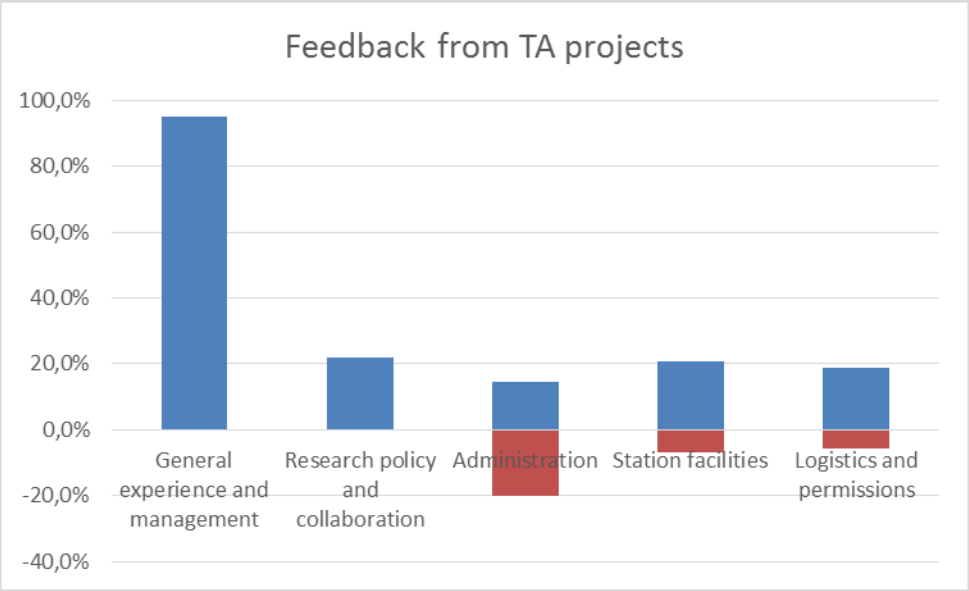

Fig. 5. The percentage of answers within each of the ten arrays of the feedback (Blue bars: positive annotation. Red bars: identified challenges and areas for development). No negative annotations were found in General Experience and Management, and Research Policy and Collaboration categories within this array.

The biggest proportion of identified challenges (mentioned in 15% of the answers and suggestions for developments concerned the administration of travel reimbursements that were taken care of by the institutions offering TA at their research stations (Fig. 6). Many TA user groups felt that the travel reimbursement system which takes place after the visit, based on the actual costs and filling in a travel claim form, could be rather complicated and time consuming:

"The finances are tricky to deal with. I had to set up a project code here [in my institution], but by the time I had done that I had spent the money, and then had to fill in a terrible form to send [to the station administration] for approval."

Many responses highly acknowledged the station facilities (21%) and logistic arrangements (19%), but in some cases suggestions for development were also provided. However, it needs to be remembered that the conditions and legislation for permissions varies largely from station to station and it is mostly remote stations or stations located in certain countries that experience most problems with logistics and/or permitting issues.

"The main problem remains the question of sample sending. It was so difficult that we decided to reduce our protocol and to bring back our samples by ourselves."

Fig. 6 presents the percentage of different categories of the "Administration" (instructions provided about TA, the application process, reporting process, travel reimbursement process) array from all answers. It is very clear from the graph that the Reimbursement issues received the highest amount of negative annotations, whereas the instructions about TA provided to all user groups received acknowledgment.

