



Small Projects. Big Journeys.

Exploring Europe through
Interreg Small Projects.



It's a guide to the places where Europe meets itself.

This guide invites you to travel across

Europe's borderlands – places where languages blend, cultures meet, and different ways of life share the same space. Each stop reveals how local communities transform borders from lines on a map into places of encounter, trust, and cooperation.

To guide you on this journey, the stories are grouped into four thematic trails:

- ❖ ***THE INNOVATORS' TRAIL,***
- ❖ ***THE SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL TRAIL,***
- ❖ ***THE CUSTOMISED TRAIL,***
- ❖ ***THE TRAIL OF ALTERNATIVES.***

Each offers a different perspective on how small projects bring people, places and ideas together across borders. No two border regions are alike. Each has its own landscapes, traditions and stories. Their diversity is their greatest strength. It reminds us that Europe is built not despite our differences, but because of them.

Along the way, you will discover how Interreg Small Projects help turn local ideas into lasting partnerships. Each chapter introduces a border region, explores its unique approach to cooperation, and shares inspiring examples of projects that make European cooperation tangible in everyday life.

Hop on board!



Welcome to our journey.

Introduction.

We are pleased to present this publication, which explores the ideas, experiences, and achievements brought by the implementation of Interreg Small Projects across Europe in the 2021-2027 period.

This publication is designed as a travel guide, because discovering small cooperation practice is, in many ways, a journey through places, communities, and stories that reveal how European cooperation works in practice. While some programmes build on a long tradition of small project support, for others this is the first encounter. The sky is the limit when it comes to small-scale cooperation, and this journey aims to inspire future ideas and initiatives.

From local initiatives that shape everyday life in border regions, to more complex activities that connect research, innovation, and local economies - together, they demonstrate that local cooperation is a fundamental building block of territorial cohesion.

Border regions face a specific challenge: the lack of a full 360-degree territorial perspective. While inland regions can develop in all directions within a continuous space, in border regions this perspective is narrowed by the presence of a national border. However, through small projects, borders increasingly become opportunities. They open new perspectives, create connections, inspire, and enable local actors to overcome obstacles and expand their horizons.

Interreg Small projects often represent the very first step in this process. They allow people to meet, exchange experiences, test ideas, and build trust before cooperation becomes more formalised or institutionalised. In this way, they act as laboratory and catalysts



for longer-term partnerships and broader territorial development. Small Project Funds – one of the ways to manage small cooperation projects – are well-established Interreg tools now, and worth exploring.

We invite you to travel across Europe's borderlands and discover how 'Small Projects' work in different contexts, what forms they take, and what they make possible. They are also a testing ground for new implementation solutions and simplifications to make the implementation process smoother.

Each stop on this journey offers a unique perspective, yet together they tell a shared story about cooperation, trust, and the power of local initiatives.

Enjoy the trip!

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DG Regional and Urban Policy

Small projects, big journeys.



Your travel plan

THE INNOVATORS' TRAIL	Page
Day 1: Lake Constance Region	8
Day 2: Flanders - Netherlands	13
Day 3: Croatia - Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro	19
Day 4: Belgium - Germany - the Netherlands	25
THE SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL TRAIL	
Day 5: Germany - Denmark	33
Day 6: Germany - Netherlands	37
THE CUSTOMISED TRAIL	
Day 7: Italy - Slovenia	43
Day 8: Czech Republic - Poland	47
Day 9: Italy - Austria	52
Day 10: Hungary - Slovakia	58



THE TRAIL OF ALTERNATIVES

Day 11: France - Spain - Andorra

66

Day 12: Baltic Sea Region

70

Day 13: Alpine Space

76

Day 14: North Sea

82

“

THE INNOVATORS' TRAIL

Small projects, new actors, bold ideas





Day 1

Lake Constance Region

When Knowledge Crosses Borders

The place & the idea

At the intersection of Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, the Lake Constance region is a shared space rather than a borderland. Daily life moves easily across frontiers: people commute, study, collaborate and exchange ideas in a territory shaped by a

common language and long-standing cooperation. In practice, what might appear as four countries on a map function as a deeply interconnected region.

Cooperation around Lake

Constance has been cultivated for decades. The International Lake Constance Conference has firmly placed cross-border dialogue in the region since the 1970s, creating a dense network of relationships where collaboration is part of everyday life, not an exception. The region is also known as one of Europe's most dynamic cross-border academic landscapes, with universities bringing together more than 115.000 students, while research institutions and innovation partners cooperate across disciplines and countries.

Here, the challenge is not to initiate cooperation within academia, but to connect worlds that do not naturally meet: research and practice, academia and society, knowledge and application. The Small Project Funds in this region respond precisely to this challenge. They create spaces where ideas can move beyond institutions and enter everyday life - where researchers work with companies, students collaborate with citizens, and innovation is tested in real-world contexts.

In the Lake Constance region, small projects are not primarily about bringing people together - they are about making knowledge travel.

In the Lake Constance region, the Small Project Funds are designed to reflect the structure of the territory itself: diverse, interconnected and driven by cooperation across sectors and borders.



Rather than relying on a single fund, Interreg Alpenrhein-Bodensee-Hochrhein programme operates four complementary Small Project Funds, each addressing a different dimension of cross-border cooperation. This structure allows the programme to respond to a wide range of needs while keeping projects small, accessible and close to their target groups.

A distinctive feature of the region is the role of established cross-border organisations as fund managers:

- The International Lake Constance Conference supports projects that strengthen both institutional cooperation and civic cooperation and networks, building on decades of experience in connecting administrations and communities.
- The Lake Constance Arts & Sciences Association brings together universities and

research institutions across the four-country region, acting as a bridge between academia and practice through the Fund for Innovation and Transfer (FIT) and the Future Fund: Shaping transformation together with skills for the future.

The Fund for Innovation and Transfer

The Fund for Innovation and Transfer (FIT) plays a central role by focusing on projects where knowledge does not remain within institutions but is tested and applied in real-life contexts. Researchers, students, companies, public authorities and civil society representatives work together to develop and experiment with solutions to regional challenges.

Projects are intentionally small in scale, but ambitious in their approach. They are designed as spaces for experimentation: testing ideas, building partnerships and creating links between stakeholders who would not usually collaborate. The emphasis is not only on generating knowledge, but on making it usable and relevant for the region.

In this way, the Small Project Funds in the Lake Constance region go beyond traditional people-to-people cooperation. They create a structured environment where innovation can emerge through collaboration – connecting education, research and practice, and anchoring new ideas in the everyday reality of the region.



Small practices

ÖV_Connect Bodensee

Location: Lake Constance region.

Partners: University of Konstanz; University of St.Gallen.

In the Lake Constance region, crossing a border is part of everyday life. Thousands of people commute daily between countries – for work, study, or leisure. Yet when it comes to mobility, one challenge remains: public transport often stops where borders begin. Despite a dense network of connections, differences in systems, planning and user expectations make cross-border mobility complex. For many people, the private car still

feels like the easiest – and sometimes the only – reliable option.

The project *ÖV_Connect Bodensee* sets out to change this situation.

Connecting Research and Reality

Rather than looking at transport from a single angle, the project brought together different disciplines – technology, economics, political science and administrative practice. Researchers from the University of Konstanz and the University of St. Gallen worked jointly to analyse how public transport functions across the four-country region.

The approach was simple but powerful: combine data analysis with real-world experience. By identifying quality differences, analysing user-behaviour, and comparing systems across borders, the project created a clearer

picture of where mobility works – and where it doesn't.

But the project did not stop at research. Workshops and exchange formats brought together experts, transport operators, decision-makers and practitioners. The aim was not only to present findings, but to create dialogue between disciplines, institutions and countries. It also aimed to shape future teaching formats and strengthen dialogue between universities and regional stakeholders.

Mobility as a Shared Future

ÖV_Connect Bodensee shows how small projects can link knowledge with real-life challenges. By combining research and practice, the project contributes to a broader goal: making sustainable, cross-border mobility a realistic option for everyday life. Improving mobility is not only about infrastructure. It is about



understanding how people move - and how cooperation can make those movements easier, smarter and more sustainable.



Citizens Consider(ed): Sustainability and AI in the Lake Constance Region

Location: Lake Constance region.

Partners: University of Zurich; University of Konstanz.

Artificial intelligence and sustainability are often discussed in abstract terms – far from everyday life. But what if these topics were explored not only by researchers, but together with citizens? What if research was not just about society, but with society?

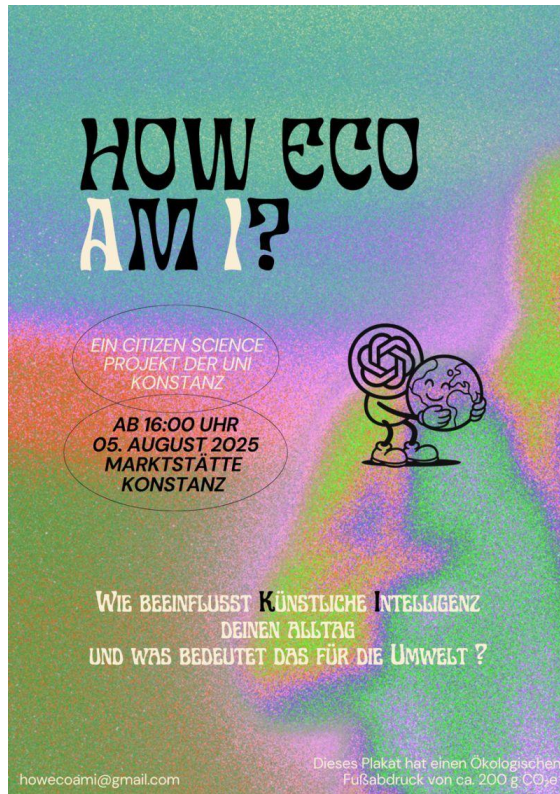
This is the starting point of the project “Citizens Consider(ed)”.

From Classroom to Community

In this project, students moved beyond predefined research questions and worked directly

with citizens to design and carry out their own projects. Students from the University of Zurich and the University of Konstanz collaborated across borders and disciplines, supported by mentors and practice partners, to explore how AI is perceived and applied in everyday life in the Lake Constance region.

“This citizen science approach brings together scientific expertise with practical experience and everyday perspectives, opening new ways to understand AI-supported solutions for sustainability.”



At the same time, the project became a space for hands-on learning: students developed skills in interdisciplinary collaboration and communication beyond academia, while citizens contributed actively to the research process; shaping questions, sharing insights and helping to ground the work in a real-life context.

Bringing Perspectives Together

By connecting universities, citizens and practice partners, “Citizens Consider(ed)” created a dialogue that shows that innovation does not only happen in laboratories or lecture halls. It happens when people come together, share their perspectives and collectively explore the future. The result is not only new insights into AI and sustainability, but also a model for how research can become more open, relevant and connected to society.





Day 2

Flanders – Netherlands

When Cooperation Drives Innovation

The place & the idea

The Flanders–Netherlands border region is a dynamic hub of economic activity, home to thousands of ambitious SMEs. Yet, for many of these companies the border can still feel like a barrier – whether in finding the right partners,

navigating funding schemes, or scaling up prototypes. CrossRoads Flanders–Netherlands addresses these challenges directly, acting as a catalyst for SMEs to collaborate, test solutions and bring them to market. By offering targeted, low-threshold support, CrossRoads empowers SMEs to innovate across borders and turn local ideas into cross-border success stories.

As Ellen Theeuwes, Chairwoman of CrossRoads, puts it:

“We want to stimulate innovation, improve the economy and prevent innovative companies from looking elsewhere.”

This is where the Small Projects Fund comes into play. It acts as a catalyst that not only captures this cross-border potential but actively stimulates and amplifies it by turning ideas into specific cooperation and innovation.

The SPF architecture:
small grants with
big ambitions.

CrossRoads operates as a dedicated Small Projects Fund within the Interreg Flanders–Netherlands Programme, with a total ERDF budget of €10.5 million allocated directly to SMEs on a 50/50 co-financing basis. Since the first call in September 2024, €8.65 million has already been committed. Demand strongly exceeds supply: in recent calls, applications surpassed available funding by a factor of six.



The programme is built on a partnership between the Joint Secretariat (JS), acting as Lead Partner, and regional development agencies in Flanders and The Netherlands. The JS manages administrative processes and supports SMEs throughout the project lifecycle, while regional agencies contribute their networks and local knowledge. This ensures that SMEs are guided from idea to implementation and beyond.

How the Small Project Fund works

From application to approval in two months

What distinguishes CrossRoads is not only funding, but its proactive, relationship-driven approach:

- Acquisition & matchmaking: Business developers actively identify SMEs with cross-border potential, connect partners and support project development from the start.
- Application support: The JS provides direct guidance on eligibility and technical requirements. Simplified procedures and a short call cycle (1-2 months, with decisions within two months) ensure quick and predictable outcomes.
- Execution support: A dedicated support desk and simplified cost options (staff costs + 40% flat rate) reduce the administrative burden. Investment-heavy projects may use real costs, where needed.
- Advance payments: Up to 50% of ERDF funding can be paid in advance to reduce cash-flow risks.
- Beyond the project: Regional agencies support SMEs in

accessing follow-up funding and entering the market.

“We take companies by the hand. Our goal is to ensure their innovations don’t just work in the lab but thrive in the real world.”

explains Ellen Theeuwes.



Small projects, significant impact

By focusing on SMEs, CrossRoads strengthens the link between innovation policy and economic impact. If SMEs are supported in developing, testing and scaling innovations together, the entire region benefits.

Evaluation results confirm this impact:

- 90% of SMEs reported turnover growth,
- on average, 6 new jobs per SME were created,
- R&D investment doubled within five years,
- leverage effects were achieved of up to ten times the public investment.

What makes the CrossRoads approach distinctive?

Several elements make the model transferable:

- Low administrative threshold: Simplified cost options, templates and clear

guidance make EU funding accessible even for first-time applicants.

- Speed and predictability: A two-month decision timeline aligns with business needs.
- Integrated support ecosystem: Continuous support from idea to post-project phase.
- Focus on commercial outcomes: Beyond prototypes, the programme supports market validation and commercialisation.
- Replicability: The model is already inspiring similar initiatives across Europe.

CrossRoads shows that when the right framework is in place, SMEs are ready to cooperate across borders – and to turn innovation into real economic value.



