



INTERREG EUROPE 2014-2020 EX-POST EVALUATION

Final report

November 2024

Table of Contents

Executive summary	3
1. Context of the evaluation	5
1.1 Interregional cooperation projects	5
1.2 The Policy Learning Platform (Platform)	6
2. Survey on interregional cooperation projects	7
2.1 About the respondents	7
2.2 Policy improvements	7
2.3 Territorial effects	11
3. Survey on the platform's peer review service	14
3.1 About the respondents and their motivation	14
3.2 Satisfaction of beneficiaries	14
3.3 Achieved results	16
4. Stories from successful projects	18
Conclusion	30
Annex 01: External evaluator's report on territorial effects	31
Annex 02: Overview of projects' achievements	37

Executive summary

In mid-2023, the Interreg Europe programme launched an ex-post evaluation of the 2014-2020 period. The objectives of this evaluation were the following:

- for the projects, to get a more systematic analysis of the available evidence about the territorial effects to illustrate how policy improvements (in particular improvements in Investment for Jobs and Growth goal programmes) contributed to positive changes on the ground in the concerned regions,
- for the Platform, to check with the community the usefulness of the services developed during the 2014-2020 period with a particular focus on the expert support services (peer reviews).
- for projects and the Platform to look at the involvement and benefits for less developed regions/ lagging regions before the background of the objective of cohesion policy as regards a balanced development.

The core objective of the Interreg Europe projects (and to a less extent the Platform's peer reviews) is the improvement of regional development policies through exchange of good practices and interregional policy learning. Under the 2014-2020 period, the programme has supported 258 projects and almost 60 peer reviews. This has generated a wealth of evidence about the benefits of interregional cooperation in terms of policy improvements and territorial effects in the participating regions.

To go beyond the achievements already validated through the regular monitoring, Interreg Europe together with a team of external evaluators conducted a survey among all partners of the 258 projects and a survey among beneficiaries of the 58 peer reviews.

- The project survey reached out to 2,230 project contacts. 503 responses (23%) were received, representing 227 different projects with partners from 29 countries. Project lead partners submitted 22% of the responses.
- The peer review survey reached all 58 peer reviews. The responses represented 24 different peer reviews with beneficiaries from 17 countries.

Overview of the project survey on the policy improvements and their possible territorial effects

The project survey first collected information about the policy improvements in the partner regions. **Almost 80% of the respondents indicated that a policy improvement took place in their region thanks to the interregional cooperation project.** Out of the three proposed types of policy improvements (i.e. a new project or initiative, a change in management, or a change in the strategic focus of a policy), 40% of the respondents indicated that their project led to an implementation of a new project; 23% answered that it led to a change in the management of the policy and 22% confirmed that the policy itself was modified.

The second purpose of the project survey was to collect additional information about the effects of the policy improvement(s) in the partner regions. 48% of the respondents who reported a policy improvement confirmed a measurable territorial effect in their region. Project partners from 28 different countries indicated territorial effects of their policy improvement, which shows a broad geographical spread across Europe.

The external evaluators, who supported Interreg Europe in this ex-post evaluation, analysed the territorial effects described in the regular project reports available in the programme's monitoring system. The evaluators looked closely at 275 cases of territorial effects with self-defined indicators. Their analysis showed that:

- there is a wide variety of effects reported,
- there is a close link between the topic of the policy improvement and its related territorial effect,
- most territorial effects come from type 1 of policy improvements (new project or initiative).

For different reasons, it is not possible to draw any aggregate data from the monitoring system on territorial effects of the projects. For future, the evaluators suggested a new categorisation of territorial effects to be used in reporting. The evaluators report on the territorial effects can be found as annex 01 of the present document.

26 project representatives from the project survey were selected for an in-depth interview. 20 respondents were available to share more detailed information, and these success stories are included in this report. They showcase how interregional cooperation projects made a difference in their regions thanks to inspiration and good practices shared with other regions from all corners of Europe. The stories represent a diversity of changes that took place and had effect on people living in the regions.

Overview of the Policy Learning Platform survey on the peer review service

The beneficiaries were first asked to rate the different features of the peer review service. **26 respondents gave the service an aggregate score of 4.8 (out of 5) on its overall usefulness.** They also highly rated its content in terms of expertise (score 4.7) and relevance of the peer review's recommendations (score 4.6), as well as its organisation – preparation (4.8), meeting itself (4.8) and the follow-up (4.6).

The second purpose of the survey was to find out about the policy improvements triggered by the peer review. **20 respondents (77%) indicated that their peer review contributed to a policy improvement in their region.** Out of the three types of policy improvements (i.e. a new project or initiative, a change in management, or a change in the strategic focus of a policy), 14 respondents (82%) indicated that their peer review contributed to an implementation of a new project; 29% answered that it led to a change in the management of the policy while 24% confirmed that the policy itself was modified.

23 answers were received on the additional effects the peer review had in their region. The most frequent effect was better cooperation among local stakeholders (15 respondents/ 65%), followed by an increased capacity on the peer review topic in the beneficiary organisation (52%). 10 respondents (43%) indicated that the challenge addressed by the peer review increased in importance on the political agenda of the region, and six respondents (26%) indicated that they formed a new partnership with one or several of the peers involved in the exercise. Many respondents selected multiple options of additional effects in their regions.

The results of the ex-post evaluation confirm the excellent performance of the programme and its usefulness for European regions.

1. Context of the evaluation

The reasons for launching the 2014-2020 ex-post evaluation of Interreg Europe can be explained by the following context.

1.1 Interregional cooperation projects

During the 2014-2020 period, Interreg Europe funded 258 projects. According to the intervention logic of Interreg Europe, the learning generated through the activities of the projects (at individual and organisational levels) should have led to policy improvements in the different regions involved. These policy improvements were fully attributed to the programme's support when the policy responsible authority was a partner in the project.

These policy improvements were reported through six-monthly progress reports and carefully validated by the joint secretariat of the programme (results reported by the projects were often not validated by the programme and had to be removed from the projects' reports). **By the end of the programme, all the objectives set in the initial programme documents were largely exceeded as anticipated in the conclusion of the 2020 impact evaluation.** The 258 projects demonstrated a total of 1,283 policy improvements. **This represents an overall performance of 56%** considering that these projects addressed a total of 2,299 policy instruments. Almost half of these improvements (631) occurred within Structural Funds programmes. The financial impact of this influence exceeded the ERDF budget allocated to Interreg Europe; and is estimated at MEUR 1,473 (including MEUR 1,186 of Structural Funds). For the Structural Funds, this represents an over performance of 296.50% compared to the initial target of MEUR 400. The programme has paid 325 MEUR to the projects. By comparing the investment in cooperation with the funds influenced, it means that that **1 euro invested in Interreg Europe projects has mobilised almost 4.5 euros of local / regional / national funding** for implementing the lessons learnt from the cooperation. These results show how Interreg Europe directly contributes to a more efficient implementation of the Cohesion Policy. Detailed information all the project results validated by the programme are available on the programme website (www.interregeurope.eu/project-results). Moreover, Annex 02 of the present report summarizes the achievements of the 2014-2020 projects.

By the end of the 2014-2020 Interreg Europe programme in 2023, 90% of the regions in the 30 Interreg Europe Partner States were represented in the programme's operations. From the 1,283 policy changes reported, 51% come from more developed regions, 9% from transition regions and 40% from less developed regions. This data illustrates again the contribution of the Interreg Europe Programme to the Cohesion policy with a significant percentage of policies improved in less developed regions thanks to interregional cooperation. In less developed regions, the highest percentage of policy instruments improved (43%) are from projects under specific objective 2.1 'SME competitiveness'. In more developed regions, the highest percentage of policy instruments improved (57%) are from projects under specific objective 1.2 'Innovation delivery' and 4.1 'natural & cultural heritage'.

Moreover, for the first time in the 2014-2020 period, the programme introduced a second phase in all projects. The objective was to monitor, when possible, **the effects on the ground of these policy improvements (also called 'territorial effects') although these effects cannot be directly attributed to the programme's intervention.** Therefore, beyond the evidence of policy improvements, the programme also collected through its monitoring system a wealth of information concerning the territorial effects of the policy improvements. While the evidence of policy improvements was systematically consolidated and promoted by the programme, **the information about the territorial effects was not systematically exploited**, despite its potential relevance for demonstrating the added value of interregional cooperation.

The ex-post evaluation was therefore an opportunity to further investigate the (mid-/long-term) achievements of the projects and collect additional evidence that the interventions funded by the programme lead to territorial effects in the concerned regions.

1.2 The Policy Learning Platform (Platform)

Launched in 2016, the Platform was a strategic operation of the 2014-2020 Interreg Europe programme. It was the first time the programme implemented such an ambitious exercise of capitalisation. Its core objectives were to exploit all the knowledge and results achieved by the projects and, on this basis, offer policy-learning services to all interested regions in Europe. These services were delivered by a team of experts and primarily built on the knowledge and achievements of the projects.

The services provided were grouped under the following three categories:

- Access to knowledge - a policy watch service offering up-to-date info on the latest developments in a range of policy areas (e.g., policy briefs, reports, other platforms) including the good practice database,
- Access to people – networking and policy learning opportunities at thematic events (such as webinars and workshops) for regional development policy makers and practitioners
- Access to expertise – assisting regions to solve their policy challenges through the provision of specific expertise and peers (e.g., peer reviews, matchmaking sessions and helpdesk).

The intensity of cooperation was lighter in the Platform than in the projects. This meant that the expectations in terms of achievements were different for the Platform, which focused primarily on capacity building of participants through its policy-learning activities. For the most intensive activities, such as peer reviews, the Platform may have contributed to policy improvements, even if this contribution has remained indirect. The ex-post evaluation was also an opportunity to check the usefulness of the peer reviews service and to investigate to which extent this service contributes to the core programme's objective.

2. Survey on interregional cooperation projects

2.1 About the respondents

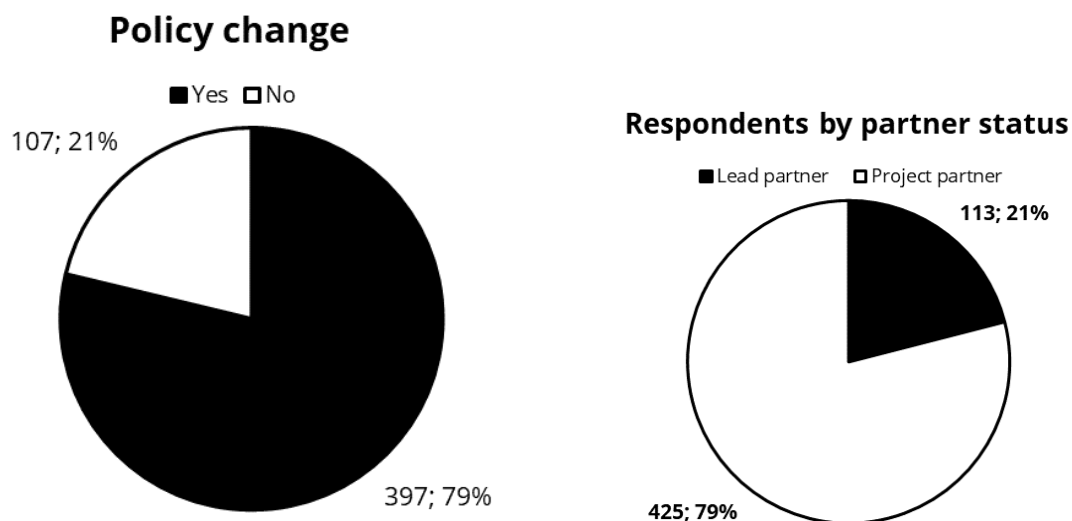
The ex-post evaluation survey was sent out to all partners involved in Interreg Europe 2014-2020 projects. The survey was open from 28 September to 16 October 2023. 538 valid replies were received in total representing:

- 234 projects representing 91% of all 258 approved projects
- 29 countries (only Switzerland was missing)

The survey was therefore very successful in terms of level of responses and geographical coverage. As confirmed by the external experts, it provides a robust basis to analyse the achievements of the 2014-2020 projects.

2.2 Policy improvements

Question 4 of the questionnaire was related to whether a policy improvement was achieved within the project.



504 people completed this question. **79% of respondents confirmed that their project led to policy improvement(s) in their region.**

People had then the opportunity to describe the nature of the policy improvement and the way the project has contributed to this success. The outcomes for these questions confirm the experience gained by the programme through the assessment of the project's progress reports: the achievement of policy improvements through interregional cooperation is a complex process. The identification of relevant experience and inspiration from other regions through the interregional exchanges supported by Interreg Europe is essential since it is the start of the

process. But the local process within the stakeholder group (also supported by Interreg Europe) to mobilise the relevant institutions and adapt the inspiration to the local context is also crucial to achieve policy improvements.

The few quotes below reflect the richness and variety of results achieved thanks to interregional cooperation.