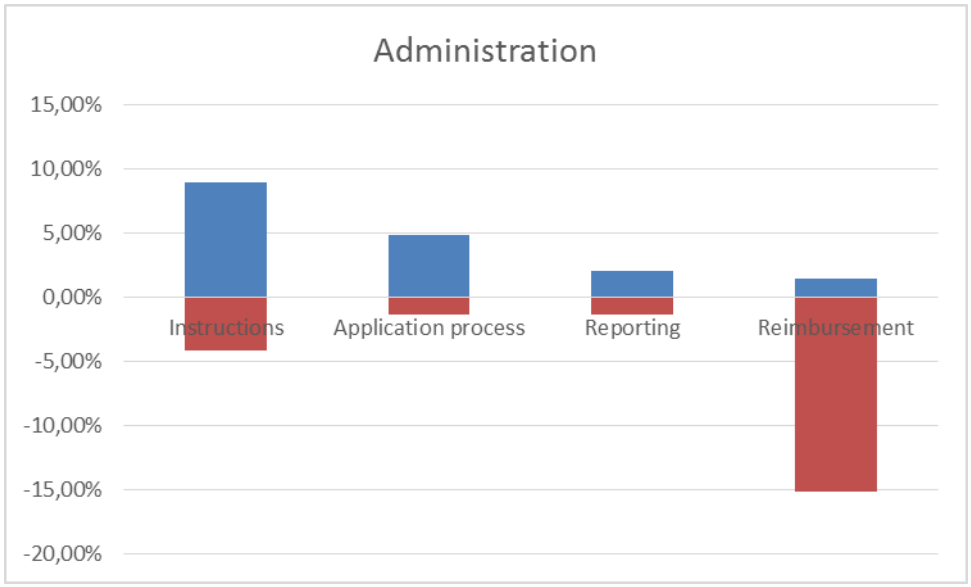

Fig. 6. The percentage of different annotations (Blue bars: positive annotation. Red bars: identified challenges and areas for development) from answers in the Administration array.

When the general experiences array is viewed more closely (Fig. 7), 40% of the answers mention a positive experience, and even higher percentage acknowledge the TA management (57%) or the station management (59%) indicating that the general satisfaction of the TA User Groups towards their access visits was at a high level and they feel like they have been supported in their research by the TA coordination and station staff:

"The INTERACT administration was very friendly and helpful and replied to all questions extremely fast and competently."

"*The support and engagement of the station staff ensured the success of our complex field program."*

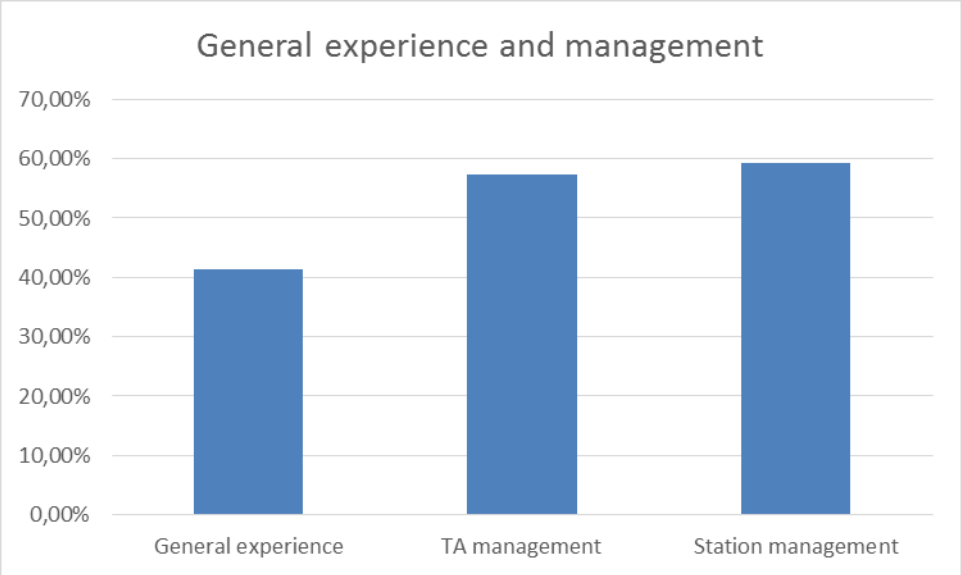

Fig.7. The percentage of different annotations (Blue bars: positive annotation. Red bars: identified challenge and area of development) in the General experience and management array. No negative annotations were recorded in any of the categories within this array.

Station Feedback

Feedback was collected from the station managers at the end of the project in 2014. The station mangers could provide their feedback anonymously either by using an online form or by filling in a questionnaire at the final INTERACT consortium meeting in Hvalsø. Altogether 80% of the station managers (14 out of 18) responded to the feedback questionnaire. The feedback analysis was conducted in this case as well by Mikkel Bue Lykkegaard.

The station feedback questionnaire focused on the efficiency of the TA Management experienced by the stations (Fig 8), and on the benefits of the TA experienced by the stations (Fig 9). Overall, the satisfaction of the stations with the Transnational Access scheme was at a high level in both categories.

The TA Coordination efficiency was scored from poor (1), satisfactory (2), average (3), good (4) to excellent (5). Promotion of the TA calls, guidance provided to the station, fluency of the TA decision and selection process and clarity of the information provided to the station received an average score 4.2 (good). Awareness of the TA users about travel reimbursement issues and other administration procedures gained an average score of 3.7, which was clearly seen as an area for development. The reality however was that since the access was offered to 20 different stations operated by different organisations

the practical procedures and guidelines (forms, payment schedules and so on) differed a lot and therefore no general travel claim forms for example could be used.