Interreg
Vlaanderen-Nederland



Gefinancierd door
de Europese Unie

CrossRoads Vlaanderen-Nederland



Small practices

Drones against disease

Location: Flanders and The Netherlands.

Partners: Croptic (Flanders) and Tective Robotics (The Netherlands).

Potato blight can sweep through an entire harvest in days. Early detection is therefore critical, both to protect yields and to reduce the use of crop protection products. This was the starting point for the CrossRoads-supported collaboration between Croptic (Flanders) and Tective Robotics (The Netherlands).

Flemish start-up Croptic maps fields using AI-powered drone imagery to detect crop disease. Dutch start-up Tective builds

autonomous drone-in-the-box systems that fly, scan and land without a pilot on site. Each had exactly what the other was missing.

Within the CrossRoads project, Tective integrated software to fully automate data acquisition. The captured images are then analysed by Croptic's AI algorithms to identify diseased areas in the field. Farmers can intervene precisely where needed, reducing unnecessary spraying and supporting more sustainable production.

Over two years, the teams tested image quality, AI model performance and the feasibility of autonomous flights above agricultural fields. The first year focused on field data collection and proof of concept; the second year on scaling and system optimisation.

The innovation journey was not without challenges.

Agricultural cycles are slow: two years means only two growing seasons, which limits data variability. Robust AI models require large datasets, and expert field knowledge remains essential. Tective also faced regulatory hurdles related to autonomous (BVLOS) flights, and even had to establish a Belgian entity to secure certain permits. Yet these obstacles led to significant technological improvements – mechanical, electronic and software-based – that would not have been achieved without the project.

Interestingly, an “unexpected bonus” of the project proved even larger than the original objective. New market opportunities emerged, such as monitoring other crop threats. Croptic developed a partnership with a Dutch manufacturer of crop selection vehicles, integrating AI directly into field equipment.



Six vehicles equipped with Croptic's technology are already scheduled to operate in the field. The collaboration did not end with the subsidy. Both companies continue working together to refine disease detection models and bring a commercial product to market.

Both SMEs are clear: without CrossRoads, this project would not have happened. The financial support lowered the risk threshold, enabling both companies to take bold innovation steps. At the same time, administrative overheads remained manageable, and guidance was provided on both technical and financial aspects.



Smarter Sterilization, Safer Surgery

Location: Flanders and The Netherlands.

Partners: Dutch company Ansana and Flemish company Sentigrade

Surgical site infections affect millions of patients worldwide, carrying significant health risks and financial costs. One of the key contributing factors is inadequate sterilization of surgical instruments. Dutch company Ansana and Flemish company Sentigrade, supported by CrossRoads Flanders-Netherlands, developed a tool that provides complete control and visibility over instrument sterility, from the sterilization unit all the way to the operating room.

Every surgical procedure carries built-in risks, but one of the greatest dangers lies in an invisible threat: bacterial

infections caused by insufficiently sterilized instruments. Each year, thousands of patients develop Surgical Site Infections (SSIs) because of inadequate instrument reprocessing.





Inadequate sterilization not only harms patients; it also places enormous financial and operational pressure on hospitals through the costs of reoperations, extended hospital stays and additional medication.

To address this challenge, Ansana and Sentigrate developed a sterilization monitoring solution built around a unique combination of advanced sensors and a real-time track-and-trace system. The sensors measure critical parameters such as temperature, pressure and exposure time, while the tracking system precisely monitors the location of sterilization containers throughout the hospital. Together, these technologies ensure that every instrument is correctly sterilized and remains sterile until the moment of use.

Sentigrate brought the software expertise needed to bring this vision to life, designing a

custom solution for real-time data processing and workflow optimization. Sensor data and location data are combined in an intuitive dashboard, giving hospital staff a clear and continuous overview of instrument status.

A successful prototype has been built and extensively tested in a real hospital environment, validating the system's performance under clinical conditions. The next step is developing the prototype into a market-ready product.

The societal impact of this innovation spans several dimensions. Based on the project team's findings, a 10% reduction in SSIs is expected, with direct health benefits for patients and significant cost savings for hospitals.

It also offers a meaningful counterweight to the growing trend toward single-use surgical instruments. Disposables are often preferred

for their guaranteed sterility, but they come at a high environmental cost. This project provides a sustainable alternative without compromising on safety or efficiency, representing a crucial step toward care that is safer, more cost-effective and more sustainable.



Day 3

Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro

Where Small Businesses Cross Borders First

The place & the idea

Across the Western Balkans,
borders are not only
geographical – they are shaped

by history, economic
fragmentation and different
stages of market development.
For many small businesses,
these borders still represent
real barriers: to growth, to
innovation and to accessing new
markets.

In this context, cooperation
often does not begin with
institutions – it begins with
entrepreneurs.

Small projects help micro and
small enterprise (MSEs)
overcome borders before
institutions do. They create
practical, low-risk
opportunities for businesses to
test collaboration, exchange
know-how and explore new
markets together, even in
regions where cross-border
cooperation has historically
been complex. This is
particularly meaningful in the
Croatia – Bosnia and
Herzegovina – Montenegro
programme area, where the
legacy of past divisions still
influences economic structures

and trust between actors. Here,
cooperation is not only about
business – it is also about
rebuilding connections through
shared economic interests.

Enhancing MSEs Sustainable Growth and Competitiveness (EmBRACE)

The EmBRACE Small Project Fund
under the Interreg VI-A IPA
Programme Croatia – Bosnia and
Herzegovina – Montenegro 2021–
2027 builds on this reality.
It supports micro and small
enterprises in turning ideas
into action, using cooperation
as a tool for growth rather
than an objective in itself.

In this setting, cooperation
becomes tangible: a prototype
developed jointly, a service
tested across borders, a
product adapted to a regional
market. Europe is experienced
not as a framework, but as a
business opportunity made
possible through collaboration.



How the microproject initiative works

The EmBRACE Small Project Fund is designed as an entrepreneurship-driven instrument that places micro and small enterprises (MSEs) at the centre of cross-border cooperation.

Rather than focusing on large, complex projects, the Fund supports small, manageable pilot actions that allow businesses to take their first step beyond national markets. The logic is simple: if cooperation is to work for MSEs, it must match their capacities, timelines and risk tolerance.

From a technical perspective, the fund provides:

- small-scale grants for Small Projects of up to €200,000, covering up to 85% of eligible project costs,
- a total financial budget of €11.76 million, with around €8.93 million directly allocated to MSEs,
- targeted support for innovation and competitiveness, including product development, process improvement and digitalisation,
- access for first-time beneficiaries, many of whom have never participated in EU programmes.

The fund actively reduces entry barriers to cooperation. It simplifies procedures, lowers financial risks and allows enterprises with limited administrative or organisational capacity to participate.

At the same time, it frames cooperation through an entrepreneurial perspective.

Projects are not defined by themes alone, but by their ability to:

- develop or adapt business models,
- create new or improved products and services,
- build cross-border value chains,
- test solutions in real market conditions.

Through joint implementation, MSEs share resources, expertise and risk. This creates a practical environment for innovation through cooperation, where ideas are not only discussed but tested and validated.

Crucially, the fund turns cross-border business ideas into specific pilot actions. It allows entrepreneurs to experiment, learn and refine their concepts before scaling



up – something that would often not be possible without external support.

Beyond immediate results, the process also builds trust between partners. In a region where economic cooperation is still evolving, these first experiences lay the groundwork for longer-term collaboration and market integration.

The result is not just a funding mechanism, but a pathway: from idea, to pilot, to sustainable cross-border business activity.

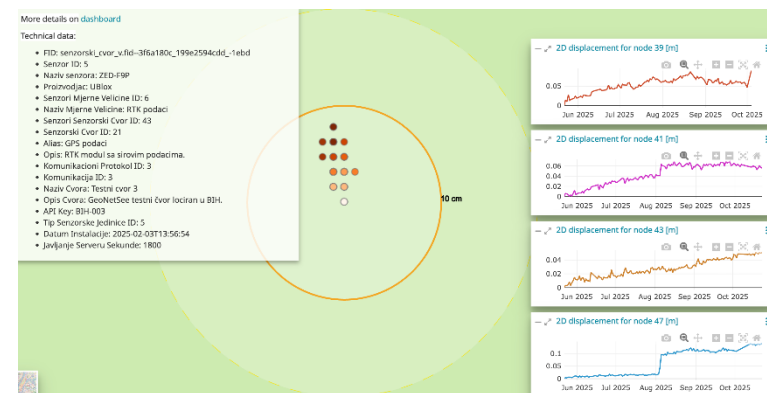


Interesting facts and practices

The EmBRACE Small Project Fund stands out for how effectively it removes the usual friction around cross-border cooperation for small businesses. It offers simple, proportionate procedures, making it realistic for MSEs to participate without needing EU project experience. What is particularly notable in practice is the focus on specific pilot actions – businesses are not just networking, they are jointly developing products, testing solutions and exploring new markets across borders.

From an Interact perspective, this initiative is a strong example of cooperation designed around users rather than systems. It aligns funding with how MSEs actually operate: fast, practical and opportunity

driven. In a region where trust and economic links are still developing, this approach is especially relevant. It shows that small-scale, business-led cooperation can be a powerful entry point – not only into EU programmes, but into sustained cross-border economic relationships.



Learn more about EmBRACE.

Click or scan QR code.





Small practices

Prefabricated nZEB Houses (PnZEBH)

Location: Montenegro-Croatia.

Partners: MEDITERA Ltd.

(Montenegro), Single Spin Ltd. (Croatia).

The PnZEBH project addresses a shared regional challenge: the environmental impact of traditional construction methods.

By bringing together partners from Croatia and Montenegro, the project focuses on developing an innovative prefabricated wooden house that meets nearly Zero-Energy Building (nZEB) standards. The ambition is not only to create a product, but to set a new

benchmark for sustainable construction in the region.

The cooperation combines complementary expertise:

- Croatian partners contribute technical knowledge in prefabricated construction,
- Montenegrin partners bring innovation in design and production.

Together, they developed a prototype based on a novel construction system using CNC-cut panels and mechanical joints, eliminating the need for adhesives or synthetic materials. This approach enables faster, more flexible, environmentally-friendly construction, while also making the process accessible to smaller teams or individual builders.

The project goes beyond product development. It integrates:

- advanced digital modelling and energy performance analysis,

- new construction methods adapted to regional conditions, and
- scalable solutions for wider market uptake.

This collaboration allows both partners to achieve results that would not have been possible independently. It creates a shared innovation process, reduces development risks and opens access to new markets across the region.

At the same time, it demonstrates how cross-border cooperation can directly support the transition towards more sustainable economic models – linking environmental goals with business opportunities.





GNSS-based IoT System for Smart Monitoring of Landslides and Agriculture Applications (SmartGNSS)

Location: Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Partners: MoDrone Ltd.

(Montenegro), Geographica Ltd. (Croatia), Gauss Ltd. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The SmartGNSS project shows how cooperation can unlock technological innovation in response to shared regional challenges.

Bringing together MSEs from Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the project develops an advanced GNSS-based IoT system for high-precision monitoring and data collection. Its objective is to provide a cost-efficient and reliable solution for sectors where accurate geospatial data is critical.

The system is tested through two pilot applications:

- real-time monitoring of landslides, improving risk management and early warning systems,
- precision agriculture tools, optimising irrigation and pesticide use.



By integrating data from multiple countries, the project creates a cross-border geospatial network that improves accuracy and coverage beyond what national systems can achieve alone.

Each partner contributes specialised expertise – from sensor design and geospatial analysis to system integration and real-world application – resulting in a solution that is both innovative and practical.

The project highlights several key dimensions of MSE cooperation:

- joint product development, combining different technological capabilities,
- innovation through shared knowledge, accelerating development processes,
- trust-building, essential for long-term collaboration in complex sectors.

It also demonstrates the market potential of cross-border



solutions. By addressing challenges that do not stop at national borders, the project creates opportunities for scaling up and expanding into wider regional markets.

SmartGNSS shows how a small project can act as a catalyst - turning cooperation into innovation, and innovation into sustainable business growth.

Why this stop matters

This initiative demonstrates how small-scale funding can effectively support MSEs competitiveness, innovation and market expansion across borders.

It provides a practical entry point into EU cooperation for first-time business beneficiaries.

It also shows how cross-border pilot actions can generate tangible economic results while strengthening longer-term cooperation in a region where borders have a special meaning.



Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

EmBRACE

IPA Croatia - Bosnia and
Herzegovina - Montenegro

The **EmBRACE** project is a pilot project that provides financial support to **micro and small entrepreneurs** within the **Interreg VI-A Programme IPA Croatia - Bosnia and Herzegovina - Montenegro 2021-2027** and improves the competitiveness of **micro and small enterprises (MSEs)** in the border area.

*Unlock
the change
EmBRACE it!*

HAMAG BICRO



PROJECT TITLE	Enhancing MSEs sustainable gRrowth And Compétitiveness (EmBRACE)
SMALL PROJECT FUND BENEFICIARY	Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments (HAMAG-BICRO)
PRIORITY AXIS	Smart investments in research, innovation and competitive entrepreneurship
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET / EU CO-FINANCING	11.764.706 EUR / EU 10.000.000 EUR
PROJECT DURATION	60 months (March 2024 - February 2029)

E-mail: embrace@hamagbicro.hr
Programme web: www.interreg-hr-ba-me.eu

Web platform: www.cbchb.eu

The project is co-financed by ERDF and IPA III funds of the European Union.





Day 4

Belgium - Germany - the Netherlands

STIPP. Innovation Redefined.

The place & the idea

In the Meuse-Rhine region, borders are part of everyday business life. Companies work in a territory shaped by

different languages, innovation systems and market environments, yet linked by proximity, shared challenges and strong economic ties. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), this creates a unique opportunity: innovation does not have to stop at the border. Instead, it can grow through cooperation across it.

Yet taking that first step is not always easy. Finding the right partner, sharing risks, aligning business interests, testing ideas in an international setting and navigating different national contexts can make cross-border cooperation feel complex, especially for smaller companies with limited time and capacity.

The STIPP initiative was created to help SMEs overcome these challenges. It supports companies in finding partners, developing innovation ideas and implementing cross-border

innovation projects. By combining hands-on business development support with accessible funding opportunities, STIPP helps SMEs transform promising ideas into concrete innovation projects.