“In the framework of BIOREGIO project in our region (Pays de la Loire Region in France), we worked in close cooperation with the Regional Council of Pays de la Loire, and in particular with the representatives of the Energy Transition and Environment Directorate. Thanks to this cooperation, the project contributed to a better take into account of the bio-based circular economy topic in several regional funding instruments and policy: - Inclusion of the bioeconomy topic in the Specific Objective 2.6 “Foster the transition to a circular economy” of the ERDF operational programme 2021-2023 - Creation of a section dedicated to bioeconomy in the 2020 Regional Circular Economy Call for projects. - As part of the BIOREGIO action plan 2020-2021, the Regional council funded of a PhD thesis on the topic of “bioeconomy as a lever of territorial development for the Pays de la Loire region”. Part of this research results are used in the development of the region policy “Framework of actions for a sustainable, circular and collaborative bioeconomy” that should be adopted by the end of 2023.”

“The realisation of the EU Cycle project has definitely contributed to the fact, that the issue of development of cycling infrastructure and traffic has become one of the priorities of the local development policy of the Białystok Functional Area and it has positive impact to the sustainable development of the area. The EU Cycle project has raised awareness of the importance of cycling in the overall sustainable development of the BFA. This is why activities related to the development of cycling infrastructure have been included in the Strategy as a strategic objective no. 5 “Sustainable Urban Mobility”. One of the key challenges of this objective, written in the Strategy, is the development of cycling routs connections in BFA, in particular among municipalities of BFA. The Strategy’s objectives were approved by the Association’s Board on 8th of November 2022. Policy instrument change was achieved through: - Promotion of cycling as a transport mode support of the development of cycling infrastructure and infrastructure supporting cycling; - Counselling and cooperation in the area of creation, development, maintenance and planning of cycling infrastructure activity for the benefit of safety of cyclists and the unprotected participants of road traffic, as well as popularisation of road safety rules - Promoting the idea of sustainable transport, in particular public transport and pedestrian traffic, and limiting car traffic in the city; - Rising public awareness of environmental issues.”

“Based on the knowledge gained and good examples shared during the project, a shared Vision Leisure Economy Destination South Limburg 2030 was developed for the first time. This vision was adopted by all 17 municipalities in our region in 2020. The implementation of this strategy lies largely with Tourist Board South Limburg (Visit Zuid-Limburg) and here, too, we use the knowledge and insights gained from the project.”

“The policy change achieved thanks to the Social Green project is related to the modification of the policy instrument itself. The RDP is the instrument by which the region promotes its priorities and interests in the economic and social fields, while representing the region’s contribution to the development of the National Development Strategy. Based on the National Development Strategy, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration elaborates the Regional Operational Program. The preparation of this strategic document is one of the main activities conducted by the South Muntenia RDA for the 2014-2020 programming period. SMRDA has introduced in the document some changes inspired by the inter-regional learning from the Social Green project in order to tackle the regional challenges in terms of thermal rehabilitation of residential and public buildings as well as greening social housing. Moreover, the new measures that have been included in the RDP 2014 – 2020 will also have an impact on the Regional Operational Program, given the fact that the ROP is developed based on the Regional Development Plan.”

“The CISMOB’s Action Plan for Extremadura has developed the Strategy for Boosting the Electromobility that, at the same time, modified the “Operational Programme ERDF 2014-2020” (specifically, the specific objective 4.5.1. “Promotion of sustainable urban mobility: clean urban transport, public transport, urban-rural connections, road network improvements, cycling, pedestrian transport, electric mobility and development of clean energy supply systems”). The 76,74 % of the total budget for the specific objective 4.5.1. was dedicated to the Strategy that promote the electro-mobility with a special regard to the ITCs. The full document of the Strategy can still be checked at:

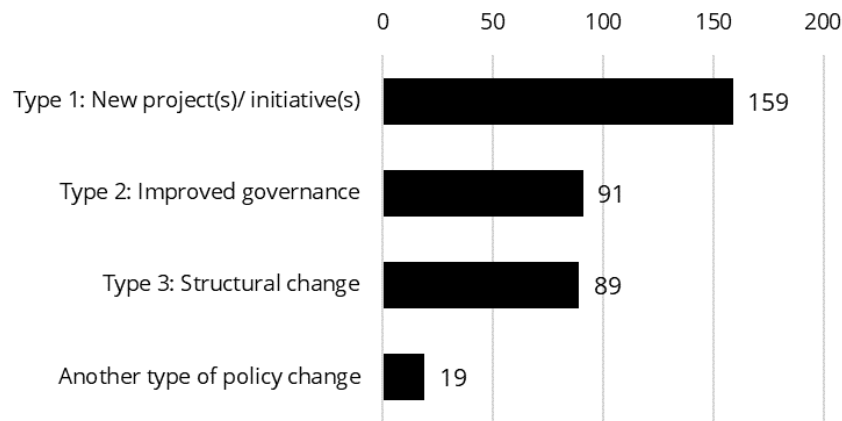
<http://industriaextremadura.juntaex.es/kamino/attachments/article/14026/VehiculoElectricoExtremadura.pdf>The document has been made by technicians from Regional Ministry for Sustainable Development (D.G. Industry, Energy and Mines) and the Extremadura Energy Agency (AGENEX). Staff from D.G. Industry, Energy has been stakeholders in the CISMOB project and they have attended to meetings and other activities in the project. Thanks to CISMOB project, these stakeholders understood the importance of ICTs and electro-mobility and, supported by AGENEX, they have advised to the Regional Minister in order to modify the Operative Programme ERDF 2014-2020. The total budget for the period is 6.900 M€ with the following breakdown: - 1.9 M€ in 1st call for grants for promoting the purchase of electric vehicles, charge infrastructure and I+D+i related to use ICTs in these fields published in 14/11/2019 - 1 M€ in TADEx (see good practice) - 2 M€ in 2nd call for grants published in 2020 - 2 M€ in 3rd call for grants published in 2021.”

“Thanks to the experience gained from the DigiBEST project, in February 2022 the Granada County Council applied for the Call launched by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation of the Government of Spain for the creation of the “Acelera Pyme” Network for rural environments. The objective of this network is to promote the adoption of digital technologies by SMEs, mainly located in rural areas, thereby fostering the transformation of the economy and society into a digital environment, contributing to the maintenance of the rural population and the fight against depopulation. The Granada County Council was selected on August 28, 2022, by the Spanish Government to establish an Office “Acelera Pyme” in the rural environment of the province of Granada. The new project, the Office “Acelera Pyme Granada”, began its implementation on August 28, 2022, and the office was launched on November 28, 2022, with the inclusion of two specialists in digital transformation. The project will run until August 28, 2024 (with a possible additional one-year extension) and has a budget of 512,500 euros, of which 80% (410,000 euros) is funded by Next Generation funds and the remaining 20% (102,500 euros) is provided by the Granada County Council. With the approval of the new project Office “Acelera Pyme Granada”, the perspective of the Plan for the development of the local productive activity changes completely. This instrument was limited to supporting the business consolidation of SMEs from a business management perspective, but now, this plan shifts its focus primarily to supporting the digital transformation of SMEs.”

“Through EURE exchange of experience, Alba Iulia Municipality identified the need for clear directions in circular economy actions, leading to the first Action Plan for Circular Economy of the municipality. Site visits, discussions, and stakeholder engagements facilitated its development. IRCM, as an External Expert, played a crucial role in both SIDU and the Action Plan. Thematic consultations and working meetings involving internal and external experts aimed at a sustainable strategy for Alba Iulia. Internal experts analyzed content from external experts in various areas. IRCM contributed significantly to SIDU 2021-2030 as part of the EURE project’s Pool of Experts. The SIDU revision process spanned several months, with IRCM overseeing the circular economy section, proposing solutions integrated into the strategy. The document underwent City Council approval in April 2022 and was also submitted for approval to the Regional Development Agency for the Central Region in October 2022, the Managing Authority for Regional Development fund.”

Question 9 of the questionnaire was related to the type of policy improvements achieved by the project. 258 people completed this question.

Type of policy change

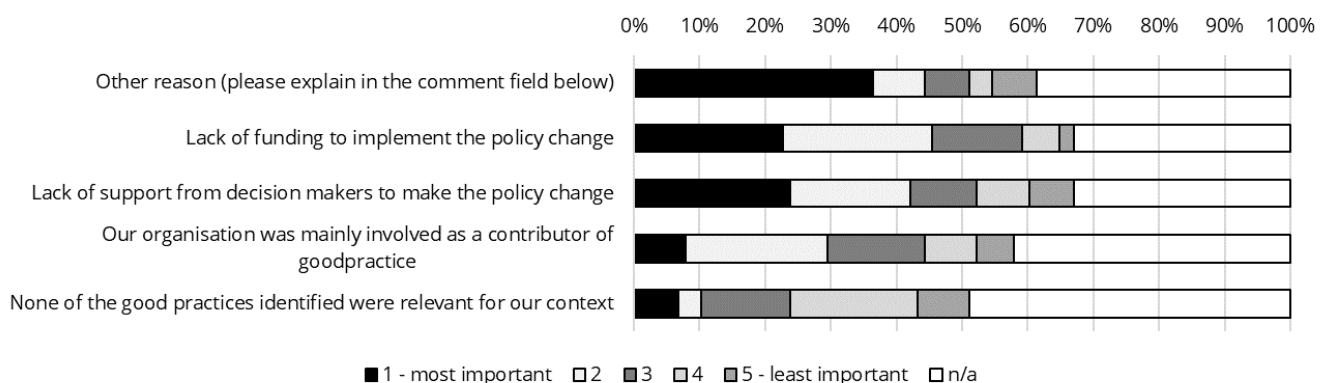


The most frequent type of change was the implementation of new projects or initiatives based on the inspiration gained through the other regions involved in the project. This is not a surprise since this is in line with the type of policy improvements validated by the programme through the projects progress reports. Policy changes in the form of improved governance or structural change were represented almost equally among the responses. 19 people selected ‘Another type of change’ although they did not demonstrate any new type of policy change (i.e., their contribution show that they could have selected one of the 3 types as defined in the question).

The fact that more than one third of the respondents selected Type 3 demonstrates the capacity of interregional cooperation to also achieve structural policy change in the regions.

Finally, the respondents who indicated that they did not achieve any policy improvement had the possibility to rank the reasons why they did not reach their objectives. 88 people completed this part of the questionnaire.

Why no policy change



The lack of funding to implement the policy change and the lack of support from decision makers were ranked as the most important reasons. 47 respondents listed their own reasons such as:

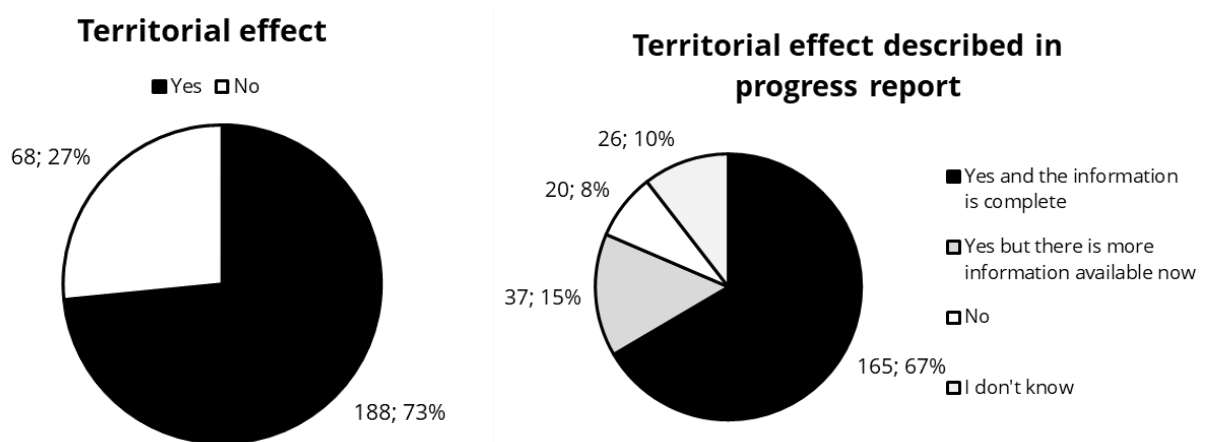
- Timeframe too short to see the policy changes approved,
- Other results achieved (e.g., spin-off projects),

- Operational Programme's budgets already committed / calls closed,
- COVID 19 – funds redirected to recovery.

Despite not reaching their initial objective, several respondents confirmed that their projects still had various positive effects for their regions (e.g., improved dialogue among local stakeholders, increased professional capacity of people and organisations, involvement in new international networks or initiatives).

2.3 Territorial effects

Questions 10 to 14 were dedicated to the territorial effects of the policy improvements. 256 people completed this part of the questions.



It is very positive that **73% of the respondents indicated that the policy improvement achieved thanks to the project already has a territorial effect in their region.**

67% respondents confirmed that they already reported this territorial effect through the regular progress reports. 15% of respondents had additional information about their territorial effect at the time of the survey. 8% didn't describe the territorial effect in their project's progress report yet. 10% of respondents did not know. One of the objectives of this question was to gather as much background information about the territorial effects of individual projects to select the most promising cases for in depth interviews.