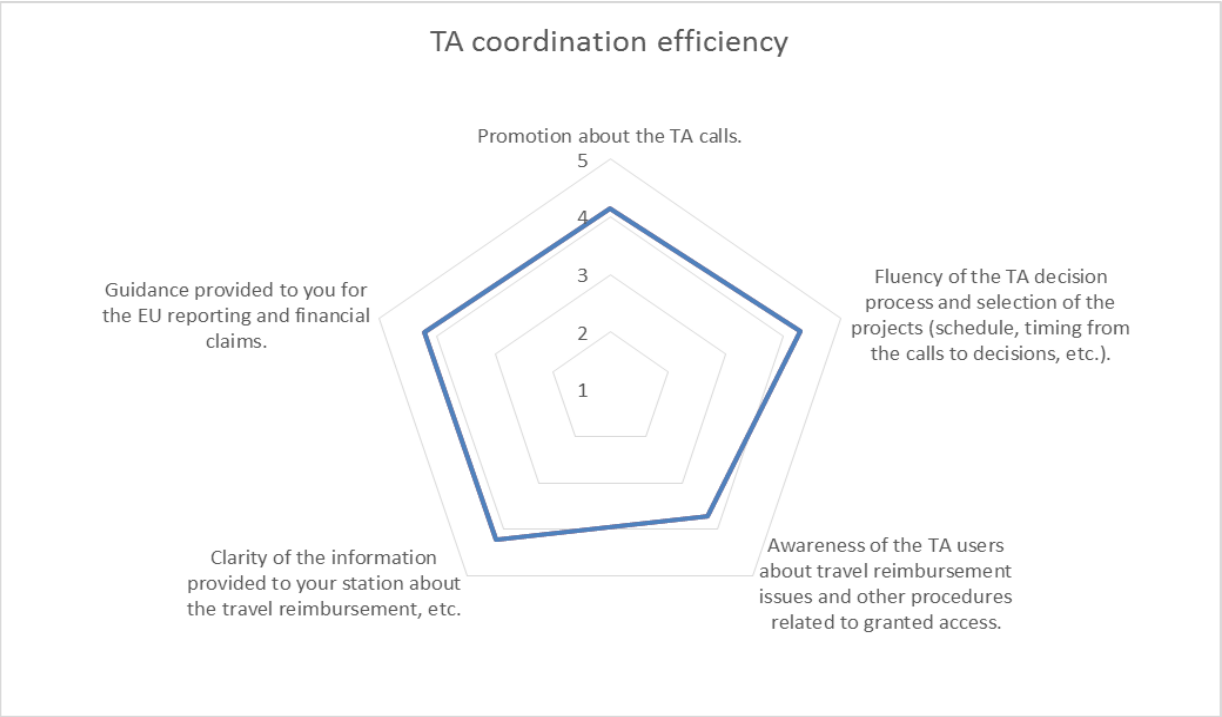

Fig 8. TA coordination efficiency as graded by the station managers.

When asked about the benefits from the TA for the station, all of the respondents agreed that new users were gained via the TA scheme. Over 90% agreed that new research topics were introduced to their station, and 86% of the respondents felt that stations gained increased visibility via the TA. 64% reported that TA had helped securing/supporting the operation of the station and established new collaboration, which are important for the long-term sustainability and future innovations.