STIPP combines two complementary elements. First, SMEs can benefit from business development support, including partner search, matchmaking and project development guidance. Second, promising cross-border consortia can apply for financial support through the STIPP SME Grant Scheme. Together, these elements help companies move from an initial idea to a concrete innovation project. STIPP makes cross-border innovation accessible at the right scale: practical, focused and closely aligned with the needs of SMEs.



How the Small Project Fund works

Created in 2024 as a Small Project Fund under the Interreg Meuse-Rhine programme, the STIPP SME Grant Scheme is the funding pillar of the wider STIPP initiative. With a dedicated ERDF budget of €10 million, it enables SMEs to develop, test and advance innovative solutions together across borders.

STIPP is specifically designed for SMEs. A consortium must include at least two independent SMEs from two different Member States in the programme area. Cross-border cooperation is therefore not an additional project feature, but the foundation of every supported project.

"The greatest success of STIPP is not the funding itself, but the partnerships that emerge from it. Companies that would otherwise never have met are now developing innovative solutions together across borders."

- Martine Rousseau, Member of the STIPP Board of Directors.

The STIPP initiative aims to stimulate cross-border innovation cooperation, helping SMEs develop new solutions and build lasting partnerships. Projects must contribute to at least one of three regional transition challenges: Industrial Transition, Green Transformation or Healthier Citizens. These priorities position STIPP at the crossroads of competitiveness and societal change. Innovation is not supported for its own sake alone, but for its capacity to strengthen SMEs while contributing to the wider development of the region.

What makes STIPP distinctive is that it combines funding with hands-on business development support. Regional Development Agencies actively identify innovation opportunities, perform partner searches, facilitate matchmaking and support SMEs throughout the application process.



In Call 3, nine of the twelve submitted consortia were formed through this partner-search process. STIPP therefore does not only finance cross-border innovation projects; it actively helps create them.

One of the key lessons learned during the implementation of STIPP is that SMEs value personal guidance and simplified procedures as much as financial support itself. For many companies, access to trusted partners, practical advice and clear processes can be just as important as funding. Continuous improvements have therefore been introduced after each call to reduce complexity, improve accessibility and better reflect the realities in which SMEs operate.

STIPP was deliberately designed to lower the barriers to cross-border innovation. Rather than requiring large consortia or major upfront investments, the scheme allows SMEs to explore

cooperation, test ideas and develop innovation projects at a manageable scale. This makes it easier for companies to take a first step into international collaboration while limiting financial and organisational risks.

The scheme provides up to 50% ERDF co-financing for eligible project expenditure. Depending on the size and geographical composition of the consortium, projects can receive between €150,000 and €600,000 in ERDF support and run for up to 24 months.

Selected SMEs can also receive up to 40% of their awarded ERDF contribution in advance, helping reduce the financial barrier to participation.



21

Discover STIPP and its projects.

What gives STIPP additional strength is the way it is organised.

The Managing Authority acts as Fund Manager, while implementation is supported by a network of regional innovation and business organisations, the Regional Development Agencies: LIOF, AGIT, NMWP, POM Limburg, VLAIO and Wallonie Entreprendre. Together, they anchor the scheme in the economic reality of the region and help connect strategic programme objectives with the needs of companies on the ground.

Applications are assessed through a governance structure that combines strategic direction and expert judgement. A Board of Directors oversees the scheme, while an Expert Committee of independent specialists advises on the innovative quality and relevance of submitted projects.



This creates a framework that is not only administratively sound, but also substantively focused on impact, feasibility, and cross-border added value.

Innovation always involves uncertainty, particularly when companies collaborate across borders and explore new technologies, products or business models. STIPP addresses this through a combination of independent expert assessment, private co-financing and hands-on support throughout project development and implementation. To further reduce barriers for SMEs, the scheme also includes a dedicated risk reserve supporting the pre-financing arrangement, enabling companies to access part of their funding upfront while safeguarding the financial stability of the fund.

STIPP at a glance:

08-2024 / 12-2029

- ❖ **€10 million** ERDF budget.
- ❖ **1100+** SMEs informed.
- ❖ **80+** partner searches initiated.
- ❖ **23** projects supported.
- ❖ **50+** SMEs involved.
- ❖ **125+** matchmaking meetings organised.

(August 2026)

Small practices

SHELLWEPRINT: building a cross-border consortium

Location: Maastricht (NL), Aachen (DE), Oupeye (B).

Partners: EGGXPERT B.V., Layer Performance GmbH, BAU-Regain.

SHELLWEPRINT aims to develop innovative applications for eggshell-derived materials in modular 3D-printed products for sustainable urban environments. The project brings together Dutch company EGGXPERT, German company Layer Performance and Walloon company BAU-Regain, combining expertise in circular biomaterials, additive manufacturing, product development and circular construction.



The project is a good example of how STIPP helps companies find the right partners across borders. Through partner searches, matchmaking activities and project development support, an initial business idea evolved into a stronger cross-border innovation project with complementary expertise from three regions.

The consortium received guidance throughout project development and application preparation, ultimately resulting in a successful funding application. SHELLWEPRINT demonstrates that innovation often starts with a good idea, but succeeds through the right partnership. By connecting companies with complementary capabilities, STIPP helps SMEs turn ambitious concepts into collaborative innovation projects with real market potential.

While SHELLWEPRINT shows how STIPP helps build cross-border

partnerships, RoboWeld-Batt demonstrates what those partnerships can achieve over time.





RoboWeld-Batt: creating momentum for innovation

Location: Stolberg (DE), Maastricht (NL), Herstal (B).

Partners: Aixcon PowerSystems GmbH, Vectioneer B.V., Magnetico Polissage de Precision.

RoboWeld-Batt brought together German welding specialist Aixcon PowerSystems and Dutch automation company Vectioneer to develop an automated welding solution for battery production. By combining their complementary expertise, the partners successfully developed and validated a prototype that significantly improved welding speed, process stability and weld quality.

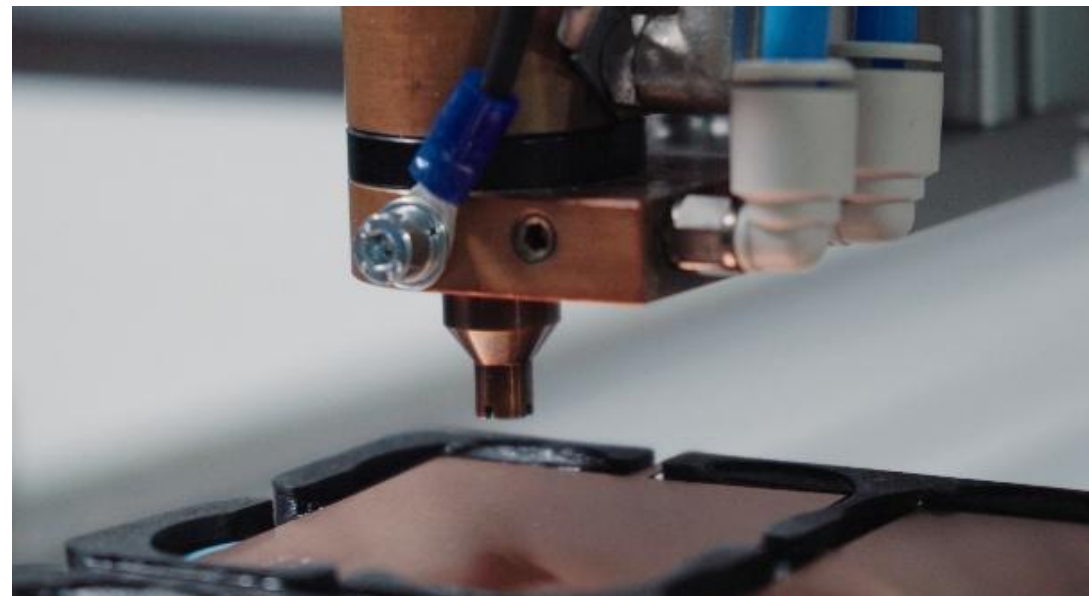
The project demonstrated the technical feasibility of the concept and resulted in a validated solution at TRL 6.

The collaboration did not stop there. Building on the results achieved within RoboWeld-Batt, the consortium developed a follow-up project, INDUBATT-WELD, together with Walloon company MPP. Notably, MPP was identified through the STIPP partner search and matchmaking process, further expanding the cross-border partnership.

The new project aims to bring the technology closer to market readiness and demonstrates how STIPP can support SMEs beyond a single project, helping them establish long-term innovation collaborations across the Meuse-Rhine region.



Watch the Roboweld-Batt results.





Why this stop matters

The STIPP SME Grant Scheme shows why small-scale support can make a big difference in border regions. For many SMEs, cross-border cooperation does not start with a major investment or a large consortium. It starts with a first contact, a first test, a first shared idea.

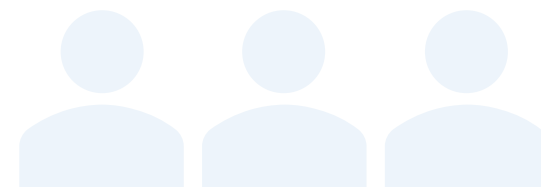
By making these first steps possible, the scheme contributes to more than individual business projects. It helps build trust between companies, strengthens the innovation capacity of the region, and creates a foundation for more durable forms of cooperation.

In only two years, STIPP has already demonstrated that there

is strong demand for accessible cross-border innovation support. The growing number of projects, partner searches and matchmaking activities shows that SMEs are willing to collaborate across borders when practical barriers are reduced. In the Meuse-Rhine region, where economic life naturally crosses borders, but practical barriers still exist, this kind of support has clear added value. It enables SMEs to innovate together, learn from each other and turn regional diversity into shared opportunity. Beyond supporting individual projects, STIPP is also building knowledge on how to stimulate cross-border SME innovation. The experience gained through the scheme is continuously evaluated and will be shared with other European regions, contributing to future approaches for SME innovation support in border regions across Europe.

“STIPP demonstrates how European Territorial Cooperation can directly benefit SMEs. By supporting innovation partnerships across borders, the initiative strengthens competitiveness, builds lasting networks and contributes to the long-term resilience of the Meuse-Rhine region.”

Raluca Danila, Fund Manager
STIPP SME Grant Scheme,
Interreg Meuse-Rhine



“

THE SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL TRAIL

Small is beautiful – bringing communities
across borders





Day 5

Germany-Denmark

Where Europe Begins with People

The place & the idea

Along the Danish-German border, Europe is not experienced through institutions, but through everyday encounters. People meet at schools, festivals, clubs, archives and

in kitchens. Languages mix, habits differ slightly and curiosity often comes before confidence.

The Danish-German People-to-People Project Fund was created precisely for these situations: to make cross-border cooperation possible before participants become professionals, and before cooperation becomes a project in the traditional sense.

Here, Small Project Funds are not about scale. They are about proximity.

How the Small Project Fund works.

The Interreg Deutschland-Danmark region, which consists of both rural areas and larger cities, contains significant geographical and historical differences that influence

cross-border cooperation. The Fund seeks to reduce barriers such as distance, lack of neighbouring-language skills, and limited experience of cross-border projects. All of these make cross-border engagement more accessible for all participants.

The People-to-People Fund supports small-scale, citizen-oriented projects that bring Danish and German communities together in practical ways. With a total budget of €4.45 million (2023–2029), the Fund was designed around one simple principle:

If cooperation is meant to benefit citizens, the rules must work for citizens.

Applicants are often first-timers. Many have never worked with EU funding before.



The Fund therefore focuses on:

- simple application procedures,
- short decision times,
- limited paperwork
- and personalised support instead of complex manuals.

To reduce typical cross-border barriers, the Fund allows costs that are often excluded elsewhere: accommodation, interpretation and external project management. This makes participation possible even for small organisations, volunteers and informal groups.

Interesting facts and practices

Funding is provided mainly through lump sums (up to €90,000), with only 10% co-financing, which can include volunteer work. Reporting

focuses on results and experiences rather than receipts.

Applicants repeatedly highlight the value of personalised guidance, which they say helps them navigate requirements and lowers the psychological threshold for applying.

The result is a Fund that does not push cooperation forward – it invites people to take part.

Three streams, one logic

Rather than one rigid instrument, the Fund operates through three complementary streams, each responding to a different type of challenge:

Citizens' Fund

Supports small projects run by or for Danish and German citizens. Institutions may apply, but only if citizens are actively involved. The rule is simple: if a museum, school or association applies, the project must clearly show how people participate, test and shape the activity themselves.

This requirement keeps projects grounded in real experiences.

Transport Fund

Targets children and young people up to 26 years old. It supports:

- cross-border meetings between groups, and
- trips to the neighbouring country without a formal partner.

Using lump sums for travel, accommodation and activities, the Fund keeps administration



light. Since its launch, around 400 projects have been supported, involving nearly 17,000 young participants. For many, this is their first meaningful encounter with a neighbouring country.

Network Fund

Encourages cooperation between adult groups such as clubs, associations and professional communities. It supports first meetings, exchange formats and preparation for future joint projects, making cross-border networking accessible even for those with no prior experience.



Small practices

Danish-German Brunch

Location: Lübeck (Fehmarnbelt Days)

Partners: CELF & Berufliche Schule Oldenburg

At the Fehmarnbelt Days festival in Lübeck, students from Danish and German vocational schools ran a joint food stand. They served crispy waffles, homemade crispbread with wild garlic hummus, and colourful smoothies which they had prepared together.

The project was not about perfect recipes. It was about cooperation in practice: planning, cooking, improvising and talking to visitors. Food became a shared language.

“It reminded me of a real kitchen. I’ve learned so much, both about food and people. Even if we don’t speak the same

language perfectly, we find a way to communicate”.

“We met German classmates for a baking workshop. It wasn’t about rules or reports – just sharing recipes, stories and laughter”,

says Malou Mikkelsen, a student from CELF.

For many students, this was their first cross-border collaboration. What stayed with them was not the event itself, but the confidence that cooperation across borders is possible – and enjoyable.



Danish-German Archives Collaboration

Location: Border region
Denmark-Germany

Partners: Local and regional
archivists from both sides

Archivists from Denmark and Germany joined forces to improve access to historical materials across the border. The project focused on everyday needs: family history research, volunteer engagement and practical challenges such as digitisation and search optimisation.