The contributions provided by the respondents on the territorial context confirms the experience gained by the programme through the assessment of the project's progress reports:

- The reporting on the territorial effects of policy improvement is very challenging for two main reasons. First, there is often a lack of data and measurable elements which would allow grasping precisely this effect. The fact that the people in charge of implementing the policy improvements are often different from the people involved in the Interreg Europe project does not help in this regard. Second, the territorial effect the partners are aware of cannot always be fully and clearly attributed to the policy improvement alone. There are often other parameters that play a role in the identified effects.
- The nature of the territorial effects is of an extremely high variety, also reflecting the richness of the type of projects financed under Interreg Europe. In most cases, these effects are specific to each project, making any aggregation impossible.

To a large extent, these lessons learnt are also confirmed in the analysis carried out by the external experts.

The few quotes below are a good illustration of this complexity.

“The visibility of the re-use sector was significantly increased. The number of companies and initiatives registered in the online re-use map has increased to 99. The “Re-Use Autumn Styria” has clearly contributed to the increased public awareness of re-use. A precise evaluation of the resulting increase in the flow of re-use-goods (and the associated prevention of waste and emissions) and the creation of additional jobs in this sector could not yet be carried out. The exact number of visitors to the last “Re-Use Autumn Styria” (20-26 Sep. 2023) and the media reach of the associated reports have also yet to be ascertained. Qualitatively, however, an increase of attractiveness of the sector is noticeable. For example, we repeatedly receive feedback from mayors about the increased interest of the population in a broader range of re-use services in the municipalities.”

“During the anti-littering campaign 2023 about 213,000 kg of waste were collected. The motto “clean banks” would not have been chosen without the PLASTEKO experience in Riga. Effect: In particular, litter collected from the banks over a length of 1,460 km (but also the rest of the litter collected on land) can now no longer enter the sea via the flowing waters and contribute to marine littering. The companies in the Green Tech Valley Cluster generate turnover and create jobs in the environmental technology sector. Current and contemporary focus topics of the circular economy support this. The five municipalities involved in the “Regional Centre for Waste Prevention & Circular Economy” have a total of 15,000 inhabitants. The implementation of the concept for reusable tableware at catering and events saves 90 % waste, mainly plastic waste. If each inhabitant attends 1 festival per year, approx. 13.5 t/a of waste can be avoided. A future model function for the entire district (approx. 60,000 inhabitants) can be assumed. However, it is not seriously feasible to clearly delineate the impact of PLASTEKO and other influencing factors such as awareness raising in the past, accompanying measures or previous and partner projects.”

“One of the outputs from the STEPHANIE project was the creation of a spaced cluster in the region which became a key emerging sector the region supported through the North-East Local Enterprise Partnership. Their Innovation Delivery Partnership was the policy instrument which we worked with to lever further investment and engagement in the sector in the region. One of the activities of the cluster is a monthly event which brings together the space community in the region involving the Quadruple Helix audiences. At one of the early events, we were able to connect Northumbria University with a local SME on an optical communications project which gained funding from the UK Space Agency. We also connected the University with another regional University - Durham. Together, they are now working on subsequent optical communication focused projects which involve and has attracted further interest from other space companies. This has led to around £6m total R&D funding and investment from Lockheed Martin Space. Also these institutions are seeing the opportunities and benefits of space technologies including photonics. Therefore, a proposal to develop a £50m North East Skills and Space Technologies Centre is being put forward to further grow these opportunities in the region.”

“The environmental and socio-economic impact of boosting renewable installations for self-consumption in the region has multiplied in the last few years, since ENERSELVES project was ending. There are many SMEs and installers that have seen their businesses increased. There are many SMEs and installers that have seen their businesses increased. A key fact is that in 2019 when our project was ending, there were approximately 200 installations for electric self-consumption in Extremadura and currently, there are 10,500 installations (with a total power installed of more than 100 MW).”

“One of the BIO4ECO’s targets was to enhance the sustainable use and production of renewable energy, which was reflected in the policy instruments improved during the project having a positive impact on the increase of sustainable use of renewable energy in North Karelia. In North Karelia the use of renewable energy has increased from 63 % in 2008 to 67% in 2018 and to 71% in 2020. In 2020, the share of wood biomass in total energy production in North Karelia was 52 %.”

“The north region of Portugal NUTII is the heart of Textile and Clothing Sector with most than 85% of the companies of Portugal. We expect a high impact of the new policies (those new projects) in the sector as we have more than 50 partners from companies to RTD developing new innovative products and processes to be adopted by the sector and funding by these new policies in more than 130M€ until 2025.”

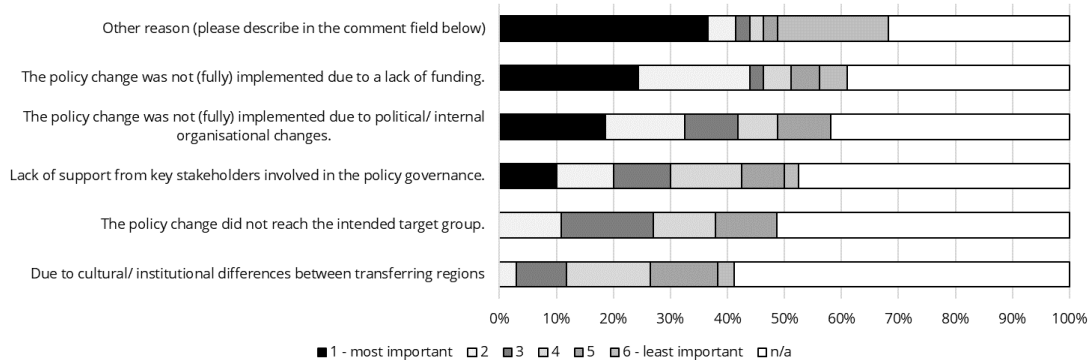
“The new National Sustainable Mobility Policy for Ireland is the overarching policy document for Ireland for all sustainable transport investments up to 2030. So the benefit of the policy change created through the MATCH-UP project will be seen for the next 7 years. Funding for the infrastructure improvements required will be allocated from the National Development Plan which has a budget of €35 billion in capital funding from 2021 to 2030 through the annual budgetary process. For 2022, €289 million was allocated to Local Authorities to improve walking and cycling infrastructure including infrastructure improvement to implement a 10 Minute City or Town. A further €290 million was allocated to Local Authorities in 2023.”

“The Regional Climate and Energy programme 2030 gives the Regional Council a mandate to continue the regional emission reduction work and to apply for and to allocate funding for new projects to support both the public and private sectors to cut their emissions to fulfil the 80 % greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. Committing to the target has a positive effect on the region in the form of reduced emissions. The development of the regional greenhouse gas emissions is followed on an annual basis.”

“Thanks to the newly implemented cycle paths in our area, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of people using bikes for both commuting and leisure activities. Although we currently lack specific numerical data, the impact is evident simply by observing the bustling cycle paths on sunny days and listening to the feedback from local entrepreneurs operating in the area.”

The respondents who indicated that there was no territorial effect resulting from their project had the opportunity to rank the factors leading to this lack of effect. 58 people completed this part of the questionnaire.

Why no territorial effect



The lack of funding appeared as the first reason for the lack of territorial effect followed by the political / internal organisational changes. The lack of support from key stakeholders arrived third. Among the other reasons, the majority of the 36 replies mentioned the timing issue (not time to measure effects, key actions not implemented yet). Others mentioned COVID 19 or changes in government and strategies which hindered the implementation of the new initiatives inspired by Interreg Europe projects.

3. Survey on the platform’s peer review service

3.1 About the respondents and their motivation

The ex-post evaluation reached out to all beneficiaries of the peer review service provided by the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform since 2018. There were 58 peer reviews carried out by the time of the survey. The survey was open from 5 October to 26 October 2023.

The 26 responses represented 24 different peer reviews with beneficiaries from 17 countries.

Respondents were first asked about their motivation to apply for the Interreg Europe peer review.



Most respondents (77%) indicated that their main motivation was to get inspiration from other European regions on the best way to solve a challenge in their region. This is not a surprise since this motivation reflects the core objective of the Platform’s peer review service. Improving a specific policy instrument is the main motivation for 15% of the respondents. No respondent selected the ‘Other’ option.

3.2 Satisfaction of beneficiaries

The objective of the first part of the questionnaire was to assess the satisfaction of the peer review’s beneficiaries.

The result of the survey is extremely positive in this regard. This is particularly reflected in question 6 where participants were asked to score the overall usefulness of their peer review. The average rating provided under that question reached **4.8 out of 5**. This satisfaction is also reflected in the detailed feedback of the respondents. A few quotes are provided below.

“Great experience in all ways. We got insight into the most relevant and successful cases in our area of interest available in the EU.”

“It was a great opportunity for the local stakeholders to get mobilized.”

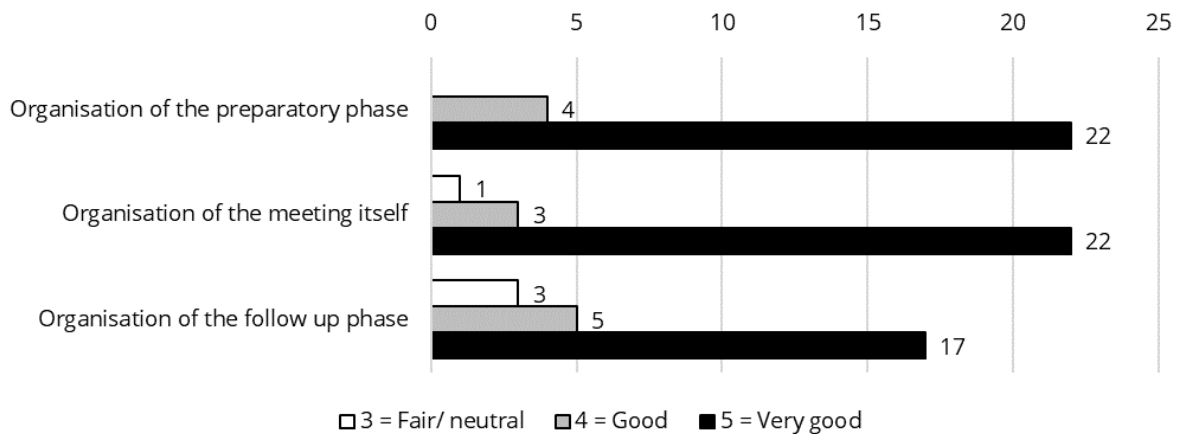
“Peer Review was a great tool for taking an outside perspective on the situation of our fortress heritage in the state capital of Magdeburg.”

“We have implemented some recommendations, and we are going to continue. We regard the peer review was very useful.”

“Very satisfied with the overall benefits of the peer review from local engagement of stakeholders to policy inspiration”

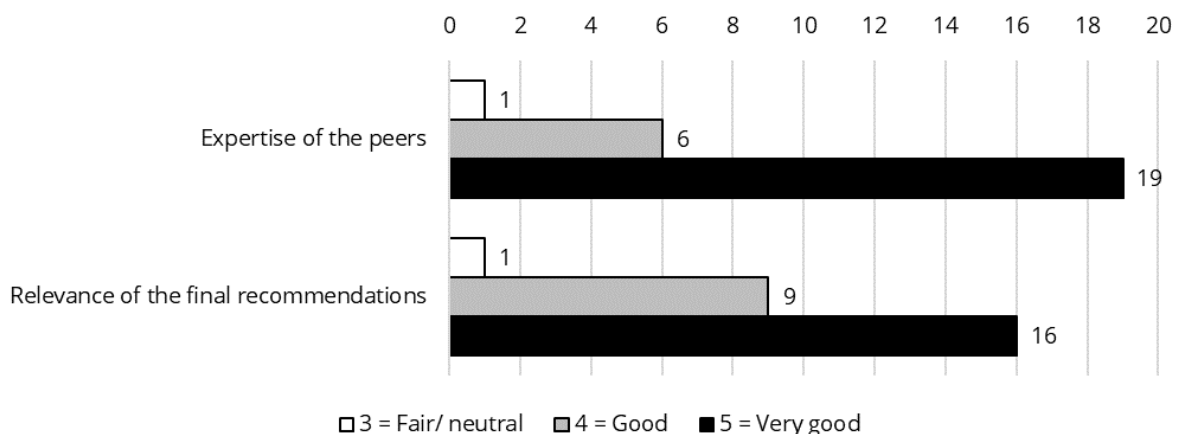
The respondents had also the possibility to rate the different aspects of the peer review on a scale from 1 to 5 from not good at all to very good. Here also, the results are very positive. Details of the answers are summarised in the two charts below:

Rating of peer review organisation



□ 3 = Fair/ neutral □ 4 = Good ■ 5 = Very good

Rating of peer review content



□ 3 = Fair/ neutral □ 4 = Good ■ 5 = Very good

Respondents had to evaluate the preparatory phase of the peer review, the meeting itself and then the organisation of the follow-up phase. The first two received an average score of 4.8 out of 5 and the follow-up phase a score of 4.6. In the comments, respondents appreciated the constant availability of the Interreg Europe experts as well as their flexibility and professionalism in the organisation and selection of peers. On the other hand, some asked for

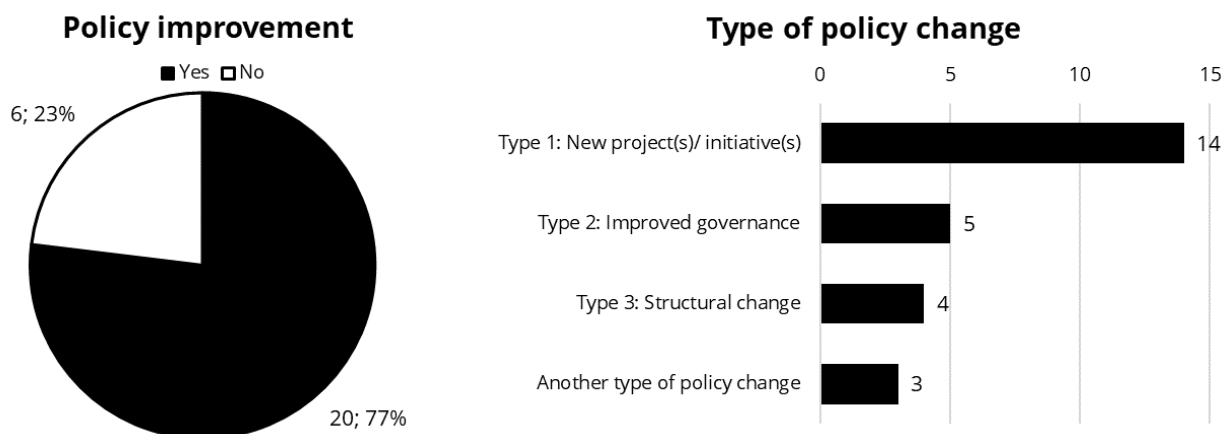
more involvement of the beneficiary in the peers' selection. Some also commented on the difficulty in demonstrating policy improvement within the timeframe of the peer review follow-up.