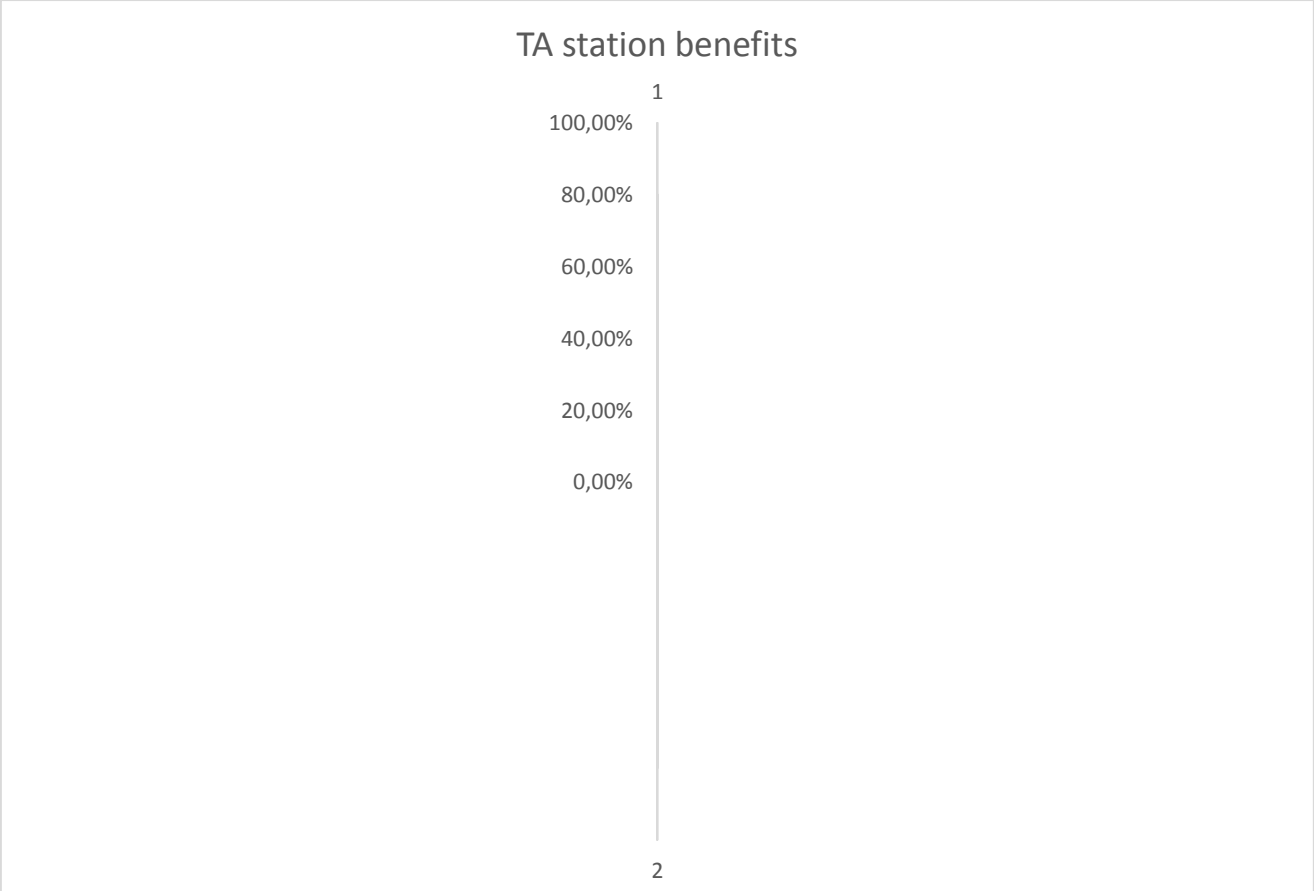

Fig. 9. The benefits of the TA experienced by TA stations.

The station managers clearly appreciated the EU Transnational Access scheme as a tool in facilitating research and international collaboration, as exemplified by the following comment in one of the feedback responses:

> *"Amazing team job! Thanks so much for the great time working with you within TA. Transnational Access is very productive, effective and much needed tool for larger and international research collaborations!"*

2.3. Deviations from Annex I

The schedules of the fourth TA and sixth TA calls for winter and summer seasons were conducted in a same call, so that the selected user groups would have more time to prepare for the field work and prepare visas (if needed), permits and other possible paper work. Both calls were opened in late summer / early fall and the decisions for winter were made earlier in order to make sure that researchers would have enough time to prepare for winter campaigns. This differed from the DoW as originally it was planned to conduct two calls annually.

In addition a separate, targeted call for summer 2013 was carried out due to the imbalance between the applications for access to high Arctic, permafrost and glacial areas, compared with the boreal forest and subarctic research station. Therefore a TA call for the stations that had more than 50% of their offered access days unused was opened in February 2013.

In 2014, unused days and related other direct costs were reallocated to support access and travel funds to stations that were granted some access but could host more TA user groups than anticipated in the DoW. The unused funds were reallocated from the stations who did not gain as many users as planned.

The final reporting and related administration tasks, including the analysis of station and TA user group feedback, updates of the Access Database and guidance related to real unit cost calculation and financial reporting of the 20 beneficiaries that offered TA in 2011-2014 has taken more work effort and time than estimated in the DoW. In addition to the work effort by the WP4 coordinator and WP4 manager, a person skilled in statistical and qualitative analysis and MSACCESS was assigned fee-based to perform the feedback analysis and database support.