Together, the partners developed a bilingual mini-guide for citizens, organised public lectures and created spaces for professional exchange. Citizens gained easier access to archives in the neighbouring country, while archivists learned from each other's practices.

"We've seen a real desire to learn from each other across the border. This collaboration could be further expanded by involving more local archive professionals and volunteers",

explains Sidsel Maria von Qualen, archivist at Historie Haderslev.

The project shows how even highly-specialised institutions can create citizen-oriented outcomes – if the framework allows it.

Why this stop matters

In the Danish-German border region, European cooperation begins with everyday encounters: shared meals, school trips, archive visits and conversations.

The People-to-People Fund demonstrates that small projects are not smaller versions of large ones. They are a different instrument altogether: one that builds trust first and structures later.



©Natureventyr



Day 6

Germany-Netherlands

Europe is not
something distant

The place & the idea

In the German-Dutch border region, Europe is not something distant – it is experienced in everyday life, in schools, in communities and in local cooperation across the border.

The Interreg VI Programme Germany-Netherlands was set up for cross-border projects in the relevant funding area, which consists of the following regions: parts of the German federal states of Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia, the Dutch provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, Flevoland and Overijssel, and parts of Gelderland, North Brabant and Limburg. As beneficiaries, the German-Dutch Euregios have developed the Interreg Germany-Netherlands Small Projects Fund (KPF) in mutual consultation with and financial support from the European Union and the Interreg Programme partners. This fund is jointly implemented by four Euregios operating along the border: Euregio Rhein-Waal/Euregio Rijn-Waal, Ems-Dollart-Region/Eems-Dollard-Regio, EUREGIO (Gronau) and euregio rhein-maas-nord/euregio rijn-maas-noord – each rooted in their respective border regions

and united by a shared commitment to cross-border cooperation.

At the heart of this cooperation lies a simple idea:

“Europe is closer to its citizens than one might think.”

The Interreg Germany-Netherlands Programme reflects this by supporting cross-border initiatives that bring people, institutions and communities together. Through the Small Projects Fund (KPF) managed by the German-Dutch Euregios, cooperation becomes tangible at the local level – addressing everyday needs and strengthening connections across the border.



How the Small Project Fund works

In the context of cross-border cooperation, small projects are effective instruments with high European added-value for removing border-related and cross-border obstacles, promoting contact between local people, and bringing border regions and their citizens, authorities and other institutions closer. The Interreg Germany-Netherlands Small Projects Fund supports small projects in the policy areas of education, governance, health and people-to-people.

The Interreg Germany-Netherlands Small Projects Fund is available for initiatives that can receive a maximum grant of €25,000. There is a simplified procedure for smaller, short-term activities that can be funded with a lump sum grant of €750. Projects

that fall into this category are communicated externally under the term 'mini-projects'.

These so-called 'mini-projects' are presented in more detail below.

As already mentioned, projects falling under the following topics are eligible for funding:

Education

General and vocational education projects aiming to promote the development of young people, primarily through cooperation between educational institutions. Such projects raise awareness of European values among (young) people. Education and training are influenced internationally through exchanges with the language of the neighbouring country, preparing students for an international labour market. Applications with the following objectives/content fall within the scope of education:

- Student exchanges, cooperation between schools/universities, language support and internships.
- Promoting the further development of young people.
- Preparing students for the international job market.

Governance

Governance projects aim to promote cooperation between organisations that want to bring Europe closer to its citizens. Projects in this area enhance European values at local level through specific cooperation between local authorities. The focus here is on knowledge-sharing to improve operational measures in the border area. Applications with the following objectives/content fall within the scope of governance, including:

- Cross-border network of organisations with public interests



- Strengthening cooperation between local authorities.

Health

Health-related projects aim to improve cooperation between health institutions. These projects contribute to the development of a cross-border health system.

Because they involve health facilities, such projects are aimed at all residents of the programme area. Applications with the following objectives/content fall within the scope of Health:

- Cross-border network of healthcare facilities.
- Improving the healthcare system (including healthy eating and exercise, animal health, and mental and physical health).

People-to-People

People-to-People projects bring citizens, associations and organisations on both sides of the border into contact with each other. Projects that are close to the citizens are particularly important. Projects focusing on culture, leisure, tourism and club life are particularly eligible for funding.

Applications with the following objectives/content fall within the scope of People-to-People:

- Citizens from both sides of the border getting to know each other.
- Joint activities in culture, sport, history, tourism and club life.

In general, mini-projects are defined as cross-border meetings, network meetings or exchanges, and cross-border (public) events. In the case of mini-projects that meet the above criteria, a simplified

application, approval and payment procedure applies. As soon as a mini-project is approved, the funding is paid out to the applicant immediately. Subsequently, the applicant must provide evidence of the activity by means of a clear implementation statement and a press report.

Why this stop matters

In the German-Dutch border region, cooperation is not about large-scale interventions - it is about everyday connections that bring Europe closer to its citizens.

The Small Projects Fund demonstrates that even small, local initiatives can have strong European added-value. By focusing on people, simplicity and accessibility, it creates a space where cooperation is not only possible, but natural.



Here, Europe is not experienced through policies alone – but through shared activities, relationships, and trust built step-by-step across the border.

Small practices from the Euregio Rhein-Waal/Euregio Rijn-Waal

Euregio Freedom Walk

Location: Groesbeek (NL) and Kranenburg (D).

Partners: Stichting Wandeling in vrijheid, Vrijheidsmuseum Groesbeek (both NL) and the municipality of Kranenburg (D).

A walk through history, freedom and shared values

The Euregio Freedom Walk brought together participants from Germany and the Netherlands – from experienced

hikers to families – in a cross-border event combining nature, history and reflection.



The route led through landscapes marked by historical events, including the Cold War and the Second World War, connecting participants with shared European history. The experience was complemented by access to the Freedom Museum in

Groesbeek, reinforcing the importance of democracy, freedom and human rights.

Beyond the walk itself, the project created a shared space for reflection and dialogue, strengthening cross-border understanding through a simple but powerful format.

International Fire Brigade Competition

Location: Kreis Kleve (D), Veiligheidsregio Gelderland Midden en Noord- and Oost Gelderland (both NL).

Partners: Veiligheids- en Gezondheidsregio Gelderland-Midden and fire brigades from the district of Kleve.

Building trust where cooperation matters most

Fire brigades from Germany and the Netherlands came together in a joint competition involving 18 teams and around 180 participants.



The event was more than a competition – it was an opportunity to build relationships, exchange knowledge and understand each other's working methods. In cross-border regions, such cooperation is essential, particularly in emergency situations where a joint response can save lives.

By strengthening trust and practical coordination, the

project contributes directly to safer, more resilient border communities.

Language Village (Taaldorp)

Location: Kleve (D), Wijchen and Nijmegen (both NL).

Partners: Gesamtschule am Forstgarten Kleve, Maaswaal College Wijchen and Mondial College Nijmegen.

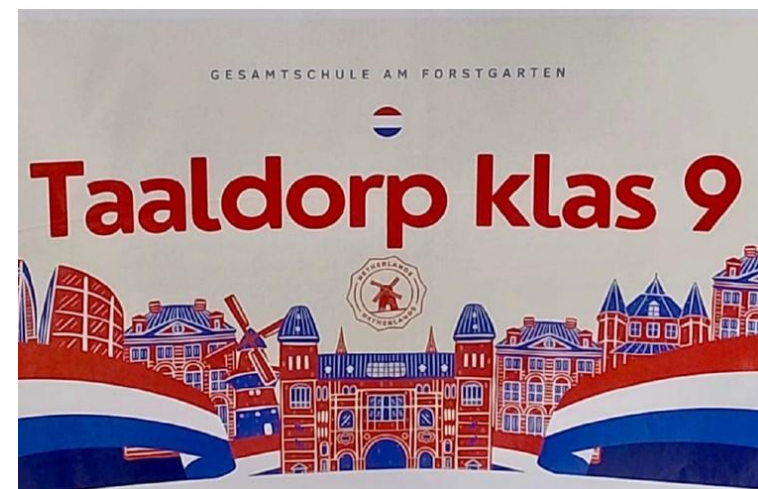
Learning language through real-life experience

The Language Village project created a simulated environment where students could practice real-life communication in the neighbouring language.

Through interactive scenarios – such as reporting a crime or shopping at a bakery – students engaged in practical language

use, often interacting with peers from across the border.

This hands-on approach helps young people overcome language barriers, build confidence and prepare for cross-border education and employment opportunities.



“

THE CUSTOMISED TRAIL

Local needs, local actors, tailor-made solutions





Day 7

Italy – Slovenia

A Split City, Acting as One!

The place & the idea

Welcome to Nova Gorica – Gorizia – once divided by history, today united by everyday life.

Nova Gorica and Gorizia sit side-by-side, separated for decades by borders that shaped identities, memories and

routines. Now, what was once a line of division has become a meeting place – a shared urban space where cultures, languages and communities intertwine.

For years, the border defined how people moved, met and lived. Daily life was made by families crossing lines. Strong borderless friendships and cultural life flowed beyond checkpoints.

Today, that lived reality is becoming visible, supported and strengthened by cross-border cooperation. Public spaces are shared, cultural events are co-created, and residents experience the city not as two halves, but as a single place with many faces.

A Square Without Borders

A once-overlooked square near the former border crossing becomes a stage, a workshop and a meeting point.

This is a cross-border investment for which – thanks to the constructive cooperation of the municipalities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica, the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and the Republic of Slovenia – EGTC GO has obtained EU funding under the FVG Regional Operational Programme as part of the "Europe 27 Programme" and the Slovenian National Operational Programme. The renovation of Transalpina/Europe Square is recognized as a strategic project in both programming documents.

In 2025, Transalpina/ Europe Square hosted numerous cross-border events, starting from the opening of the European Capital of Culture 2025 Nova Gorica – Gorizia to the 2025 edition of the Friendship March. It has also been chosen as the setting of a variety of cultural events, including Rossini's opera *Il viaggio a Reims* and a concert by pianist



Alexander Gadjiev, as well as sporting events such as the 14th stage of the Giro d'Italia and the Jumping over Boundaries event.

GO! 2025: Culture Without Borders

The designation of Nova Gorica and Gorizia as European Capital of Culture GO! 2025 represents both a symbolic milestone and a practical framework for strengthening cross-border cooperation. At the centre of this process stands the Small Projects Fund (SPF), designed to bring the idea of a shared city into everyday life.

Recognising the importance of local engagement, the Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia Programme allocated 10% of its budget to a targeted SPF managed by EGTC GO. This makes the fund a key instrument for ensuring that the European Capital of Culture is not only a large-scale

cultural event, but also a participatory process shaped by local communities.

How the Small Project Fund works

The SPF focuses on small-scale, people-centred initiatives that activate cooperation directly in the shared urban space. Typical activities include neighbourhood cultural events, joint artistic productions, workshops and cross-border encounters.

These projects are designed to:

- activate shared public spaces,
- connect local stakeholders across the border, and
- build trust through direct participation.

Rather than concentrating resources in a limited number of flagship projects, the SPF distributes support across a wide range of local initiatives. This creates a dense network of activities that collectively contribute to the transformation of Nova Gorica and Gorizia into a shared cultural space.

The fund is implemented by EGTC GO as a single beneficiary through open calls with simplified procedures focused on results and milestones. This approach lowers administrative barriers and enables participation by smaller organisations and first-time applicants.

The scale and demand for the SPF highlight its relevance. The initial allocation of €8.24 million was increased in 2024 by an additional €3.2 million from the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, bringing the total budget to €11.44 million. Across three calls (2023–2025),



the fund attracted high interest, with hundreds of applications submitted and 69 projects ultimately funded.

While individual projects remain modest in size, their total effect is significant. Together, they create continuous cross-border interaction, strengthen local networks and embed cooperation in everyday life. In this context, the SPF acts as a practical tool that translates the vision of GO! 2025 into tangible, people-to-people experiences across the borderless area.



Small practices

WALK2SPIRIT – Sacred places that unite

Location: Aquileia (IT) – Sveta Gora (SI).

Partners: Frančiškanski samostan Sveta Gora; Fondazione Socoba - Basilica di Aquileia.

WALK2SPIRIT - Sacred places that unite: the journey from Aquileia to Sveta Gora

Building on the recognition of the Basilica of Aquileia and the Sanctuary of Sveta Gora, the WALK 2 SPIRIT project aims to increase cultural and religious tourism in rural areas and the outskirts of cities, capitalizing on the growing influx of people interested in history and cultural heritage. The partners, the Franciscan Monastery of Sveta Gora and the

Society for the Preservation of the Basilica of Aquileia, have developed a cross-border walking route connecting the two holy places. In addition to the paths, a series of public events took place, including lectures, concerts and exhibitions.



The project included adaptation work in the Sveta Gora sanctuary, cross-border public events, and training paths for tour guides. The goal was to improve the attractiveness and recognition of the destinations



involved, positioning them as ideal for sustainable and "slow" tourism.

Ars Sine Finibus - Art without borders

Location: Collio (IT) and Brda (SI).

Partners: Sinefinis D.o.o.; Gradisciutta di Princic Robert.

Ars Sine Finibus - Reconstruction of artistic-agricultural landscapes for the new Europe

"Ars Sine Finibus" aims to reconstruct the unity of the panorama of Collio and Brda through the creation and installation of artistic works made with eco-sustainable and recycled materials in the panorama of vineyards, thus creating an open-air cross-border art park. The project consists of two complementary

parts: The art competition between young students, and the creation of two twin works called "So(g)no". Young students from the Art Academies of Venice, Udine, Nova Gorica and Ljubljana took part in the competition. Students were invited to explore the cross-border territory and, working in pairs, created original artworks from sustainable and recycled materials, later exhibited as part of the project. The So(g)no artwork was created by world-renowned artist Marco Nereo Rotelli in collaboration with other artists, including a Nobel Peace Prize, a poet and a geologist and scientist, leaving a lasting legacy in the territory.



asf. ARS SINE FINIBUS

OPERA 2025
NOVA GORICA
GRADISCA

UNIVERSITÀ

GRADISCA

gradisca



Day 8

Czech Republic – Poland

Shaping Border Regions Together

The place & the idea

Welcome to one of Central Europe's most fascinating border regions – a landscape where mountains, traditions and communities meet across borders. The Czech-Polish borderland is remarkably

diverse. From the peaks of the Krkonoše / Karkonosze Mountains, home to a shared cross-border national park, the border winds through historic towns and villages shaped by centuries of cultural exchange. In places such as the twin town of Cieszyn / Český Těšín, it gently divides communities that have long lived side-by-side, sharing everyday life, culture and history. Elsewhere, the region tells a story of transformation – with former mining and post-industrial areas developing into modern urban clusters. Traditional villages rich in folklore, crafts and local heritage stand alongside dynamic cities that have reinvented themselves after decades of industrial change.