Respondents also provided feedback on the expertise of the peers and the relevance of the final recommendations. Their rating of these two aspects was also high with average scores of 4.7 and 4.6 respectively. Most comments were positive recognising the quality and relevance of the peers. The recommendations were well received but sometimes it was not possible to implement them in the local context of the beneficiary.

Finally, the above positive results are confirmed under question 8 dedicated to the possible improvements for the future. Indeed, more than one out of four respondents (5 out of 16) considered the service good as it is with no need for improvement. Most of the suggestions for improvements refer to the timing of the peer review itself and the possibility to have more time for exchanges. Several respondents also mentioned the importance of in person meetings (several peer reviews were organised online).

3.3 Achieved results

The second part of the questionnaire (questions 9 to 15) was dedicated to the results achieved through the peer review. The overview of the answers is provided in the charts below.



Most respondents (77%) declared that their peer review contributed to policy improvement. This outcome of the survey is very positive and to a certain extent surprising. Indeed, according to the intervention logic of the programme, policy improvements are not necessarily expected from the Platform activities and more specifically from the peer reviews services. In any case, this outcome confirms the added value of such services.

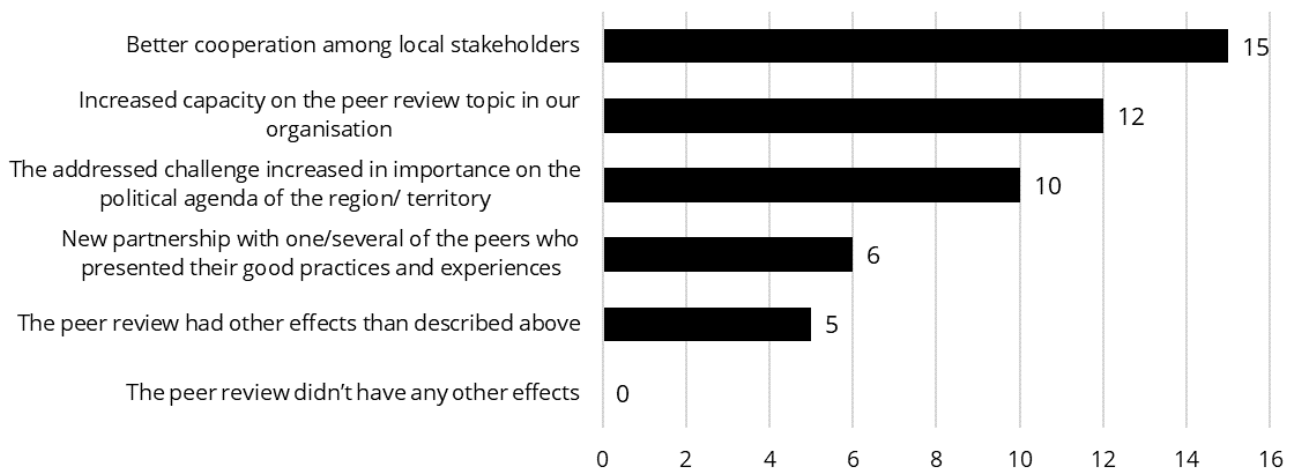
16 respondents provided more details about these improvements. For instance, the peer reviews contributed to:

- Creation of local partnership for ecotourism,
- Website/ platform for knowledge exchange between science and business,
- Regional Strategic Programme,
- Platform of Flemish Fortified Cities,
- Housing startup incubator for cultural and creative industries/ co-working space,
- Grants for climate projects organised by municipalities,
- European Urban Initiative project on sustainable tourism,
- Czech National Smart Cities Strategy + Interreg Danube project,
- Magdeburg's masterplan for its fortress heritage,
- Updated SECAP plan.

17 respondents indicated what kind of policy change their peer review contributed to. The most frequent type of change was the implementation of new projects or initiatives based on the good practices shared by the peers during the review. Policy changes in the form of improved governance or structural change were represented almost equally among the responses. The remaining 3 examples indicate creation of partnerships with their stakeholders.

23 respondents shared their input on the other effects the peer review had in their region.

Other effects of peer review



65% of respondents saw better cooperation among local stakeholders as the side-effect of the peer review (some saw it as the main improvement in their region). 52% selected that their organisation increased capacity on the peer review topic thanks to this Interreg Europe service. For 43%, the challenge addressed by the peer review increased in importance on the political agenda in the region or territory after the peer review. Six respondents formed new partnership with the peers who presented good practices and experiences at the meeting.

Among the other effects of the peer review were:

- Increase in capacity among the stakeholders,
- Openness to regional development ideas from other parts of Europe,
- Participation in EU projects based on the peer review learning.

4. Stories from successful projects

The outcome of the survey among the projects in October 2023 led to a selection of 22 projects for an in-depth interview to describe in more detail examples of successful interregional cooperation leading not only to policy improvements but also having tangible territorial effects. The interviews were conducted between November and January 2024. This chapter presents the overview of the best cases and then goes into each story in more detail.

CREADIS3	Spain	1.1	Smart Specialisation Creative Districts
AERIAL UPTAKE	Croatia	1.2	Removing barriers to the uptake of innovative Unmanned Aerial Systems in the EU
EU_SHAFE	Germany	1.2	Europe enabling Smart Healthy Age-Friendly Environments
INNO INDUSTRY	Slovakia	1.2	Improving innovation delivery of policies within 4.0 industry in Europe.
GRESS	Norway	2.1	GREen Startup Support
OSS	Poland	2.1	One Stop Shop towards competitive SMEs, focusing on the ecosystem for the first line service system
UpGradeSME	Hungary	2.1	Improving policy instruments supporting innovative SME performance
CISMOB	Portugal	3.1	Cooperative information platform for low carbon and sustainable mobility
E-MOB	Austria	3.1	Integrated actions towards enhanced e-mobility in European regions
EMPOWER	Slovenia	3.1	More carbon reduction by dynamically monitoring energy efficiency
MATCH-UP	Ireland	3.1	The role of modal interchange to foster a low-carbon urban mobility
OptiTrans	Estonia	3.1	Optimisation of Public Transport Policies for Green Mobility
PASSAGE	Albania	3.1	Public Authorities Supporting low-carbon Growth in European maritime border regions
RESOR	Cyprus	3.1	Supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy in European islands and remote regions
VIOLET	France	3.1	preserve traditional buildings through Energy reduction
ZEROCO2	Malta	3.1	Promotion of near zero CO2 emission buildings due to energy use
Innocastle	Netherlands	4.1	INNOvating policy instruments for historic CASTLES, manors and estates
KEEP ON	Greece	4.1	Effective policies for durable and self-sustainable projects in the cultural heritage sector
Local Flavours	Italy	4.1	Authentic tourism based on local cultural flavours
2LIFES	Denmark	4.2	Promoting Re-use from the Public Policies
BIOREGIO	Finland	4.2	Regional circular economy models and best available technologies for biological streams



Safety with the help of drones

Civil and commercial usage of drones is a reality in the City of Osijek, Croatia, thanks to the inspiration from Sweden. Two drones are now monitoring the traffic in the city to ease the public transport flows and help in public safety situations.

Removing barriers to the uptake of innovative Unmanned Aerial Systems in the EU (AERIAL UPTAKE) was a project with nine partners from six countries. Their common goal was to exchange and transfer knowledge to unleash the potential of drones, unmanned aerial system (UAS) technology, for civil and commercial usage.

The City of Osijek in Croatia joined the project with the aim to learn from good practices in drone applications in other European towns and cities. Later they planned to finance their own drone initiative under the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) scheme, subject to the Strategy of Osijek Functional Urban Area Development till 2020.

The City of Osijek succeeded in learning from experiences of the others and mobilising the ITI funds for their own drone projects. Inspiration from Sweden and Spain were instrumental in these changes brought by AERIAL UPTAKE to Croatia. During a study visit at a Swedish drone factory, the City's representatives saw firsthand examples of the military and medical usage of drones. Exchanges with the Spanish partners then provided inspiration on how to improve collaboration between universities and enterprises.

Thanks to the AERIAL UPTAKE project and successful work with all relevant stakeholders, the City introduced several initiatives for drone usage in their territory. For example, the City bought two drones for the traffic control and trained several drone operators as part of their strategic e-mobility project aimed at improving their public transport system. EUR 27,500 were mobilised from ITI for this e-mobility project.

The City used the two drones also for monitoring situations affecting public safety. In case of a factory fire, the drones were used for the local fire brigade to extinguish the fire more efficiently.

Osijek's improved development strategy also included forward-looking awareness-raising campaigns among the general public on the usage of drones, engaging mainly the youth and children. Local farmers have also adopted the use of drones for their commercial activity.

The City's flourishing IT sector, the presence of a leading drone-specialising company and an early drone education among the general public are a promise of further development opportunities in this high-technology sector.



12

Boost to culture and creativity

Cultural and creative industries entrepreneurs in the Basque Country, Spain, get a boost to their innovative potential. Better statistical data and pilot projects, inspired by Italy, Belgium and Greece, match them with universities.

Smart Specialisation Creative Districts (CREADIS3) project brought together six partners from six countries. Their goal was to boost the contribution of cultural and creative industries (CCIs) to their regions' development through better institutional governance. The partners looked for new ideas how to connect their technological sectors with culture-based creativity.

The Regional Government of the Basque Country in Spain developed and later led the project with the aim to learn from good practices from the partner regions and improve the collaboration between CCIs, innovation and research centres in their own region.

Exchanges on good practices from Emilia-Romagna (Italy), Wallonia (Belgium) and Western Greece soon helped the Regional Government to change the Basque cultural and creative sector. The Regional Government together with the local stakeholders created the Basque District of Culture and Creativity (BDCC) which now integrates local cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in one place and has a steering group to pilot promising innovation projects. The inspiration from Belgium and Greece also helped in developing a Basque statistical system on financing and public expenditure for the CCIs. Both actions were integrated in the Basque Country Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS3). The RIS3

is now fostering a more cohesive, innovative, and competitive ecosystem for the CCIs in the region.

This change in the regional strategy has already had several effects in the region. The Euskadi Creative Steering Group is now a key player in the RIS3 of the Basque Country and a model for others both in Spain and other countries in Europe. Stakeholder engagement and management have improved.

There is a successful grant scheme matching universities with entrepreneurs. 52 cooperation projects have already been completed and over MEUR 5 was mobilised for them thanks to CREADIS3's policy improvement. KSIgure, the Basque Cluster for Higher Education and Research for Cultural and Creative Industries, was set up thanks to the project. Moreover, the new focus on innovation led also to the Contrast project which brought an input from industry players into the CCIs.

Thanks to CREADIS3 project, the management of the Basque RIS3 improved and the strategy now prioritises projects with high innovation potential and market applicability. Thanks to that the internationalisation of the CCIs is also growing with new partnerships and exchanges with organisations worldwide.



13

Test site for smart healthy ageing

SMEs and start-ups working on assisted living technologies in Hamburg, Germany, have a new showroom now where they can present their products and let their users test them. The inspiration came from Denmark.



Europe enabling Smart Healthy Age-Friendly Environments (EU_SHAPE) was a project with nine partners from six countries. Their common goal was to develop a comprehensive approach to smart healthy age-friendly environments and create a cooperative, inclusive ecosystem between public authorities, European networks and user's associations for the growth of community-based services and "ageing at home" around Europe.

The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg in Germany joined the project to find inspiration for a new, more effective, more integrated, and more result-oriented project framework, which will increase the quantity and the quality of the local projects and initiatives related to demographic change adaptations.

One of the key steps towards a better project framework was the improvement of the Hamburg's regional programme 2021-2027. The programme's managing authority adapted the management and control system for smaller projects, limiting the financial

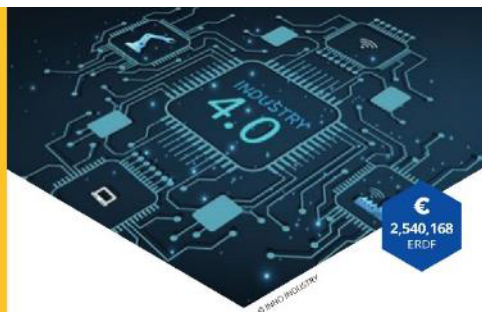
controls. This made the programme more attractive to SMEs and start-ups which are often producing the tools for assisted living.

In Hamburg, *Barrierefrei leben e.V.* has been organising an exhibition on technical aids and home adaptations for over 30 years. Since 2018, smart homes and digital assistance systems have played an increasingly important role in both Aarhus and Hamburg. During a study visit to Denmark, those responsible for assisted living technology in Hamburg were able to visit a showroom in Århus. This resulted in a close exchange between the two showrooms and the colleagues are still in close dialogue about new innovations in the context of new AAL technologies.

The opportunity to test assistive devices on site is of great relevance for people who are dependent on support services. It is particularly important for small companies that manufacture special aids for assisted living and do not have their own exhibition space to be able to exhibit their innovations.



14



Road to Industry 4.0 clusters

Clusters in Slovakia made a big step towards Industry 4.0 thanks to innovation vouchers, inspired by examples from Portugal and Slovenia. Clusters can also get grant support based on their performance evaluation, inspired by Austria and Hungary.

Improving innovation delivery of policies within 4.0 industry in Europe (INNO INDUSTRY) project brought together ten partners from ten countries. They were brought together by the necessity to transform the current industry sector into a smarter one. Their goal was to increase the rate of clusters that develop activities to support the transformation towards industry 4.0.

The Slovak Business Agency, a specialised non-profit organisation for the support of SMEs in Slovakia, joined the project with the aim to consolidate and modernise the use of existing infrastructures and to promote the activities of excellent research. The Agency's ambition was to improve how the Slovak Operational Programme Research and Innovation, merged in 2019 with the Operational Programme for Integrated Infrastructure, supported clusters, cluster organisations and their activities leading to innovation in line with the smart specialisation strategy, as well as the transition to Industry 4.0.

Inspired by the project's work, especially a SWOT analysis for each region, the Slovak Business Agency prepared an action plan. Together with the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency,

with the support of the Slovak Ministry of Economy and other local stakeholders, they put this plan in place with two specific measures inspired by good practices shared by the project partners. First, ideas from Hungary and Austria helped in improving the evaluation of effectiveness of clusters. Effectiveness of clusters serves now as a criterion for the Slovak Ministry of Economy, the managing authority of the operational programme, in their decision on whether to provide a cluster with financial support. Second, the Ministry introduced innovation vouchers in the operational programme, inspired by good practices from Portugal and Slovenia.

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency distributed MEUR 2.5 worth of innovation vouchers through five calls which were prepared and managed by the Agency within a national project "inovujme.sk", applying the lessons learned from INNO INDUSTRY. Outcomes of some of the supported projects are already on the market, for example 3D printing of tooth implants or bio-based creams for skin illnesses. First cluster performance assessment for deciding on the cluster support grants was also put in place.



15



Transition towards green city

Companies working on their green transition got a boost in Kristiansand, Norway. A new Green City - Green Buildings initiative, inspired by Italy, facilitates search for the best green and circular solutions for the construction sector and performance indicators.

Green startup support (GRESS) project brought together five partners from five countries. Their common goal was to strengthen their regions' capacities to trigger and support formation of sustainable and competitive start-ups and spin-offs within the green economy.

The Municipality of Kristiansand in Norway developed and later led the project with the goal to boost the number of start-ups within clean-tech sectors in their region and increase the survival rate of the new businesses. The Municipality's ambition was to feed into their Strategic Business Development Plan new ideas coming from the other partners' regions. The Municipality was looking for new approaches, methods, and tools for encouraging, supporting and sustaining green start-ups.

The most inspiring for the Municipality were good practices from Italy, especially their Green technology centre and Green Observatory. Following the Italian examples, the Norwegian Municipality developed further their competence centre and launched the Green City - Green Buildings initiative. The Bølgen centre evolved from a broad sustainability-related meeting place into a co-working space for around 50 in-house green innovators, offering regular trainings and networking opportunities for

students and startups in the green sectors. The Bølgen centre remained a meeting place for SMEs but dedicated the events and meetings to topics such as green public procurement or emission-free construction sites. The centre has served as a public-private meeting place since March 2020, with regular meetings fostering dialogue on green and circular solutions for businesses in the building and construction sector, accelerating the green transition in the region.

The Green Monitor, launched by the Municipality to generate scientific knowledge on the region's green economy and growth following the Green Observatory example from Italy, has been compiling relevant statistics, reports, and surveys for the benefit of policymakers and regional leaders. Even though it is still in a pilot phase, the efforts to identify the best indicators for all businesses aiming at green transition are ongoing.

Thanks to the GRESS project, the Municipality set more ambitious targets for a green, circular, and sharing economy in their Business Development Plan updated in 2022. They also improved their City Masterplan in 2020 and shaped the local Climate and Environment Strategy.



18

New hub for local SMEs

Podkarpackie region in Poland has built a new hub for local businesses. The new business park, inspired by one in Norway, provides business support services and also the place for networking among the idea makers, businesses and science.

One Stop Shop towards competitive SMEs, focusing on the ecosystem for the first line service system (OSS) was a project which had eight partners from seven countries. Their common goal was to improve SMEs growth and entrepreneur skills through an attractive tailor-made ecosystem for start-ups and thus increase their number and quality.

The Rzeszow Regional Development Agency and the Regional Centre of Social Policy in Poland joined the project with the aim to boost the economic development in Podkarpackie region by increasing the level of entrepreneurship in the region through the development of financial instruments, possibilities and motivation for starting a business by people especially endangered with social exclusion (including migrants). The Polish partners also wanted to mobilise the funds from the Regional Operational Programme for Podkarpackie region's business development.

First, the two Polish partners decided to develop a business park with various business support services to create the ecosystem for start-ups. This inspiration came from Norway, from the Maritime Competence Centre.

In order to bring this idea to Podkarpackie region and finance it, the

two partners worked closely with the Operational programme's managing authority and as a result a new type of project was added to the programme. After the call for proposals under the new Entrepreneurship support 'business parks' measure closed in 2019, the construction of the new businesses park started. Close to MEUR 1.5 was allocated to this new project.

The Podkarpackie Business Park in Rzeszów, built on the premises of the Podkarpackie Science and Technology Park AEROPOLIS, was established in 2022 and opened for activities in 2023. Since then, the park has been connecting idea makers with business and science. It is well located. It is close to the motorways, railway station and also the airport. Its focus is on aerospace sector.

The Podkarpackie Business Park in Rzeszów is now one of the main economic and business centre of Rzeszów. It provides opportunities for networking, advisory services, and a training room. There are restaurants and also plans to start a kindergarten at the premises. The interest of the local businesses is so high that a special committee decides on which companies can join based on applications.



19

Opening foreign markets for SMEs

Innovative and fast-growing SMEs in Hungary are receiving a more comprehensive support to enter foreign markets than before thanks to a new programme shaped by ideas from Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Spain.

Policy improved directly by the Managing Authority for EU Structural Funds in Hungary.



€ 2,460,000 ERDF

Improving policy instruments supporting innovative SME performance (UpGradeSME) project brought together eight partners from six countries. Their aim was to improve the SME internationalisation policies in their regions based on learning from good practices of the others.

The Pannon Business Network Association together with the Ministry of Public Administration and Spatial Development (former Ministry of Finance) of Hungary developed and later led the project to improve the international competitiveness of their SMEs and increase the number of their foreign trade relationships.

The Hungarian partners learned from good practices shared in the project, for example the PIPE programme in Spain for training SMEs on foreign trade. They also found inspiring practices about the role of innovation agencies in SME support from Germany and the international trade support from the Netherlands. A good practice from Romania on the SME promotion in the Enterprise Europe network was also useful when improving the Economy Development and Innovation Operational Programme (EDIOP) 2014-2020 and the calls open under this programme for support of SME internationalisation.

Thanks to these ideas shared in the project, the Ministry of Public Administration and Spatial Development as the key decision-maker introduced new calls under the Hungarian large enterprises programme under EDIOP. They moved the focus from SME internationalisation support to a more comprehensive support to fast-growing enterprises, so-called gazelles. The new approach to SME support covered targeted mentoring with the involvement of experts in the focus of internationalisation including international business visits, managerial skills, product development, as well as financing. The new activities specifically assisted in the preparation of SMEs to enter foreign markets.

The Ministry of Public Administration and Spatial Development also improved the management procedures in the EDIOP programme. They introduced the use of unit costs and maximum costs to prevent overpricing, along with a simplified and normative call for proposals.

Over 200 SMEs received support in three new calls open under the improved programme: two calls at the national level and the third one focusing on central Hungary. Close to MEUR 2.5 was mobilised for this SME support.



UpGradeSME
Interreg Europe

20

Greener mobility with open data

Public transport in the Centro Region, Portugal, is now using new management and information systems with open data and real-time information. Thanks to ideas from Spain, Sweden and Romania, passengers can make greener mobility choices.



€ 1,437,000 ERDF

Cooperative information platform for low carbon and sustainable mobility (CISMOB) was a project with six partners from five countries. Their ambition was to promote innovative ways to reducing the carbon footprint by improving the efficiency of urban transport infrastructure through ICT. They wanted to contribute to greener and more accessible public transport and motivate citizens to make more sustainable mobility choices.

The University of Aveiro supported the Municipality of Agueda in Portugal in developing and later leading the project. They were looking for inspiration on how to encourage synergies between European Structural Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research programmes to implement sustainable mobility plans with green mobility projects based on ICT. They also wanted to test real-time information in public transport in a pilot action to decide whether and how to implement it in the Centro region.

The two Portuguese partners found many inspiring practices in the partner regions. They learned, for example, from an open data public transportation platform in Cáceres, Spain, or the Swedish Trafiklab, a community for open traffic data, made to inspire and foster transportation entrepreneurship, or from the Timisoara Public Transport Management System in Romania with real-time passenger information, e-ticketing and more. They compiled their lessons learned in a publication called ICT towards low carbon

and sustainable mobility - a multiscale perspective.

This publication was decisive in motivating the managing authority of CENTRO2020, Portugal's Structural Funds programme, to change the way submitted projects were considered. The managing authority of CENTRO2020 adopted more realistic CO2 reduction goals for evaluating submitted project applications and added four new criteria for the area of intelligent transport systems seeking to take advantage of ICT tools to improve public transport services by using open data platforms, real-time information systems or citizen assistive technology.

Four different projects, inspired by CISMOB, consequently received funding: a real-time information system for public transport users in the Leiria community, a management and information system for innovative and experimental transportation solutions in Agueda, information systems for public transportation, and the implementation of a real-time information system. Thanks to CISMOB, close to MEUR 0.8 from the Structural Funds was used to implement the lessons learned from other parts of Europe.

Additionally, the pilot action testing the use of real-time information for public transport had good outcomes and was later implemented in Cantanhede and Penacova, in the Centro region in Portugal.



CISMOB
Interreg Europe

24

Less pollution with e-mobility

E-mobility in the State of Vorarlberg, Austria, has been booming thanks to a new energy autonomy strategy. Inspiration from Greece and Germany led to tests of e-busses in public transport and a launch of grid projects improving the e-mobility infrastructure.

Integrated actions towards enhanced e-mobility in European regions (E-MOB) project brought together nine partners from eight countries. Their common goal was to enhance e-mobility solutions in regional passenger transport systems through coordinated policy learning and planning.

The Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences in Austria with its energy research centre joined the project to support the State of Vorarlberg in improving the electromobility strategy in the region. They were looking for inspiration on how to reduce the CO₂ emissions by analysing the interaction between electric vehicles and the electric grid. They wanted to prepare recommendations for a joint expansion and development of e-mobility and infrastructure connected to loading devices, renewable energy generation, and electric grid.

They found inspiration in good practices from Greece and Germany. The Greek peer review encouraged the policymakers in Vorarlberg to merge the e-mobility strategy with the energy and climate strategies into one energy autonomy strategy. As a result, a new Energy Autonomy+ 2030 was adopted in 2021, integrating the lessons learned on e-mobility from the project.