This diversity creates strong potential for cooperation. Cross-border collaboration often begins at the local level, where municipalities, cultural organisations, schools

and associations work together to address shared challenges and opportunities.

Through the Small Project Fund, these local actors can turn ideas into specific initiatives. Small projects bring people together, encourage the exchange of experiences, and build trust step-by-step – laying the foundations for lasting cross-border partnerships.

Small Projects with a Long Tradition

The Small Project Fund (SPF) has been a key instrument of the Interreg Czech Republic-Poland Programme since the Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004. Over the years it has become one of the most important tools for strengthening the local dimension of cross-border



cooperation. Six Euroregions operating along the border manage the funds and act as bridges between the communities on both sides. Together, they administer approximately 20% of the Interreg programme's allocation, making SPF a strategic component of the programme. Each SPF was required to prepare its own medium-term strategy, clearly defining its cross-border objectives and expected results. The strategies were then submitted to the Managing Authority for approval. In addition, a performance-based payment framework was established, linking payments to the gradual achievement of the strategic objectives.

The funds mainly support two areas:

- Cross-border tourism development, and
- Strengthening cross-border ties between people and institutions.

Projects are intentionally small, accessible and easy to implement. Using simplified cost options such as unit costs and lump sums, the programme enables local people to focus on cooperation rather than administration. Despite their modest size – usually up to €30,000 per partner – these projects generate a strong cross-border impact. The fund builds cooperation at the local level, while achieving significant combined results thanks to the scale effect. During the 2014–2020 programming period, nearly 2,000 small projects were successfully implemented. In the current period, interest remains high, particularly in people-to-people initiatives that reconnect communities, strengthen cultural ties and create new networks across the border.

Small projects may be modest in scale, but they often serve as

a first step towards deeper and long-term cooperation.

Small practices

Lašský Skok Dance

Location: Municipality Paskov and district of Pszczyna

Partners: Municipality Paskov and Agencja Rozwoju i Promocji Ziemi Pszczyńskiej.

Reviving the “Lašský Skok” Dance in the Beskydy Region

If you travel further east along the Czech–Polish border, you will find that the landscape changes again. The Beskydy Mountains are known not only for their beautiful scenery but also for their rich cross-border cultural traditions. Here, folklore is still a living part of community life – expressed



through music, costumes and traditional dances passed down from generation to generation.

One of these traditions is *Lašský skok*, a lively “jumping dance” once typical in the Lašsko region. But over time the dance disappeared from public performances and collective memory.

A small cross-border project set out to change that.

Researchers, folklorists and cultural organisations from both sides of the border joined forces to bring the traditional dance back to life.

The process combined historical research with practical workshops. Experts analysed historical sources and ethnographic materials, while dancers and musicians experimented with movement, rhythm and choreography. Three intensive seminars held in Paskov brought together dancers, ethnologists and

musicians. Participants not only studied the history of the dance but also practised its steps to the sounds of live traditional music.

The involvement from both sides of the border ensured that the project reflected the shared cultural heritage of the entire cross-border region, not just one national tradition.

Culture as a Bridge Across Borders

Projects like this show that cross-border cooperation is not only about infrastructure or economic development. Sometimes it is about rediscovering a dance, sharing stories and celebrating traditions that belong to the communities on both sides of the border. By reviving *Lašský skok*, the project reconnects people with their cultural roots while creating new opportunities for cooperation between folklore groups, researchers and cultural institutions.

“Small projects like this demonstrate how culture can become a powerful bridge between local communities, strengthening a shared sense of identity in the Czech-Polish borderland across generations”.





Strengthening Cooperation in the Euroregion Silesia

Location: area of Euroregion Silesia CZ/PL

Partners: PL - Stowarzyszenie Gmin Dorzecza Górnej Odry and CZ - Euroregion Silesia.

The project aims to strengthen institutional capacity and improve cooperation among institutions in the Euroregion Silesia, deepening mutual trust and making exchange of experiences and good practices across the Polish-Czech border possible. It also focuses on reflecting on the future development of the Euroregion Silesia, including defining strategic goals and exploring the potential for establishing

a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

We discussed the project together with representatives of the Euroregion Silesia.

Interview with the Project Partners

Why did you decide to implement this small project?

This small project aims to revitalise interest in Polish-Czech cross-border cooperation within the Euroregion Silesia. In recent years – particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic – local stakeholders have been less willing to engage with and take part in cross-border activities.

So, the project aims to turn this trend around by making

cooperation possible again, and by encouraging the development of a more proactive and structured form of cross-border collaboration. It aims to inspire stakeholders to engage in new thematic areas of cooperation, revive existing partnerships, and start up new cross-border initiatives.

Furthermore, the project will explore the possibility of setting up a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as a likely institutional framework for strengthening cooperation within the Euroregion Silesia. Within the project activities, partners will jointly assess the added-value, opportunities and potential risks associated with establishing an EGTC structure. They will also discuss its possible role in supporting long-term cross-border governance and cooperation in the region.



How does the project strengthen cross-border cooperation?

The project strengthens cross-border cooperation by creating opportunities for direct interaction between representatives of municipalities within the Euroregion Silesia and institutions involved in cross-border cooperation in Poland and the Czech Republic. Project activities include the organisation of joint meetings, study visits, educational activities and exchange visits.

These activities create a platform for dialogue between partners, encouraging mutual trust, better understanding and the development of sustainable cross-border partnerships.

The project also enables participants to exchange and transfer good practices, drawing inspiration from the

experiences of other Euroregions and from existing European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs).

What results do you expect for cross-border cooperation?

The expected result of the project is to strengthen and revitalise cross-border cooperation within the Euroregion Silesia. This will involve enhancing the institutional capacities of our organisation, increasing mutual knowledge and understanding, strengthening interpersonal relations, and rebuilding interest in cooperation on both sides of the border.

The project will contribute to identifying shared challenges, potential areas for joint action and opportunities for

further cooperation. Special attention will be paid to how possible it is to set up a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).





Day 9

Italy – Austria

Bottom-up approach for local development

The place & the idea

The Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach has demonstrated its effectiveness for over ten years within the framework of the Interreg Italy-Austria Programme.

CLLD is a 'bottom-up' approach to local development, involving citizens at the forefront of managing activities and taking part in the decision-making process.

They take responsibility and contribute 'bottom-up', autonomously and on their own initiative to the development of their local area. This leads to the empowerment of local communities. They become 'living labs'; active participation in democracy in peripheral regions is strengthened, and local populations become direct participants and key players. Peripheral communities become the centre and source of initiatives to enhance the border area.

The Interreg Italy-Austria Programme was a pioneer in experimenting with this type of approach in the 2014-2020 programming period, as it was the only programme in Europe to make this a priority.

Important competences have been developed in the CLLD areas, and all four areas have become real 'territorial labs' that can serve as a model at European level.

The Interreg Italy-Austria Programme has taken a leading position in the implementation of the integrated and cross-border CLLD approach. The programme supports strategic action plans in the following four CLLD areas:

- "Dolomiti Live": East Tyrol, Pustertal, Alto Bellunese,
- "HEurOpen": Hermagor, Gemona, Canal del Ferro and Val Canale, Carnia
- "Terra Raetica": Landeck, Imst, Vinschgau, Lower Engadine,
- "Wipptal": Wipptal Tyrol, Wipptal South Tyrol

Calls for submitting projects through the open call system are posted on the respective websites of the four cross-border strategies.



Financing and Implementation

Through CLLD, small-scale (up to € 50,000) and medium-scale (up to € 200,000) projects are financed that fit within the framework of four cross-border development strategies that can be traced back to four selected areas. This allows for much more targeted interventions capable of responding to the needs of local populations.

Grassroots vision, borderless mission

Strategy and Goals

The mission of CLLD is to ensure joint dialogue to identify obstacles and find solutions that cross borders and/or enable the development of common potentials.

This has the overarching goal of strengthening integration, promoting integrated social,

economic and environmental development and cultural heritage at the local level.

CLLD territories autonomously identify their areas of intervention through collecting needs and proposals “bottom-up”, which is typical of this approach. They fund initiatives that respond to territorial needs that only local participants/people can define. Sectors covered include tourism, culture, multilingualism and the promotion of so-called “Smart Villages”.

The main beneficiaries within CLLD areas are the many partners in the region who can act on specific issues identified by the territorial strategy: from nature associations to small businesses, from local authorities to research centres, from educational institutions to cultural associations, and so forth.

The Multi-Level Governance Principle.

An important principle in cross-border cooperation is Multi-level Governance, especially in CLLD. The programme has several vertically- and horizontally-networked organisational structures. This function based on consensus, trust, friendship and good relations.

The multilingual approach and the strong belief in local empowerment through the involvement of local people and their presence on site enable successful implementation. Our CLLD approach stands for trust and effectiveness: no huge budgets, complex structures and committees are needed - just the right people working together on important issues in their specific areas of expertise.

Even with modest resources, the CLLD approach can have a significant impact on



territorial development and promote real and efficient knowledge growth.

CLLD Territories & Statistics

The development strategies cover four different geographical areas, each focusing on the specific needs of the area in question.

They are implemented through the action of LAGs (Local Action Groups).

- 4 areas of intervention
- 17,000 km² Surface area
- 480.000 inhabitants

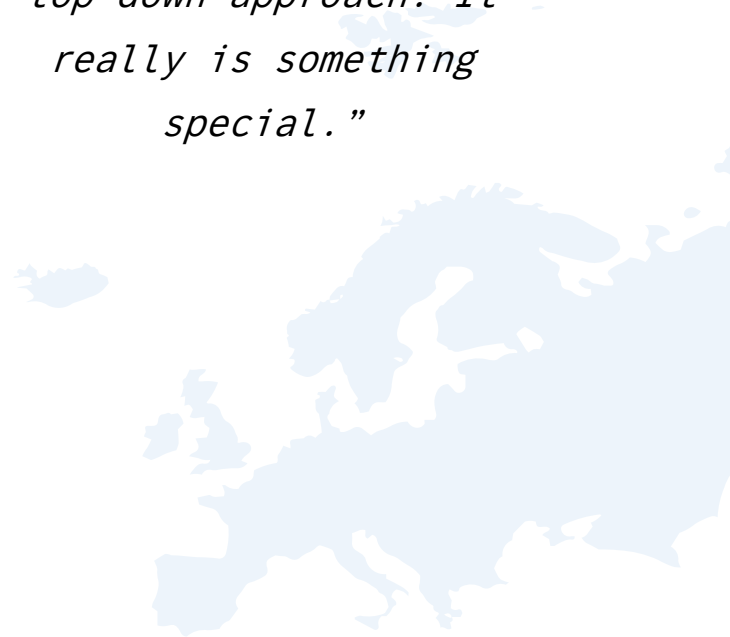
National borders are dissolved for closer cross-border cooperation. The bottom-up approach promotes local engagement and strengthens the active participation of citizens in peripheral regions and areas along European inner

borders. In this way, a thriving community in the periphery can become the vibrant centre, source and resource for bottom-up initiatives which enhance and promote the border area (local empowerment).

The unique European success of the cross-border Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) of the Interreg Italy-Austria Programme will continue in the new 2028-2034 programming period. With the signature of the cross-border local development strategies through the CLLD approach, the "programme within the programme" with its "Local Development" priority is reaffirmed in the 4 CLLD areas and is ready to welcome numerous new project initiatives.

Sebastian Vicoli, Regional Management Landeck (CLLD area Terra Raetica), emphasizes that the principle of local embedding works very well:

"The motivation and enthusiasm of the project promoters is incredible. I believe you cannot achieve this in the same way with a top-down approach. It really is something special."





It aims to share and spread its successful approach EU-wide for peaceful cooperation and territorial development.

More information on the CLLD approach - click or scan:



[Link to our CLLD 2021-2027 brochure.](#)

Structure: 4 funds under four cross-border strategies:

- [Terra Raetica](#) / [Wipptal](#) / [Dolomiti Live](#) / [HEurOpen](#)

Small practices

Democracy: Towards Responsible Citizens - Knowledge and Participation

Location: Dolomiti Live region. East Tyrol (AT), Veneto / Belluno (IT), South Tyrol (IT).

Partners: Regionsmanagement Osttirol, Fondazione Società Bellunese & Jugenddienst Dekanat Bruneck.

The Dolomiti Live region consists of the territories of Pustertal (South Tyrol), East Tyrol and the Province of Belluno. This cross-border area is characterized by the shared natural heritage of the UNESCO World Heritage Dolomites, and a long-standing tradition of social and economic cooperation across borders.

Dissatisfaction with politics is evident across all age groups. Citizens often feel that their voices are not heard, and they see public institutions as increasingly distant. At the EU level, the rise in the number of citizens not using their right to vote is a significant indicator of this trend. It is becoming particularly difficult at the local level to engage people in the social, political and economic development of their territories and municipalities.

This project aims to provide young people with the necessary tools to encourage their interest in politics, public administration and social issues. Through these "tools", the project enables them to conduct their own research and form their own independent opinions without being subject to manipulation.

The partnership addresses and involves young people—ranging from primary school age to



prospective academics—using various tailored formats. One key output of the project is the creation of a digital document that provides a comprehensive overview of the entire process, from the initial baseline situation to a summary of the results achieved.



Mobility Terra Raetica – Enhancing Public Transport Attractiveness

Location: Terra Raetica region. Tyrol (AT), South Tyrol (IT).

Partners: Municipality of Pfunds, Municipality of Mals, Associated Partner - Regiun EBVM.

Terra Raetica is a cross-border region situated in the border triangle between Austria (Tyrol), Italy (South Tyrol) and Switzerland (Engadine). It is a vital alpine transit corridor where the districts of Landeck and Imst cooperate closely with the Vinschgau region to manage shared transport and environmental challenges.

This cross-border Interreg medium-scale project is the direct result of the CLLD small-scale project "Climate Stops Terra Raetica - Concept" and serves as a follow-up to the medium-scale project "Klimahalt".

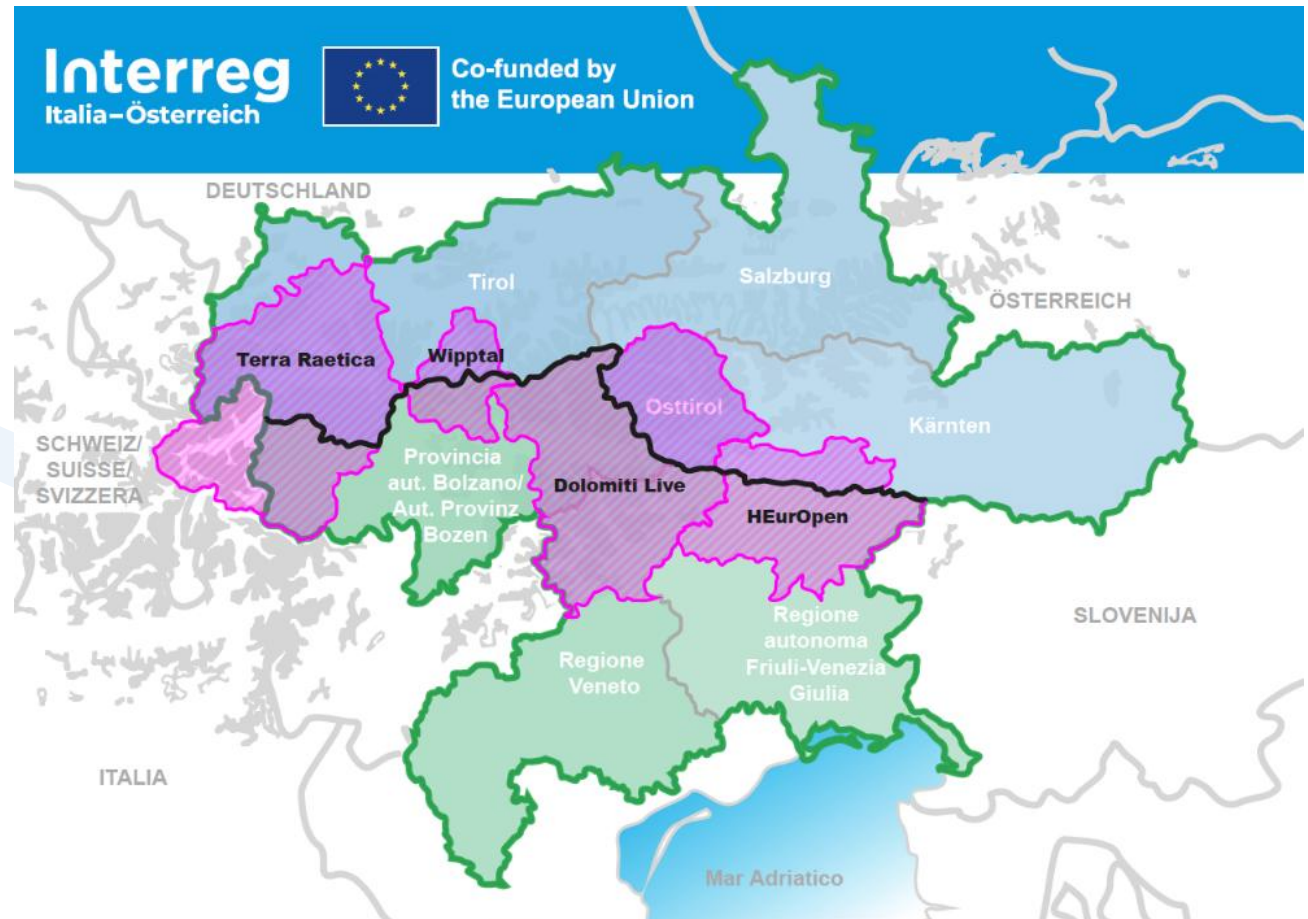
In the Terra Raetica region, a major strategic priority is to make public transport (ÖPNV) more attractive. The municipality of Pfunds (specifically the Kajetansbrücke) and the cross-border transport hub of Mals

play a central role in this network. Due to increasing traffic and the fact that some of the existing stop infrastructures are outdated, significant improvements are needed to maintain a functional and sustainable transport system.





The primary goal of this medium-scale project is to improve the comfort, safety and efficiency of public transport while optimizing cross-border connections. By upgrading the physical infrastructure, the project aims to make the switch to public transport more appealing for both residents and visitors. The project involves the practical implementation of modernized infrastructure - "Climate Stops" at key locations. These interventions are designed to modernize the travel experience and strengthen the link between the regional transport networks of Austria and Italy.





Day 10

Hungary – Slovakia

Building Communities Across Borders

The place & the idea

Situated at the heart of Central Europe, the Hungarian-Slovak borderland is shaped less by division and more by centuries of shared life, culture and everyday connections.

As our journey continues, this Region reminds us that cross-border cooperation is not newly created – it is something that is continuously being rediscovered and strengthened through people.

“The true success of cross-border cooperation lies in the people themselves – their ability to understand and accept one another, and to think and act together over the long term.”

The Hungarian-Slovak border region has a rich historical and cultural heritage; the peoples of the Region have

lived together for centuries, building shared economic, social and cultural ties that continue to shape their identities and relationships today.

This shared past is not merely a historical fact, but a living tradition. Linguistic, religious and cultural diversity, the preservation of traditions, and mutual influences all contribute to the unique character of this border region. Therefore, it is so important to encourage and support the connection between the communities on either side of the border. Because these initiatives genuinely bring people closer and make their shared heritage tangible.

People-to-people cooperation is among the most effective tools for cross-border programmes. Its aim is to foster genuine encounters and meaningful connections between those living on both sides of the border, offering opportunities



for interaction, shared experiences and mutual understanding.

Twin-city relationships, and civil and cultural organisations engaged in bilingual and intercultural dialogue. Natural points of connection in everyday life play a significant role here. It is evident that the key to the future lies in even more intensive and deliberate cooperation. More and stronger cultural and people-to-people projects are needed to further strengthen mutual trust, expand shared knowledge and reduce the divisive effects of borders.

How the Small Project Fund works

In this region, cooperation often starts with simple encounters – and the Fund is

designed to make these interactions possible.

The Small Project Fund aims to strengthen cross-border social cohesion and partnership, and to encourage citizens and organisations to participate in and contribute to the democratic and civic life of the Union. It also seeks to promote exchanges between the citizens of Hungary and Slovakia, particularly through town twinning and networks of municipalities. These enable them to gain practical experience of the richness and diversity of the Union's shared heritage.

The Small Project Fund supports the organisation of cultural festivals, sporting events, professional gatherings, and camps for children and youth, allowing representatives and members of organisations operating on both sides of the border to meet and strengthen their ties.

The Fund is implemented through umbrella projects led by two EGTC on the western and eastern sides of the border.

Small project funding is provided through simplified cost accounting as a lump-sum grant.

Each small project, regardless of its individual character, must embrace 3 main features that are distinctive for all small projects - building partnerships, getting to know each other's cultural values, and promoting the democratic values of the European Union.



Building partnerships

Applicants must ensure that the organisations involved in the partnership introduce themselves to each other and present their activities and achievements (e.g. in the form of a formal board meeting, presentation, information materials, information stand, exhibition, film, etc.).

Getting to know each other's cultural values.

Applicants must ensure that the diversity and cultural values of the host country are presented, e.g. by showcasing local attractions, sights, joint visits to natural attractions, presentations of local handicrafts and gastronomy, exhibitions of works of art, and performances by local traditional or contemporary art groups.

Promoting the democratic values of the European Union.

The final beneficiary must ensure that citizens living in the border region are given the opportunity to engage in open discussions in order to learn about the benefits of European identity and solidarity, and to express what kind of Europe they would like to see develop (e.g., through thematic forums, roundtable discussions, and the European Sole Beneficiary principle).

Small practices

Boundless Joyful Music

Location: Solymár (HU)

Partners: Municipality of Solymár (HU) and Nána (SVK).

The Boundless Joyful Music small-scale project was more than a series of events; it was a cross-border experience where music, faith and community came together. The initiative, realised through the cooperation of the Municipality of Solymár (HU) and Nána (SVK), developed into a two-day cultural celebration, offering a rich and diverse Programme that included a Village Day and a Gospel Festival. During the event, lectures, roundtable discussions, church and outdoor concerts, an ecumenical Mass, culinary demonstrations and communal singing alternated, while participants could also



explore the natural beauty of the Pilis Mountains on a group hike. The participants entertained one another and fostered genuine connections. Through music, religion and gastronomy, opportunities arose to learn about each other's traditions and values.

The combination of the Solymár Gospel Festival and the village festival created a special synergy. Gregorian chants, classical church music, Swabian musical traditions and the vibrant world of gospel united on one stage, offering the audience a unique cultural experience. The true power of the festival extended beyond the musical experience. It served as a communal space where religious and cultural identities met, dialogue was initiated, and the sense of belonging was strengthened. Participants were able both to recharge spiritually and build new connections.





Palóc Pilgrimage and Folk Festival (Palóc Búcsú és Folkfesztivál)

Location: Balassagyarmat (HU)

Partners: Mikszáth Kálmán Művelődési Központ, Kicsi vagyok én Közhasznú Alapítvány, Oblastný výbor Csemadok, Veľký Krtíš so sídlom vo Vinici, Obec Slovenské Ďarmoty.

The Palóc Pilgrimage and Folk Festival is one of the largest religious and folk cultural events in the Euroregion. Since 1996 it has played a significant role in strengthening the sense of belonging and preserving folk traditions in the Region.

A key objective of the event is to encourage people living in the Palóc Region to recognise their regional identity as a value, and to draw faith, strength and confidence from their unique cultural heritage.

Installations and exhibition panels placed in the buildings and courtyards of the town centre present both the past and present of the guest settlements in the Region.

In addition to providing opportunities for learning and exchange, the event offers cultural Programmes through performances by traditional singers, dancers, musicians and storytellers.

In presenting traditional customs, patterns of the behaviour characteristics of former rural communities are brought to life. Craftspeople demonstrate traditional techniques in workshops, actively involving visitors in the creative process.

The characteristic flavours of Palóc cuisine are presented in a dedicated courtyard for visitors arriving in Balassagyarmat.





Territorial Action Plans for Employment (TAPE)

In addition to small projects, the Hungary-Slovakia Programme has also experimented with a more structured and strategic form of cooperation – one that brings projects together in a shared territorial vision.

The idea behind the instrument

In the Hungarian-Slovak border region, economic challenges often do not follow administrative borders. As shown in the Programme area, neighbouring regions on both sides of the border have faced similar issues, particularly high unemployment rates - exceeding 20% in some areas - accompanied by the broader social impacts of poverty, migration and ageing populations.

In response to those shared challenges, the Programme introduced a new funding approach designed to better reflect territorial needs, ensure long-term impact, and connect public and private actors in creating employment opportunities.

How the approach works

At the core of this model is the Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE) – a joint cross-border development plan built around a clearly-defined functional area.

These areas are not administrative regions, but coherent geographical, economic and social units that span across the border and can address labour market challenges or specific economic sectors on both sides.

Rather than funding isolated projects, the approach requires stakeholders to:

- jointly identify the needs and opportunities of the target area,
- design a comprehensive set of interventions,
- and work towards a shared objective: namely, creating jobs and improving cross-border labour mobility.

From single projects to coordinated action

One of the defining features of TAPE is its structure.

Since complex territorial challenges cannot be addressed through a single intervention, each Action Plan consists of a group of interrelated projects, combining both hard investments (e.g., infrastructure), and soft actions (e.g., training, networking, services).

Each TAPE includes 3 to 8 project proposals, designed to be complementary and mutually reinforcing.

This creates a coordinated framework where individual



projects contribute to a broader, shared impact.

Results in practice

The implementation of this approach has led to a significant number of coordinated initiatives across the Programme area.

Following a two-round competitive call, the Programme supported:

- 9 Territorial Action Plans,
- 47 individual projects,

all of which contributed to the promotion of sustainable employment and cross-border labour mobility.

What makes this approach different?

TAPE represents a shift from project-based cooperation to territory-based cooperation.

Instead of starting with individual project ideas, the process begins with:

- a shared understanding of the territory,
- a jointly defined development vision,
- and a coordinated set of actions designed to deliver long-term impact.

By linking projects within a single strategic framework, the approach strengthens:

- coherence of interventions,
- involvement of both public and private actors,
- and the durability of results beyond individual project lifecycles.



“

THE TRAIL OF ALTERNATIVES

Small projects implemented directly,
beyond the Small Projects Fund model





Day 11

France – Spain – Andorra

Shared History, Shared Future

The place & the idea

Across the Pyrenees, cooperation is rooted in something deeper than policy frameworks and institutional agreements. It grows from a shared geography that has for

centuries both separated and connected communities. Mountain passes, valleys, coastal areas and border villages have shaped patterns of movement, exchange and coexistence, where cultural practices, languages and traditions overlap rather than divide.

In this context, cooperation grows from memory, culture and identity. It is carried through oral traditions, local festivities, agricultural practices and everyday interactions that reflect a long history of living side-by-side. The border is present, but it is not the defining feature of the territory – what matters more is the shared experience within the territory.

The microprojects promoted by the Working Community of the Pyrenees (CTP) build directly on this reality. They do not introduce cooperation; they reveal and activate it. By focusing on small-scale,

locally-rooted initiatives, they create space for communities to reconnect with their common heritage and translate it into present-day collaboration.

This approach makes cooperation tangible. In the Pyrenees, cooperation is not something that starts with a project – it starts with people, stories and a shared sense of belonging.

How the microproject initiative works.

From a technical perspective, the initiative is characterised by:

- small-scale funding, allowing targeted and manageable interventions
- the condition that only “newcomers” can apply



- simplified application and reporting procedures, reducing administrative burden
- short implementation cycles, enabling quick and visible results
- broad thematic openness, as long as projects contribute to cross-border interaction
- a strong emphasis on partnership, requiring cooperation between partners on both sides of the border.