A German good practice on the use of electric buses inspired the State to support a test of electric buses in the region's hilly terrain. Following the test, they decided to purchase 100 e-busses within three years for public transport. Thanks to the strategic shift in the region shaped by the E-MOB project, regional funding became available also for electric taxis and installations of charging stations. The number of electric cars increased by over 300%, reducing pollution from the mobility sector in Vorarlberg. They have also nearly 600 Type 2 charging stations and 103 fast charging stations, providing a comprehensive charging infrastructure for the e-mobility users.

Thanks to the project and especially a German good practice addressing high load issues with e-buses, the State was aware of the grid stabilisation challenges linked to e-mobility infrastructure and integrated the interconnectedness of electro-mobility and energy generation in the new merged energy autonomy strategy. The grid operator recognised the work on grids, which lead to collaboration on a specific grid project.

The annual monitoring by the State of Vorarlberg shows a clear decrease in CO₂ emissions.



25

Saving energy in public buildings

24 refurbished public buildings in Podravje, Slovenia, save energy and costs for the region thanks to better CO₂ data monitoring and public private partnership project. Ideas from Portugal, Ireland and Germany played an instrumental role in shaping the new monitoring system.

More carbon reduction by dynamically monitoring energy efficiency (EMPOWER) project had nine partners from nine countries. Their goal was to achieve more carbon reduction and improve low-carbon economy policies in their regions by dynamically monitoring energy efficiency in buildings. They also wanted to boost financing for energy refurbishment projects by using innovative financial instruments.

The Energy and Climate Agency of Podravje in Slovenia developed and later led the project with the aim to find inspiration in the partner regions for good monitoring and management system. The Agency wanted to bring to the region ICT tools and processes based on the principle of plan-do-act-check to sustain the energy savings and CO₂ reductions in the new or renovated buildings.

Thanks to the project, the Agency contributed to improving energy management of public buildings, including their monitoring and other measures for CO₂ reduction. Podravje region also implemented a public private partnership project for energy refurbishment of 24 public buildings and developed a system of energy and financial monitoring and data collection for energy use, all based on lessons learned from EMPOWER.

Portuguese good practice, Almada Less Carbon Climate Fund, served as an inspiration on how to finance energy efficiency and

renewable energy investments. Ireland's action plan developed during the project was inspirational with its focus on social aspects of public buildings' refurbishments. Exchanges with the German partner, the Development Bank of Saxony-Anhalt, brought insights into financial risks and better understanding of the private sector, both instrumental in developing the public private partnership project.

Thanks to the project, the Agency established a practice of annual monitoring and reporting of the energy use data and financial reporting on the costs. Over time, the whole Slovenia turned that annual reporting into law, and collecting data for that reporting has become not only a routine but also a criterion for public money grants and other funding. Each public building must state now how much money was used in previous year for the energy based on their monitoring. The energy monitoring data play important role in discussing, educating, and presenting the state of energy efficiency and the changes to the key stakeholders who see the added value of monitoring now.

EMPOWER helped in improving energy efficiency of 24 public buildings which now save 6,000 MWh/year. So far, they saved MEUR 3.5 of Cohesion funds and MEUR 1.9 of municipal financing.



26

Developing 10-minute towns

Irish communities are becoming better connected to public transport, shops, services, green spaces, and other neighbourhoods thanks to 10-Minute-Town concept, developed thanks to ideas from Germany, Portugal and Romania.

The role of **modal interchange to foster a low-carbon urban mobility** (MATCH-UP) project brought together five partners from five countries. Their common goal was to find the best approaches to the development of sustainable multimodal mobility in their regions. They wanted to combine low carbon means of transport such as walking and cycling, rail transport, public transport, and green vehicles to connect communities into more compact and permeable urban forms and reduce the need to travel.

The Southern Regional Assembly in Ireland joined the project with the aim to learn from the partners on how to multiply the benefits of the low-carbon transport modes. The Assembly wanted to improve the definition of the strategies for integrating all the multimodal urban mobility initiatives in their regional operational programme 2014-2020, especially with respect to the projects' content and selection.

Study visits and exchanges with the project partners provided a lot of inspiration to the Irish Regional Assembly. For example, inspiration from a German good practice on assessing the transport connectivity and accessibility of disused rail tracks or a Portuguese one on intelligent crosswalks with LED lights enhancing pedestrians' safety contributed to low carbon modal interchange improvements projects implemented in two cities and financed by the regional operational programme. Moreover, exchanges during several

policy-learning events with another Interreg Europe project, TRAM, on bike-sharing schemes and pedestrianisation of cities also contributed to developing the Assembly's '10-Minute-Town' concept for their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, one of the main achievements of the project in the region.

The concept was tested during the MATCH-UP project in a pilot action in three key towns in the region. The Assembly turned the lessons learned into a new implementation tool for local authorities to undertake the 10-Minute-Town assessment of their key towns. This new methodology for prioritising the pedestrian environment, cycle investments, public transport infrastructure and services, and road enhancements is helping to improve the low carbon urban mobility and encourage a modal shift in the region. Since the project's end, additional seven towns and six local authorities incorporated the MATCH-UP 10-Minute Framework and Methodology into their Local Development Plans. Over MEUR 4 was mobilised for the implementation of this new concept in the region.

This new methodology contributed also to the National Sustainable Mobility Policy for Ireland. This is the overarching policy for sustainable transport investment in Ireland up to 2030. It now includes a strategic focus in support of 10-minute/ 15-minute neighbourhoods and the Town Centre First approach for the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages.



27



Less carbon with bike sharing

People in Tartu City and surrounding towns in Estonia are limiting their car use thanks to available low CO2 public transport alternatives such as bike sharing and on-demand buses. Ideas for the changes came from Italy, Greece, Spain and Germany.

Optimisation of Public Transport Policies for Green Mobility (OptiTrans) project had seven partners from seven countries. Their ambition was to reduce the carbon footprint of mobility in their regions by strengthening the public transport especially in rural and suburban areas. They were looking for ideas on how to reduce bottlenecks in public transport networks.

The Tartu City Government in Estonia joined the project with the aim to improve their main planning tool for the city's public transport system, the Transport Development Plan of Tartu City 2012-2020. The City was looking for inspiration on how to better integrate the residential areas in the public transport system and address the increasing use of private cars for transport between the urban centre and the expanding city outskirts and surrounding municipalities.

The OptiTrans project helped to improve the Tartu City Development Plan 2018-2025. Thanks to the project, the plan included building of mobility centres in the city's border areas, building a network of bicycle paths, and creating high-speed bus connections between the city centre and the outskirts of the city. The plan focused on modifying the moving habits of Tartu residents by establishing a network of light traffic roads

connecting different districts in the City and creating convenient and environmentally friendly public transport system, including bike sharing. The bike-sharing system, demand-based buses and bus lines connecting surrounding municipalities were intended to reduce the number of cars entering the city.

Inspiration for these changes came from several project partner countries. For example, ideas linked to cycling and regional cycling paths network came from Italy, connecting of different transport modes from Greece, demand-based transport and more attractive bus stops and public transport in general from Spain. Inspiration from Germany about cooperation among municipalities was extremely useful for developing better working relationships with the municipalities surrounding Tartu.

Implementation of the plan and mainly the OptiTrans ideas mobilised MEUR 2.65 of local funds. As a result, the number of cars entering the city has visibly decreased. The bike-sharing system has close to 25,000 users, 25% of the city dwellers. As of early 2024, the total mileage of bike share reached 10.5 million kilometres. The demand-based transport also has its users which further limits the car use.



28

Less carbon with electric boats

Maritime activities in the Strait of Otranto and the Strait of Corfu in the Vlorë region, Albania, are now regulated according to new procedures aiming at reducing the CO2 emissions of the boats. Inspiration came from Italy and Denmark.

Public authorities supporting low-carbon growth in European maritime border regions (PASSAGE) project brought together 11 partners from eight countries with maritime borders. Their common goal was to find the best way to promote low-carbon initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of maritime and logistics flows, port operations and related industries in strait areas.

The Regional Council of Vlorë in Albania joined the project to find inspiration for improving their Strategic Plan of Vlorë Region 2010-2020 with the ambition to become a zero emission territory by 2020. Maritime activities in the Vlorë region affect the Strait of Otranto with Italy and the Strait of Corfu with Greece.

The Council found many inspiring ideas among the good practices shared by the project partners. The Council decided to adopt the ecolabel for tourism structures and use LED systems in those structures, an idea shared by the Italian partners. They also incorporated in Vlorë a solar-powered automated system for charging batteries of electric ships which reduced their charging time, inspired by a good practice from Denmark.

Informed by a joint research study done in the PASSAGE project, the Council updated their strategic plan. The new plan included nine strategic lines focusing on tourism, agroindustry, and light

networks, as well as aligned indicators used during the project in a joint research study of the straits. The new policy changed economic activity procedures in the Otranto maritime strait under Albanian authorities, for example, requiring vessels in the Bay of Vlorë to obtain environmental permissions from Port Authorities.

The study provided data on maritime activities and the coastline regarding CO2 emissions. Results showed that approximately 85% of emissions are from coastal activities like tourism, ports, and oil depots. Based on these findings, the Agency prepared several new projects, some of which have already been funded. They incorporated CO2 reduction measures such as photovoltaic panels for energy production in the new passenger terminal of passengers in the Port of Vlorë.

Local universities, ports, municipalities, traffic monitoring agencies, and NGOs formed a consultative network utilizing a quadruple helix system and functioning like a maritime cluster. The network has been working for the past three years now. PASSAGE project also influenced the professional education content, universities and professional institutions revised their curricula and proposed new modules to incorporate greener transport concepts in higher education.



€ 82,750 ERDF



29



€ 1,285,000 ERDF

New charging stations for e-cars

Businesses and local authorities in Cyprus are building publicly accessible charging stations for electric vehicles through a grant scheme inspired by a good practice from Portugal. Many communities also will have their Joint Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans now.

Supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy in European islands and remote regions (RESOR) project had eight partners from five countries. Their ambition was to support energy efficiency and renewable energy use in businesses of the secondary and tertiary sector in European islands and other remote regions.

The Cyprus Energy Agency joined the project with the goal to find inspiration in the project partner regions for new energy efficiency actions to be funded by the country's operational programme Competitiveness and Sustainable Development 2014-2020. The Agency wanted these actions for energy upgrade of secondary and tertiary sector to contribute to reducing the energy costs and enhancing competitiveness of businesses in Cyprus.

The main inspiration for the Agency's actions came from Portugal. The project partner from the Azores islands shared their experience in promoting public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles with a large publicity campaign which explained the benefits of electric vehicles (EV) which increased the interest

in the offered support.

The Agency engaged the relevant Cypriot ministries in the RESOR project, specifically in discussing the good practice from Portugal. That latter led to the initiation of a grant scheme for businesses and local authorities to install up to 1,000 publicly accessible EV charging stations. 350 charging points under this charging stations' grant scheme have already been approved in Cyprus. This measure mobilized close to MEUR 3.7 from the NextGenerationEU - Recovery and Resilience Facility.

The Agency also supported the local authorities in developing their Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs). The Agency worked closely with the Union of Cyprus Communities and the Union of Municipalities in the project's stakeholder group assessing the needs of local communities which revealed a lack of proper strategies as a prerequisite for funding energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Thanks to the RESOR project, 348 communities in Cyprus will have 30 joint action plans addressing their long-term sustainability until 2026.



30

Energy efficient heritage buildings

Owners of ancient buildings in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region in France can receive funding and guidance for energy efficient renovation of their property. Good practices from Cyprus and Spain shaped the new support system in the French region.



Preserve traditional buildings through energy reduction (VIOLET) project brought together six partners from six countries. Their common goal was to promote a building culture that protects architectural heritage and is sympathetic at the same time to modern requirements of reinstatement and conservation for improved energy usage and reduced carbon emissions.

The Local Energy and Climate Agency in Bordeaux metropolitan area in France joined the project with the aim to integrate energy refurbishment and heritage preservation in their regional strategy for energy transition. The Agency wanted to direct the regional EU funds towards projects improving energy efficiency and reducing the final energy consumption of public buildings and housing in the region. However, when the project started in 2017, a new Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region had just been created merging three regions into one and, at the same time, a new regional planning tool for energy efficiency had to be developed. The Agency and the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region saw the opportunity to contribute with VIOLET to this new policy development.

The new planning tool, the Regional Program for Energy Efficiency (FREE), was developed in March 2020. Thanks to the VIOLET project, it stated that particular attention had to be paid to ancient

buildings in the various operational measures. Before launching the new regional programme, the new Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region initiated four calls for proposals planned to shape the new regional policy. VIOLET helped to clarify the definition of ancient buildings in these calls. The calls on energy renovation offered extra financial assistance to owners of traditional buildings.

The inspiration for shaping the calls came mainly from Cyprus. The Agency learned how they shaped the incentives for protecting, conserving, and enhancing historic built environments in Cyprus. They offered extra financial assistance to owners of listed buildings to preserve and restore it. Later on, the Agency found some inspiration on the financial incentives for owners of old buildings also in, where they promoted the renovation of disused residential buildings in the historical centre and encouraged new inhabitants to move in.