The initiative also actively lowers participation barriers by supporting organisations that are not typically involved in EU programmes – including small associations, local cultural actors, schools and community groups.

Learn more about CTP.

Click or scan QR code.



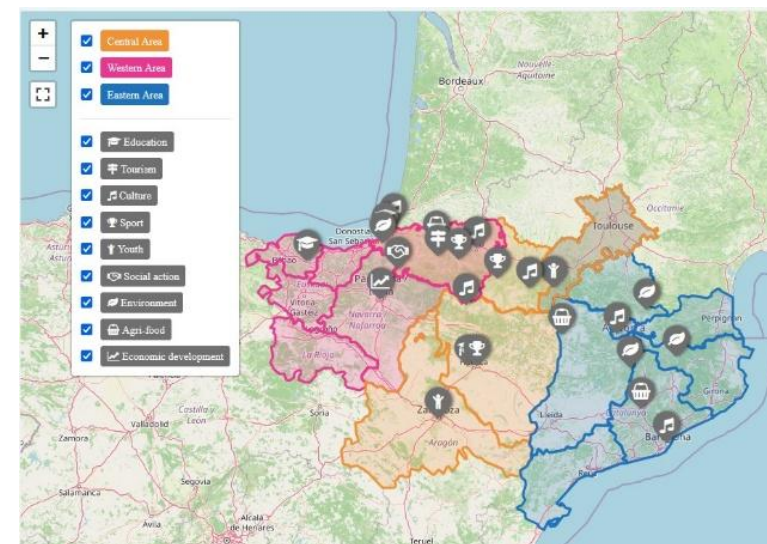
Interesting facts and practices.

The key is not what has been done, but how it was achieved. Simplified procedures, reduced barriers and a strong focus on proximity enabled local partners – many of them outside the usual European funding circuits – to actively engage in territorial cooperation. For many organisations, these microprojects represented their first direct experience of European Cooperation; for citizens, a clear and tangible way to recognise its value in everyday life.

Microprojects often represent a first step into EU cooperation. They provide a low-risk environment where participants can test collaboration, build relationships and gain confidence before potentially engaging in larger programmes. From an Interact perspective, this experience clearly

reflects the principles that define effective European Territorial Cooperation: genuine interaction between diverse partners, a bottom-up approach, real impact and transferability. The microprojects functioned as spaces for experimentation and shared learning, where cooperation is not explained but practiced.

**Learn more about our Fund.
Click the map below and watch
the video guide.**





Small practices

Canfranc and the Shared Memory of the International Railway

Location: Aragón Valley (Spain)
– Aspe Valley (France)

Partners: local municipalities
and cultural associations.

Activating memory means bringing the past into the present, giving new life to the voices, stories and everyday experiences that define a community. This is the driving idea behind Canfranc Mémoire, a cross-border microproject that turns shared memories into shared action. The project connects communities around the shared history of the Pau-Canfranc railway, collecting oral testimonies, local knowledge

Learn more about our project.
Click and watch the video guide
below.



and lived experiences that rarely appear in formal archives but are essential to local identity. At the same time, it translates memory into action by contributing to a joint cross-border effort towards UNESCO recognition of the railway heritage.

Specific outcomes include:

- an annual historical re-enactment of the railway opening,
- a permanent photographic exhibition
- strengthened cooperation between local partners

At the symbolic Estación Internacional de Canfranc - a historic point of passage and exchange - the project illustrates how a microproject can generate momentum that goes beyond its scale.

Besties in the Pyrenees: Living Legends and Shared Identity

Location: Catalan Pyrenees
(Spain-France)

Partners: cultural associations
from both sides.

Memory, symbols and identity are not abstract ideas: they live through stories, figures,





celebrations and shared creative practices. **BESTIES - Bestias fantásticas del Pirineo** - shows how these elements can be activated through a microproject that turns cultural heritage into direct experience.

The project reconnects young participants with the shared cultural roots of the Catalan Pyrenees through the *bèstias*: legendary animals that play a central role in traditional festive imagery on both sides of the border.

Rather than studying these traditions from a distance, the project invites young participants to experience them directly. School pupils from both sides of the border worked together to:

- explore the stories and meanings behind the *bèstias*,
- design and construct their own representations,
- create original music and choreography,

- perform together in a cross-border setting.

By exploring the legends and traditions of the festive bestiary, children discovered how cultural expressions can differ in form yet share a deep common meaning. The experience strengthened their sense of identity, increased awareness of their cultural environment, and involved them directly in artistic creation through cross-border cooperation.

**Learn more about our project.
Click and watch the video guide below.**



Why this stop matters

These two stories show how cultural heritage and collective memory can become powerful drivers for building lasting ties between communities on both sides of the Pyrenees.

In this way, the initiative does more than fund projects - it builds a pathway into cooperation, rooted in the territory and shaped by the people who live there.



Day 12

Baltic Sea Region

Small steps for a big change

The place & the idea

Many interventions start with a bold idea to fix a challenge, and the courage to pursue that idea. The same could apply to Interreg cooperation projects, except that while many organisations have the idea,

they don't always have the courage to act on it.

But what if we created a safe space, especially for newcomers, to try things out together across borders? What if we simplified the Interreg set-up and made it easier for partners to focus on scalable, durable outcomes?

In the Baltic Sea Region, this is exactly how Interreg small projects came to life. Smaller in size but mighty in their importance, they opened the door to working in a transnational setting on a more manageable scale. Beyond their many lasting results, they did something equally important: they laid the groundwork for future initiatives in the region and showed how close Europe can be to people.

Stepping back from individual examples, a few broader lessons emerge from the Baltic Sea Region experience.

“Small projects, as a compact and simplified cooperation instrument, have successfully lowered the threshold for accessing the Transnational Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme without compromising the quality of results delivered.”

Experience shows that transnational projects where both scope and budget are limited can successfully contribute to the programme's objectives in a meaningful manner.



Small projects have proven particularly useful in addressing areas not covered by larger core projects. They allow programme countries to shape a joint vision for each call without complex requirements. At the same time, targeted communication and the activation of regional networks have helped bring the programme closer to practitioners on the ground, enabling them to respond directly to real needs. An increasing share of public authorities and non-governmental organisations taking part in small projects demonstrates the readiness of local entities to use Interreg as a tool to strengthen their capacities, share good practices, and develop solutions together across borders.

Equally important is that the results generated by small projects are practical, often tested and scalable across the Baltic Sea Region: ranging from

tools and strengthened organisational capacities to cooperation models, networks and roadmaps that support longer-term development. They also anchor trust between partners, helping to build a new generation of organisations whose staff are confident in working with Interreg. Small projects have often been just a small step for them. But this is how the real change has started.

How Small Projects work

In this part of our journey, we explore how a lighter and more accessible project format can unlock cooperation for a wider range of organisations.

Interreg Baltic Sea Region introduced a new instrument in the 2021-2027 programming period; small projects, to

reinforce the Programme's experimental character while making it more accessible. Designed to be particularly attractive for public authorities and non-governmental organisations, they give many newcomers a first opportunity to work across borders, test ideas and deliver tangible results. At the same time, they serve clear purposes: building trust for future initiatives, enabling a swift response to emerging challenges, initiating and maintaining networks, and bringing the programme closer to people.

What makes all this possible is the project format. Compared with other programme instruments, small projects are shorter (up to 24 months), have a smaller budget (up to EUR 500,000 of the total budget), and come with a simplified organisational set-up. In addition, for the first time in Interreg Baltic Sea Region



these projects were fully implemented using simplified cost options. This resulted in a reduced administrative burden, allowing partners to focus on what really matters: addressing challenges in the region and developing solutions together in a transnational setting.

In terms of thematic coverage, Interreg Baltic Sea Region small projects complement the programme's other instruments by delivering results across all thematic priorities: Innovative societies, water-smart societies and climate-neutral societies.

Facts & figures

Since the 2021-2027 Programme started, Interreg Baltic Sea Region has selected 58 small projects for funding, bringing together 337 partners from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden. Each project involves project

partners from at least three of the nine programme area countries, with an average of six partners per project. These partners represent a wide range of organisations, from public authorities at local, regional and national levels to non-governmental organisations, sectoral agencies, higher education and research institutions and others, to business support organisations, companies and more.

The programme's new instrument attracted considerable attention from the very first call for project applications, with interest growing further with each subsequent call. In the most recent call, a targeted outreach to organisations in rural areas and smaller places proved particularly successful, attracting strong participation from local and regional authorities, and non-governmental organisations. Many of these organisations

engaged with Interreg for the first time: in fact, of the 337 organisations involved in small projects, 144 were newcomers – representing around 43%.

The design of the small project did not foresee the obligatory piloting actions. Yet, a considerable number of projects validated their solutions in real-life settings and involved the intended target groups more actively. Formats ranged from participatory workshops to technical demonstrations and installations, confirming that small projects can act as effective testbeds before wider roll-out.

The impact of the first small projects is visible through solutions that are already being used, ready for wider roll-out, and generating follow-up and spin-off activities. This shows that Interreg small projects can deliver considerable impact despite their scale.



First small project results in place

Thanks to the programme's early start, first project results are now visible. 17 small projects have been completed, delivering a range of solid outcomes – many already in use and some already prompting spin-off or follow-up activities.

A large share of these results comes in the form of practical tools and guidance, often developed and refined through pilots or tests. These include tools to bring healthier food to schools, to support cultural institutions, and to engage young people in urban and climate planning.

Small projects have also demonstrated Interreg's value in strengthening people's knowledge and skills. They have built capacities in areas such as circular public procurement, circular bioeconomy

technologies, and inclusive labour markets.

Working across borders has also led to the development of cooperation models and lasting networks, connecting experts in fields like energy or water management in lake areas.

Finally, many projects have developed roadmaps and frameworks to guide future investments, in sectors such as renewable energy and tourism.

Many of these results will pay off in the future by feeding into ongoing processes. Their value lies in the knowledge gained, the connections built for future initiatives, and the confidence that working across borders makes the Baltic Sea Region more liveable and resilient.

Small practices

Project GlassCircle

Location: from Sigulda luge track to locations across Latvia, Denmark and Sweden.

Partners: Riga Technical University (LP); Lulea University of Technology; Aarhus University; Podcomp Ab; Hitachi Energy Sweden AB, Composites (HPAG); Valmiera Municipality Government.

From industrial waste to Olympic sleds!

At full speed, there's no room for second chances. Every curve, every material, every gram matters. What most people don't see is that parts of a high-performance luge sled have already lived another life, far from the track. How can this be?



Mārtiņš Rubenis, Olympic medalist and Chief of Engineering for the Latvian national luge team, knows precision is everything. Manufacturing sleds requires small, complex pieces of glass fibre. With the help of the Interreg project GlassCircle, his team obtained 100 kg of leftover glass fibre fabric that would otherwise be thrown away, and used it to build high-performance, more eco-friendly sleds. "It's a win-win situation: the big companies can share the materials that they don't need anymore, and we can build new sleds and give them a second life," he says. But glass fibre is going circular beyond the Sigulda luge track in Latvia. The Interreg project GlassCircle brought together industry leaders, experts and public authorities to spark ideas, connect those with spare fibre to those ready to reuse it, and scale this approach across Denmark, Latvia and Sweden.



Project BSR Food Coalition

Location: from Võru County, Estonia to other places across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Partners: Klaipeda University (LP); Sustainable Gastro; The Association "Klaipeda Region"; Latgale Planning Region; Kurzeme planning region; The association of municipalities of Tartu county; Development Centre of Võru County.

You are what you eat: starting at school.

In many schools, ultra-processed foods still find their way onto the menu. Mainly because they are convenient and cheap. Unfortunately, these foods are far from nutritious. So, is it too late to change course?

In Võru County, Estonia, the answer is a firm no. Known for its dramatic canyon valley, the



Region is now gaining attention for something else: what ends up on children's plates. All 42 educational institutions here have made healthy food a priority. With support from the Interreg project BSR Food Coalition, Võru rolled out a Farm-to-School programme that in just two years brought 20-50% locally-grown organic food into school meals.

This is not just about changing menus; it's about changing habits. Farm-to-School reconnects schools with local farmers, engages school chefs and shows children where their food comes from. "BSR Food Coalition has offered valuable experience from partners abroad and cooperation with local producers and schools. This has been key to making changes on the ground," says Kaja Kesküla from the Võru County Development Centre.

Võru is part of a wider shift driven by Interreg. Across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania,

regions tested and shaped this approach together. Now it's ready to travel further. Because what children eat today doesn't just fill plates; it shapes their future.





Day 13

Alpine Space

Breathtaking
landscapes and
diverse cultures
come together

The place & the idea

In the Alps, breathtaking landscapes and diverse cultures come together – turning borders into a shared space where cooperation naturally unfolds.

As our journey continues into the heart of Europe, the Alpine Region offers a unique setting for cooperation – shaped by mountains, diversity and shared challenges that do not stop at national borders.

The Interreg Alpine Space Programme supports transnational collaboration across the Alpine Region. It covers the partner states of Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and parts of the partner states of France, Germany and Italy. The Programme focuses on key priorities such as climate-resilient and green Alpine Regions, carbon-neutrality and resource-sensitive region, and innovation and digitalisation, while strengthening governance capacities across borders. It brings together national, regional and local authorities, research institutions, and other relevant stakeholders to jointly develop and implement pilot actions and solutions to

shared territorial challenges. Within this framework, the Programme has introduced a dedicated strand of small-scale projects to better respond to its objectives and to offer a more flexible and accessible form of cooperation. Importantly, these small-scale projects are not to be understood as “small projects” in the sense of the Interreg Regulation, nor are they implemented through a small project fund. Instead, they represent a distinct project format within the Programme.

Q&A

**Why did you decide to try small projects in your Programme?
What was/were your objective(s)?**

Small-scale projects were introduced to complement classic project formats and to provide a new, more agile



cooperation tool. Their main objectives are to lower entry barriers, enable quicker project implementation, and to respond more flexibly to emerging needs and trends in the Alpine Region. In this sense, they also serve as a practical instrument for bringing the Programme closer to citizens by supporting more accessible, locally-relevant initiatives. At the same time, they serve as a laboratory for experimentation, innovation and capitalisation, while helping to diversify participation and engage new organisations in transnational cooperation.