Thanks to the VIOLET project, the Agency facilitated extra assistance in financing energy efficiency works in ancient buildings, provided guidance for condominiums and social housing public and private companies owning such buildings, introduced trainings for civil servants on energy efficiency in ancient buildings, and prepared a toolbox for ancient building owners.



31

New grants for heat pumps

The housing sector in Malta, especially public buildings, is becoming more energy efficient thanks to a new grant scheme for heat pumps and plans for deep renovation of social housing blocks. Inspiration came from Germany, Italy and Slovenia.



Promotion of near zero CO2 emission buildings due to energy use (ZEROCO2) was a project with eight partners from eight countries. Their ambition was to identify the best working financial tools, and renewable energy and energy efficient technologies to promote the near zero CO2 emission public buildings at the local, regional and national levels, including social housing.

The University of Malta joined the project to help their government find the best approaches to funding renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies in public infrastructure, public buildings, public social housing and housing sector in general, relying on the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 Malta's Operational Programme.

The Maltese partner found inspiring approaches in Slovenia during a study visit at the public school projects using renewable energy technologies, in Italy showcasing successfully operating heat pumps in a gym project, and in Germany demonstrating an effective process of external insulation in social housing without displacing residents.

Thanks to this inspiration, the University collaborated with the Energy and Water Agency, the Government's energy policy advisory arm, to develop several support schemes: one for heat pump water heaters in dwellings and the other for energy and water efficient actions at voluntary organisation where a number of sports facilities invested in heat pump water heaters. A grant scheme for installation of the heat pumps in residences saw increase in interest from zero to an average of about 100 grants annually since 2018. Together with funds available for improving energy efficiency in sports facilities, MEUR 1.5 was mobilised thanks to these new initiatives.

ZEROCO2 has also contributed to consolidating the Housing Authority's ongoing commitment to decarbonisation, by launching the first deep renovation project in public social housing. As of September 2024, the key tender was undergoing adjudication, with a budget of up to MEUR 2. Construction, including substations for grid input from photovoltaic panels, is expected to be completed by mid-2026. The renovation project is fully funded by the Housing Authority through national funds.



32

New repair cafés and re-use sites

People and companies in Aarhus, Denmark, can now easily recycle reusable construction material or learn how to repair things in numerous repair cafés across the whole country, all thanks to inspiration from Spain, Italy and Hungary.

Promoting Re-use from the Public Policies (2LIFES) project brought together seven partners from seven countries. Their ambition was to accelerate the EU's entry into the era of re-use with public administrations promoting waste prevention through repair and re-use activities.

Kredslob, a utility company providing sustainable waste management and carbon neutral district heating to Aarhus in Denmark, joined the project to find inspiration for re-use and repair innovations. Their goal was to improve the Waste Plan for Aarhus with measures promoting re-use of construction material and raise awareness about the benefits of repair in the region.

The exchange of experiences with the project partners was fruitful for Aarhus. Inspiration from Spain, Italy and Hungary helped Kredslob launch two new projects: a mobile repair café and a construction material recycling. Inspired by a Hungarian example of a mobile library, the Danish partner adapted it to their needs and turned it to a mobile repair café. The Danish utility company acquired a van and fitted it with tools and material needed for simple repairs. Around 25 volunteers took part and staffed the van on various occasions such as town markets and festivals where they helped people repair their things. This project was funded with EUR 106,400 from the local waste plan updated for

2021-2026 with new ideas from the 2LIFES project.

The van with the mobile repair café was very popular and became a symbol of re-use and repair in the region. The national association of repair cafés was set up in Denmark and took over the repair idea further. It gave the van a new life and spread the repair cafés across the whole country. 80% of Danish municipalities now have repair cafés in various formats, mobile or stationary.

The second idea for improving the construction material recycling came from Spain and also Italy. Study visit in these countries showed Kredslob how to move forward with their recycling plans. They set aside a special area for construction material at their existing recycling centers in the region. These are bring-and-take areas where people and companies can leave reusable construction material and/or pick up for free what was deposited for re-use by someone else. Six such recycling centers exist in the region now.

Thanks to the 2LIFES project, the ambition of the city with respect to recycling increased. The improved Waste Plan for Aarhus set the goals which facilitated the implementation of the two projects. Moreover, the plan now foresees to recycle three times more material in the future than initially.



€ 106,400 ERDF



36



€ 2,617,507 ERDF



Policy improved directly by the Managing Authority for EU Structural Funds in Finland.

Boost to bio-based economy

The Päijät-Häme Region in Finland has strengthened its role as a frontrunner in bio-based circular economy with several projects developed thanks to inspiration from Greece, Romania and Spain,

Regional circular economy models and best available technologies for biological streams (BIOREGIO) project had eight partners from six countries. Their common goal was to boost bio-based circular economy in their region through transfer of expertise about best available technologies and cooperation models.

The Regional Council of Päijät-Häme in Finland together with the LAB University of Applied Sciences developed and later led the project with the aim to draw more attention to bio-based circular economy in the region. They wanted to support systemic development of closing nutrient cycles, increase the rate of biowaste recycling in the region, as well as the investment in research and development from the Sustainable Growth and Jobs 2014-2020 Finland's Structural Funds programme.

In Päijät-Häme, they have a regional road map towards circular economy which set targets and actions for the region. Site visits to Spain and Greece during the BIOREGIO project led to an update of this road map, which focused more on the bio-based content and on developing bioenergy solutions in the region.

Thanks to BIOREGIO, they developed several new projects focusing

on bio-based circular economy which the Regional Council decided to fund under the local Structural Funds programme with over MEUR 2.6. For example, the RAKIKY (Improving competitiveness by recycling nutrients) project was influenced by a good practice from Romania on composting of plant waste, domestic organic waste and sewage sludge.

The circular bioeconomy project BIOSYKLI, which aimed at and also succeeded in strengthening Päijät-Häme's role as a frontrunner in bio-based circular economy, was developed to implement the BIOREGIO action plan, focusing on piloting effective biowaste collection, exploiting organic waste as a raw material for biodegradable products, developing use of biobased plastics, developing carbon dioxide cycles and promoting the use of biogenic carbon dioxide.

The Regional Council also developed additional projects inspired by BIOREGIO and funded by the REACT-EU funds. Without BIOREGIO, the Päijät-Häme Region Circular Economy roadmap would not have had such a strong bio-based circular economy orientation.



37



Preserving heritage with zoning

Historic castles, manors and estates in Gelderland, the Netherlands, are better preserved and managed now thanks to a new estate zoning approach. The inspiration came from Belgium.

Innovating policy instruments for historic castles, manors and estates (Innocastle) project brought together five partners from five countries. Their ambition was to unlock the potential of historic castles, manors and estates in their regions to act as drivers of job creation and better education to improve life quality and reduce social inequalities.

The Province of Gelderland in the Netherlands joined the project to look for inspiration in the partner regions on how to improve their Policy Programme "Culture and Heritage" enhancing the conservation of protected heritage in the region. The Province wanted to better address the needs of owners regarding the economic viability, sustainability and financing of the necessary measures, as well as the needs of municipalities with respect to applying the legislation and other rules on the cultural heritage.

The inspiration came from Flanders, Belgium, where key stakeholders from Gelderland went for a study visit and could observe successful execution of estate zoning, collaboration with farmers, and recreation planning.

The Province then decided to shift from treating historic estates and country houses as individual monuments towards considering them as part of zones. They defined the zones in their Policy Program "Culture and Heritage". This strategic move aimed to bridge the gap between heritage preservation and spatial planning, emphasizing both conservation and development.

Following the policy change, specific estate zones emerged. A newly created map now outlines eight of these zones. They are also integrated in regional plans. The Province has allocated around MEUR 1-2 of heritage funds per year for the area- and task-oriented work. This financial backing ensures that heritage remains a priority, even in the face of other pressing demands.

More support could come also from the local waterboards which started cooperating also thanks to the Innocastle project which played a pivotal part in connecting heritage to critical tasks like climate adaptation.



38

New cultural package for tourists

Cultural heritage in the Paggiao municipality in Greece is better preserved and used now with more efficient and sustainable public funding combined with tourism income thanks to inspiration from Poland and Italy.

Effective policies for durable and self-sustainable projects in the cultural heritage sector (KEEP ON) was a project with seven partners from six regions. Their common goal was to improve public policies in the cultural heritage sector in terms of delivering high quality projects with sustainable results, reasonable public funding, and a long-lasting impact on regional development.

The Municipality of Paggiao in Greece joined the project with the aim to learn from good practices protecting cultural heritage and stimulating local economy at the same time. By improving the Strategic Planning of the Operational Programme of the Municipality of Paggiao (2016-2019), they wanted to help in developing a more extensive local tourism offer and encourage new jobs' creation.

The Municipality found inspiration mainly in the project's study visits showing how cultural heritage sites could use public funds efficiently and sustainably combined with the income from tourism. Good practices from Poland, the Royal Castle of Cheçyn or the Entnographic part in Tokarnia, or from Italy, the Landscape Museum of Magliano Alfieri, shaped the changes introduced in

Paggiao's strategic planning document.

As a result, the Municipality invested in renovating a previous army building in the Eleftheroupolis, the seat of the Municipality, repurposing it for cultural activities as well as public service. They also decided to focus on the cultural centre building in Nea Peramos, an area with a rich history and stunning natural beauty, allocating significant funds for its development, to upgrade the cultural heritage product for tourists and use the income from tourism to cover some of the building's maintenance.

The Municipality invested over 40 thousand euros in creating and promoting a new cultural heritage package for tourists. The Municipality built on the inspiration from KEEP ON when they joined an Interreg cross-border project with partners from Bulgaria and created the #visitpageo platform. #visitpageo presents various cultural assets in the region and promotes its rich cultural heritage as key part of the tourism experience. It encourages visitors to explore beyond Paggiao's renowned beaches, discovering the area's vibrant history and traditions.



39

Promoting heritage along the river

Tourism sector SMEs along the Meschio river in Veneto region, Italy, can now sell their local tourism experience offers jointly with others through a new portal and a tourism app. Inspiration came from Finland, Hungary and the Netherlands.



Authentic tourism based on local cultural flavours (Local Flavours) project had nine partners from eight countries. Their common goal was to explore the specific local and regional potentials and bottlenecks in promoting small and medium sized towns with rich but undervalued cultural heritage to create a more even distribution of tourism and more cohesive regional economies.

The Municipality of Vittorio Veneto in Italy joined the project to look for inspiring ideas in the project partner regions on how to improve the available tourism offer in the region. More specifically the Municipality's ambition was to mobilise funds from the ERDF Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 and the Operational Programme European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 of Veneto Region for projects promoting currently underdeveloped or underexploited historic locations, favouring authentic forms of tourism which sustain and promote cultural heritage.

Thanks to the inspiration from Finland, Hungary and the Netherlands, they prepared two projects: Veneto Rivers Experience and Enjoy the Rivers. Experience from Finland inspired the Municipality to consider their river Meschio as a blue route connecting different attractions and use restored

old buildings along the river. The idea of choosing the river as a unifying element came also from a study visit in the Netherlands. A good practice from Hungary then inspired the Municipality to link tourism to the local producers along the river.

The Enjoy the Rivers project focused on collaboration, training, and capacity building for companies, leading to increased capacity for SMEs linked to the tourism sector, for example with slow food movement offers. The Veneto Rivers Experience project brought offers of these and other SMEs together in a Product Club based on river-tourism supported by a portal selling touristic experiences all over the world. The municipality of Vittorio Veneto then funded, with its own resources, a tourism app harmonising the tourism offers across 11 municipalities at the local and subregional levels.

The 2 projects were funded by the ERDF and ESF funds with close to MEUR 1 in total. Moreover, building on the Local Flavours project, the Municipality developed a brand-new City Tourism Plan 2021-2027 and obtained MEUR 2.27 from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for local tourism-related activities, also inspired by the Interreg Europe project.



Conclusion

How to demonstrate the usefulness of capacity building activities? Does interregional exchange of experience bring any added value? How can a programme without investment lead to concrete results? These are some of the questions Interreg Europe has had to face since its creation more than 20 years ago. Due to this pressure of demonstrating its usefulness, Interreg Europe had to develop a result-oriented approach from its very beginning in the 2000-2007 period when a first integrated monitoring system was developed. Since then, the programme's intervention logic and indicator system have continuously improved.

As anticipated in its 2020 update evaluation, the Interreg Europe programme has exceeded all its initial objectives during the 2014-2020 period both in terms of outputs and results. This can be partly explained by an underestimation of the initial assumptions. In particular, the total number of approved projects was underestimated by 34% with 258 projects finally supported instead of the 192 initially forecasted. Nevertheless, this issue should not undermine the excellent performance of the 2014-2020 programme as confirmed in the present ex-post evaluation.