What are the characteristic features of your small projects?

Small-scale projects' implementation period is shorter (typically 12-18 months, and up to 24 months for governance projects), involve fewer partners, and operate

with smaller budgets (EUR 250.000-750.000). Partnerships usually consist of 3-6 partners (or 4-7 for governance projects) from at least three countries. The format is strongly output-oriented and based on simplified administrative procedures.

A distinctive feature is their separation into three complementary strands:

- **“Set the scene”** focuses on exploring new or emerging topics through analysis, experimentation and pilot actions. It enables projects to address innovative themes (e.g., biodiversity in urban areas or digitalisation linked to social innovation) and to test tools, policies or approaches that may inform future cooperation.
- **“Roll-out”** is dedicated to capitalisation and transfer of existing knowledge, tools and solutions. These projects aim to scale up and share proven results,

ensuring wider uptake across the Alpine Region. They often involve organisations with strong links to end-users and target groups.

- **“Governance”** supports improved coordination and cooperation across sectors and governance levels. It promotes participatory, place-based approaches, strengthens institutional capacities, and fosters multi-level governance involving public authorities, private entities, NGOs, and citizens.



How have applicants responded to this new form of cooperation in your Programme? Has this opportunity attracted new types of applicants?

The introduction of small-scale projects has been met with strong interest. The simplified structure and reduced administrative burden have encouraged participation from a wider range of stakeholders, including smaller organisations, local organisations and first-time applicants. At the same time, the various strands have allowed applicants to engage according to their specific capacities and objectives, whether they are exploring new ideas, transferring existing solutions or strengthening governance structures.

What are your top three takeaways from implementing small projects?

1. Lower barriers vs. administrative effort:

Simplified procedures and smaller budgets may have lowered entry barriers and attracted new partners. At the same time, the administrative cost-benefit ratio remains a challenge, as assessment, monitoring and support efforts, particularly at Joint Secretariat level, are relatively high compared with the funding volume of these projects.

2. Flexibility and innovation vs. need for guidance:

Small-scale projects provide an effective framework for experimentation, innovation and diverse cooperation formats, especially through the three strands. However, the novelty and complexity of this structure require strong guidance. In early calls, many applications did not fully meet the Programme's expectations. This resulted in higher

rejection rates, which in turn caused frustration for applicants. It also highlighted the importance of targeted applicant support.

3. Impact and outreach vs. learning curve:

The format demonstrates that small-scale projects can generate specific results and broaden outreach, particularly through roll-out activities. At the same time, both applicants and programme bodies face a learning curve in understanding and implementing this new format, with improvements observed over successive calls.

Do you see small projects as having potential in future transnational programmes?

In the context of the evolving performance-based approach (PBA) in EU programmes, the



role and design of small-scale projects will require further reflection in the upcoming period. While they offer clear advantages in terms of flexibility and accessibility, they can also introduce additional complexity in programming, implementation and monitoring, which needs to be carefully balanced against their intended value.

To support evidence-based decision-making, a dedicated performance evaluation of the small-scale project type is currently ongoing within the Alpine Space Programme. Its findings will provide important input for the future development and possible adaptation of this instrument in the next programming period.



Small practices.

FRACTAL - FosteRing green infrAstruCTure in the Alps.

Location: Austria, Italy and Slovenia.

Partners: Free University of Bolzano-Bozen (Lead partner), National Institute of Biology Slovenia, Triglav National Park, Burgenland Business Agency.

Habitat fragmentation and ecosystem deterioration, intensified by land-use change and climate change, are major challenges in the Alpine Region. Strengthening ecological connectivity through Green Infrastructure (GI) offers a key response, yet its practical implementation at local level remains limited.

The Interreg Alpine Space project FRACTAL turned this challenge into action by bringing GI closer to municipalities and communities across Italy, Slovenia and Austria. At its core, the project aimed to reconnect nature, people and governance through a shared, hands-on approach to ecological restoration and planning.

A flagship achievement was the co-development of the GI Pact, a simple but powerful commitment tool that invited municipalities to actively plan and implement GI measures within a defined timeframe. By signing this Pact, local authorities publicly committed to taking specific action, while citizens, schools and associations were also encouraged to take part, turning the idea of green infrastructure into a shared community responsibility.

FRACTAL also translated complex ecological concepts into



accessible and engaging learning tools. Its multilingual educational toolkit, featuring infographics, illustrated booklets, a short film and a board game, helped children, young people and local stakeholders understand the value of biodiversity in a hands-on and memorable way.

To bring these ideas into real life, the project organised vibrant community events such as a “GI Day”, where towns and villages actively planted and created green infrastructure, and the “Re-green Festival”, combining science, education and local engagement in a celebratory format.

By linking policy innovation, education and community action with a bottom-up approach, FRACTAL created momentum for a new culture of ecological connectivity in the Alps - transforming GI from a concept into a collective practice.

HumanFactor - Closing the Implementation Gap in the Alps: Putting the Human Factor at the Center of Sustainability Transitions.

Location: Austria, France and Germany.

Partners: Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management Austria (Lead partner), Intersectoral School of Governance Baden-Wuerttemberg, Protect Our Winters Austria, Oxalis SCOP.

Sustainability transitions are not driven by policies alone; people, their behaviour, their values and their everyday decisions are what ultimately make change happen. Yet, this “human factor” is often overlooked when ambitious environmental strategies are

turned into real action on the ground. The Interreg Alpine Space project HumanFactor directly addresses this gap.

HumanFactor works across the Alpine Region to support communities, organisations and local entities in becoming active drivers of sustainability. Instead of focusing only on frameworks and strategies, the project puts people at the centre of change. It explores why implementation gaps emerge between political ambitions, such as those of the Alpine Convention or EUSALP, and real-life practice and how these gaps can be overcome through collaboration, learning and participation.

At the heart of the project is a simple idea: transformation works best when people are involved early, when knowledge is shared, and when solutions are developed together. Through a co-creative approach, Human Factor brings together diverse stakeholders from different



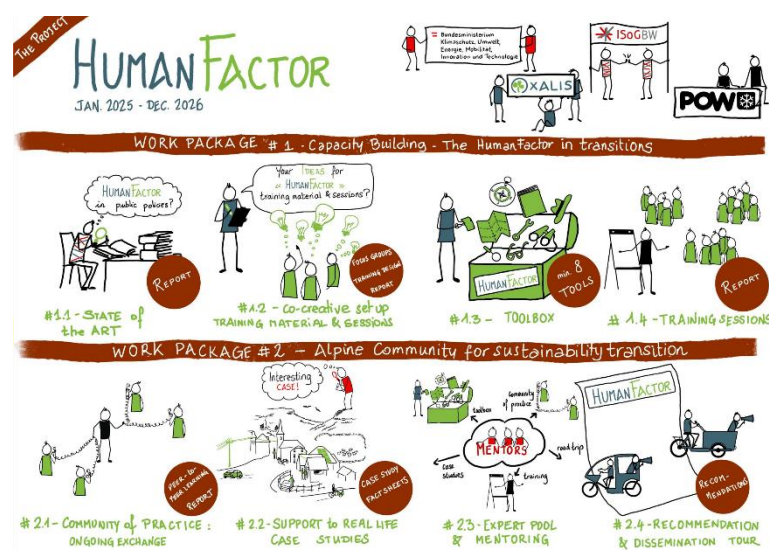
Alpine Regions to better understand local needs and the social dynamics behind sustainable behaviour.

One of the key results of the project is a practical “Skillbox”, a set of tools and methods that helps stakeholders design and manage participatory change processes. It supports local actors in engaging communities, building trust and turning sustainability goals into specific actions. Alongside this, the project offers training, mentoring and real-life case studies to strengthen capacities across the Region.

HumanFactor also establishes an Alpine community of practice, where practitioners can exchange experiences, learn from each other, and build lasting cooperation beyond borders. Two thematic focuses, sustainable practices in mountain sports and a second topic defined by stakeholders,

allow for in-depth learning and targeted collaboration.

By combining knowledge-building, networking and hands-on support, HumanFactor helps turn local actors into sustainability pioneers. It strengthens skills, builds connections, and empowers Alpine communities to shape their own transformation pathways - making sustainability not just a policy goal, but a lived reality.



Priority 4
Cooperatively managed
and developed Alpine region



Day 14

North Sea

Highly interconnected territories

The place & the idea

As our journey continues, this Region shows how borders can fade in highly interconnected territories, where trade, mobility and environmental challenges naturally bring countries together. At the same

time, it is a Region constantly adapting – balancing economic strength with the need for sustainability, resilience and innovation.

Within this dynamic setting, the Interreg North Sea Programme supports transnational cooperation to address shared challenges and unlock joint opportunities.

The small-scale project (SSP) scheme is new to the Interreg North Sea Programme in the 2021-2027 period. This is not a small-scale project fund, but a scheme which funds smaller projects in a transnational setting.

For the project community, small-scale projects represent an alternative to regular projects, i.e., smaller projects that allow partners to test out an idea within a relatively short amount of time and with minimal administrative requirements.

In this part of the journey, the focus is on a format that allows partners to move quickly – testing ideas, building partnerships and preparing the ground for larger initiatives.

Q&A

**Why did you decide to try small projects in your Programme?
What was/were your objective(s)?**

In general, the aim of the SSP scheme was to provide our Monitoring Committee with a flexible tool for getting good innovative ideas off the ground relatively quickly.

More specifically, at the beginning of the Programme, our aims were to establish new partnerships, especially by involving organisations new to the Programme, to involve partner organisations from the new territories of the



Programme (there were new territories added to the Programme area), to address new thematic fields, and to set the scene for bigger initiatives (projects) in and/or outside the North Sea Programme. A call for small-scale projects opening this year will address capitalisation, putting the focus on themes identified as important to the EU agenda since the Programme was written in 2021: namely, increasing competitiveness, strengthening rural areas and building resilience.

You can learn more about the capitalization call of the Programme [here](#).

What are the characteristic features of your small projects?

Small-scale projects must function as 'stand-alone' projects that contribute to the same Programme objectives as regular projects, but on a smaller scale.

In previous calls, small-scale projects had to fulfil three requirements:

1. Partnership of between three and seven partners from at least three Interreg North Sea countries
2. Maximum total project budget of EUR 500.000; suggested minimum budget of EUR 200.000
3. Lifetime of no more than 18 months.

The Programme makes use of the small-scale project scheme in the capitalization call mentioned before, to be launched at the end of 2026, where the above requirements have been slightly changed, i.e., up to 9 partners, total maximum budget of 1m EUR, project lifetime of no more than 24 months.

With a one-step application procedure, a less complex application form (e.g., one work package only), lighter reporting, and the simplified

cost option (staff costs + 40% for all other costs), the Programme makes it easier for SSP partners to administer their project.

How have applicants responded to this new form of cooperation in your Programme? Has this opportunity attracted new types of applicants?

We conducted a survey at an early stage of our Programme implementation (June 2023) as part of a preliminary internal evaluation of the small-scale scheme, involving all partners (beneficiaries) in approved SSPs. The outcome of this survey was rather positive. In general, the majority of applicants were satisfied with the application procedure, the newly introduced 40% flat rate simplified cost option, and the simplified reporting procedure.

We could see that small-scale projects in the first calls contributed 5.1% of the Programme output targets, using



1,4% of the Programme budget. This is very positive from the Programme-efficiency perspective.

The interest in the SSP scheme was moderate; however, approximately 50% of the organisations involved in the SSPs were new to the Programme.

What are your top three takeaways from implementing small projects?

The Programme's midterm impact evaluation is currently ongoing. The evaluation will reflect on the actual impact of these small-scale projects, gathering information from their partners, including from an operational perspective.

However, the above-mentioned early-stage internal analysis of the newly-introduced scheme showed that these projects:

- fulfil the aims set out by the calls – especially for the beginning of the Programme implementation,

e.g., involving new partners,

- are rather positive about the reduced administrative requirements and the guidance provided by the Programme to partners,
- contribute to Programme-level achievements with their indicator targets at a higher rate than was originally anticipated.

Do you see small projects as having potential in future transnational Programmes?

SSPs in earlier calls are useful for engaging new applicants and testing ideas. As the Programme progresses, their purpose can shift – for example, toward capitalization or scaling up existing results. Our experience shows that the SSP scheme could serve different functions depending on the stage of the Programme, as a tool to test new ideas or address timely challenges within limited budgets.

Small practices

GREEN – towards a circular economy in the cross field between retail businesses, consumers and governance institutions

Location: Denmark, Belgium and Sweden.

Partners: Vejle Municipality, the Danish Design Center, De Republiek and Drivhuset.

In just 18 months, the small-scale project GREEN helped 36 retailers develop more circular business models through workshops, individual advice and networking. Its 39 local events engaged around 11.000 citizens in sustainable consumption. One participating retailer reduced its residual



waste by two-thirds and its stock by 25% through a second-hand bridal dress service, while also lowering CO₂ emissions through resale.

GREEN also produced two practical guides, the Green Retail Handbook and Toolkit, together with Olivia, a multilingual AI assistant trained on both guides. These tools are now available to other retailers and business developers.

Learn more about project.

Click or scan QR code.



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SUPER - Successful user participation examples and recommendations in digital mental health: better digital tools for mental health care across Europe

Location: The Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium.

Partners: GGZ Central, Centre for Digital Psychiatry, Thomas More University of Applied Sciences.

Getting access to proper mental healthcare is important, although it often proves challenging. Insights from the SUPER project help to make accessible, culturally appropriate support available across Europe. The project not only developed guidelines for transnational adaptation and collaboration – it also applied these to two existing digital mental health tools, namely SAM and SAFE. It reused proven

solutions to demonstrate how co-creating apps with users and stakeholders can create better, more scalable apps.

Learn more about project.

Click or scan QR code.





See you where Europe comes together!

As our journey comes to an end, one message stands out above all: **small projects create big change**. They are often the first step towards lasting partnerships, stronger communities, and a more connected Europe. By bringing people together across borders, they transform everyday encounters into trust, shared experiences, and new opportunities for cooperation. Every stop in this guide reminds us that Europe's greatest strength lies not only in its diversity, but also in its willingness to work together.

This publication would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, expertise and generosity of our colleagues from Interreg programmes across Europe. We would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone who shared their experiences, stories and good practices, helping us bring these inspiring journeys to life.

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