The results of the projects' survey, interviews with selected lead partners and experts' report on territorial effects demonstrate the programme's direct contribution to improving the situation in European regions. Almost 80% of the respondents to the survey indicated that a policy improvement took place in their region thanks to the interregional cooperation project. When it comes to the territorial effects of policy improvements, the evaluation confirmed the experience gained by the programme through the assessment of the projects' progress reports. First, the reporting on these effects is very challenging in particular because it goes beyond the intervention scope of the programme. Second, the effects on the grounds of the policy improvements are of a very diverse nature, reflecting the richness of the programme's impact on European regions. This variety is well illustrated in the 20 success stories presented in this report.

When it comes to the Platform, the ex-post evaluation has demonstrated the usefulness of the peer review service. It confirmed the good results already collected by the programme through the follow-up interviews carried out with each host region. The ex-post survey revealed an overall satisfaction of the beneficiaries of 4.8 out of 5. In addition, more than three quarters of the respondents indicated that the peer review contributed to a policy improvement in their region. This success is to a certain extent unexpected for a service which is much more limited in its means and in scope compared to the support provided through a regular project.

Finally, the ex-post evaluation provides good input for the preparation of the post 27 period. First, it confirms that the current programme works well. There is therefore no need for a revolution in case Interreg Europe is prolonged in the future. Second, it confirms the complexity of grasping and aggregating territorial effects of the policy improvements achieved within projects. Some of the recommendations provided by the external experts can be helpful not only for designing a possible post 27 programme but also for the implementation of the current programme.



Annex 01: External evaluator's report on territorial effects

EX-POST EVALUATION OF THE INTERREG EUROPE 2014-2020

FINAL REPORT

JANUARY, 2024

PREPARED BY SAFEGE BALTIJA, SIA &
NORDEVAL, OY

BACKGROUND

The evaluation was carried out during October 2023 – January 2024 as a joint exercise between the external evaluation experts and the Joint Secretariat (JS) for the Interreg Europe programme.

According to the intervention logic of Interreg Europe, the learning generated through the projects' activities should lead to policy improvements in the regions involved. These improvements can therefore be directly attributed to the programme's support. The 258 projects have demonstrated a total of 1,283 policy changes, 50% of them (631) occurring within Structural Funds programmes. For the first time, the programme has also collected information concerning the territorial effects of the policy improvements although these effects cannot be directly attributed to the programme's intervention.

The evaluation was conducted at a time when all projects had been finished. Thus, it was a fruitful time to explore the medium and long-term achievements of the 2014 – 2020 programming period and to assess the territorial effects in the participating regions.

The external evaluation experts provided methodological support to the JS evaluation team and carried out specific tasks:

- appraised and validated the data collection instruments (survey of project partners, survey of peer review hosts, and interview scripts), and proposed selection criteria for the mini case studies.
- analyzed programme data on territorial effects and produced a concise report on the findings.
- analyzed the results of the project partners survey in the light of policy and territorial effects and provided a short report on the findings.
- supported the JS evaluation team in the mini case study process by assisting in the interview process and preparing short overviews of the interview results.

TERRITORIAL EFFECTS

As the Interreg Europe programme aims at improving regional development policies, the Programme is expected to contribute to the achievement of EU-wide policy goals and regional/local development objectives. Indirect effects in the socio-economic or environmental conditions of regions participating in Interreg Europe projects are considered **territorial effects**. These territorial effects are consequences of actual improvements that are fostered by policy changes achieved by projects. Assessment of available evidence about these territorial effects was carried out as a part of this evaluation to illustrate how policy improvements contribute to positive changes on the ground in the concerned regions.

The analysis is based on self-reported data from project progress reports about the achieved policy change, description of influence, self-defined performance indicators and description of territorial impact. For further analysis of territorial effects, 275 cases were selected that had:

- provided descriptions of territorial effects, and
- reported at least minor progress in achieving self-defined indicators.

Analysis of territorial effects was done from two perspectives: (i) inductively, by qualitative coding of provided narratives and self-selected indicators to identify various effects, and (ii) deductively, by sorting cases and identifying effects in a few selected key categories:

Effects on institutions (governance)

#Efficiency #Empowerment #Stakeholder collaboration
#Ecosystem and platforms #Data

Effects on business (economy)

#Revenue growth #Connections #Competitiveness
#Innovations #Knowledge #Jobs

Effects on habitat (land & resource use)

#Less harm #(Wiser) resource use #Climate
#Energy

Effects on people (social)

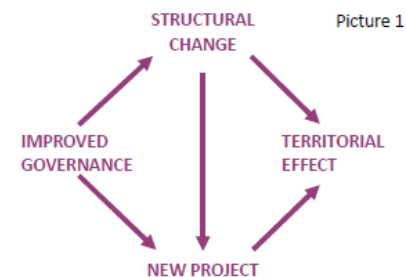
#Services (better, accessible) #Connections (digital, mobility) #Accessibility #Quality of life

Policy improvements facilitated by the Programme can be categorised as (i) implementation of new projects/initiatives, based on good practices or lessons coming from the project (ii) change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance) and (iii) change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change).

Evidence of improved situation in regions thanks to policy changes achieved by the projects

As reflected in the case studies carried out as part of the evaluation, there is some evidence of territorial effects. However, it is challenging for the projects to grasp these effects as project intervention may be only one of several factors contributing to later effects. Also, the evidence around territorial effects is varied as it relies on the reports of the projects, and the reporting quality does vary significantly between projects and even project partners. The projects themselves tried to define the indicators for measuring territorial effects. They are thus heterogeneous and cannot be aggregated.

The thematic analysis revealed a **time sequence in and connections between reported territorial effects**. Management-related changes alone do not directly lead to territorial effects but require a combination of structural changes or new projects (or both) for territorial effects to become observable. See Picture 1.



Picture 1

Trends and categories among a variety of territorial effects collected

The thematic analysis revealed a clear **connection between specific objectives (SOs) and the domains in which territorial effects are reported**. Projects under SO 1.1 and 1.2 primarily reported effects in the business domain only. Projects under SO 3.1, 4.1, and 4.2 focused on the environmental/habitat domain but also demonstrated influence on other domains. For projects under SO 3.1, 4.1, and 4.2 it is easier to identify territorial effects. These usually have a shorter causal chain and effects can be measured sometime during or shortly after the project ends. For interventions focusing on business development, the causal chains between the intervention and reported territorial effects usually are longer.

SO 1.1 Improving innovation infrastructures policies

Projects implemented under SO 1.1 created effects primarily in the **business domain** that are related to innovations (in projects, products, services), industry and research collaboration, created and more widely used R&D infrastructure and collaboration solutions.

E.g. the project CREADIS3 began with the creation of Basque region's Creative and Cultural industries (CCI) strategy. In collaboration and learning process with project partners and regional stakeholders the strategy has now resulted in the Basque Cultural and Creative District, providing space and services for the CCIs of the Basque Country and serving as an important focal point.

SO 1.2 Improving innovation delivery policies

Projects mainly created effects in the **business domain**, which are primarily industry and research collaborations combined with new infrastructure solutions that are leading to various innovations in products and services. Innovations are often seen in combination with shared knowledge that leads to such effects as increased competitiveness and revenue growth.

E.g. project ClusterFY focused on training and capacity building of stakeholders and representatives from clusters and designed specific cluster-supporting measures under the new OP. These policy changes have transferred in significantly higher number of applicants to the calls of the new OP.

SO 2.1 Competitiveness of SMEs

Effects are visible mainly in the **business domain**, e.g., the number of supported SMEs, acquired knowledge, improved collaboration, connections and networking. In some cases, these effects are hopefully leading to increased competitiveness (in the foreseeable future). Under the **governance domain** are reported improved efficiency of measures, procedures, or services for SMEs, and closer stakeholder collaboration that is enabled by creating platforms and ecosystems.

E.g. the project GRESS developed strategic planning documents for green and sustainable building. The previously established sustainability centre was transformed into a green and sustainable one, which regularly brings together representatives of the region's building and construction industry for various training and capacity building activities.

SO 3.1 Low-carbon economy

Effects related to the **habitat domain**: emission reduction, increased renewable energy capacity, created mobility infrastructure, and energy efficiency. Under the **people domain** changes in mobility behaviour and modal shift, improved services, and cost savings, are noted. Under the **governance domain**, we see the empowerment of stakeholders and stakeholder collaboration.

E.g. the project MATCH-UP assisted in the improvement of regional strategic planning documents and developed a new implementation tool under the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy to assist local authorities in undertaking a "10 Minute Town" assessment. Implementation of this tool has resulted in the annual allocations of significant funding for infrastructure improvements.

SO 4.1 Improving natural and culture heritage policies

Under **habitat domain** effects are related to protected biodiversity, preserved heritage, created tourism infrastructure or green infrastructure. Under the **governance domain**, improved stakeholder collaboration, efficiency of new measures, capacity building and new data tools.

E.g. the project Innocastle inspired by the experience of neighbouring partners has introduced a new heritage policy premise allowing historic estates and country houses to be approached as zones, not just as individual monuments. The novel approach in connecting heritage to spatial challenges has opened new broader collaboration possibilities.

SO 4.2 Improving resource-efficient economy policies

There is a connection between effects in the **business domain** (industry/research collaboration resulting in new projects, innovations, new products and services thanks to reached and supported SMEs and their closer integration in value chains) and the **habitat domain** (better resource use, re-use and circularity leading to reduced emissions, less waste and cost savings, as well as protected areas and created waste-related infrastructure). These effects are enabled by **governance effects**.

E.g. the project BIOREGIO in Päijät-Häme region (FI) set up the circular economy roadmap as part of the regional strategy closely involving local and regional stakeholders in that process. Project inspiration boosted the regional development initiatives and started the region's internationalisation in the circular economy field, contributed to wider understanding and thus facilitated several initiatives.

POLICY CHANGES & TERRITORIAL EFFECTS

Interreg Europe 2014-2020 programme financed a total of 258 projects. These projects had altogether 2,109 partners (258 lead partners and 1,851 project partners). The ex-post evaluation survey to project partners received 568 responses, which represented 94% of the total projects. Results of the survey and the interviews with the selected projects (22) have been used to draw an analysis of the policy changes supported by the projects and the contribution of the Programme.

79% (396) of the respondents confirmed that the project had achieved changes in the chosen policy instrument during the project or since its closure.

A total of 25 projects (e.g. 2LIFES, CISMOB, 40Ready, GRESS, BIO4ECO, OSIRIS, SUBTRACT, Blue Green City, CONDEREFF, EMPOWER, InnoHEIs, REBUS, CLEAN, COCOON, COHESION, INNO INDUSTRY) reported all three types of changes resulting from the project.

As the main reasons for no policy change respondents indicated a lack of funding, lack of support from decision-makers, and lack of organizational contribution. Additionally, the policy instruments not being open for changes and the impact of COVID-19 were mentioned as reasons why some projects did not lead to policy change.

Type of Policy Changes achieved

The policy changes reported by projects fall into distinct categories across the Strategic Objectives. Under SO 1.1, changes revolve around methodological advancements, governance enhancements, sector-specific focuses, cross-sectoral collaborations, and visibility improvements. SO 1.2 projects highlight strategic redesigns, stakeholder engagement, innovation strategy influence, targeted sector development, and regional program integration. SO 2.1 initiatives encompass

entrepreneurship support, green practices integration, governance improvements, regional development promotion, and skills enhancement. SO 3.1 efforts concentrate on energy efficiency, urban development, strategic framework enhancements, social and community development, and funding scheme modifications. SO 4.1 projects emphasize biodiversity protection, ERDF fund utilization, cultural heritage integration, policy management enhancements, and sustainable tourism promotion. Lastly, SO 4.2 initiatives center on circular economy principles, policy alignment and updates, collaborative efforts, waste management reforms, and behavioural shift fostering initiatives.

Interreg Europe project contribution to the policy change

Good practice examples and technical or digital solutions learned from other European regions were highly significant in the policy changes. Interaction and learning from each other have greatly contributed to the policy changes. Namely, engaging practitioners and stakeholders in the study visits and project events were mentioned to be important for influencing the policies. The same goes for the inclusion of policy-makers in the project events and meetings, as well as disseminating project outcomes clearly to them. Other important

activities included supporting the networking of enterprises and holding local policy focus group meetings and policy learning dialogues.

Territorial effects occurred due to policy change

The analysis confirmed a connection between SOs and the territorial effects domains explained in the previous chapter. Policy improvements lead to territorial effects primarily through the implementation of new projects in the concerned regions.

For instance, some projects already report on tangible effects, such as increased use of renewable energy, amount of collected litter, the number of created jobs, and increased number of cyclists. In other cases, policy changes fostered by projects have created an enabling environment for the start of new projects or initiatives through which territorial effects are expected to occur. The new projects mentioned in the responses focused on a variety of issues such as sustainable transport, urban development, energy poverty, culture and creative industries, circular economy, and renewable energy.

The factors that have contributed to the effects, included communication, timing (e.g. being able to influence a new policy), availability of funding for the changes, and sufficient human resources allocated to the project.

LAGGING REGIONS

Out of the 275 cases reporting at least minor progress after achieving **policy changes** 116 (42%) represent more developed regions, 60 (22%) transition regions, and 82 (30%) less developed regions. All regions most often report 'structural change' (new strategy, programme, plan etc.). Almost half of the policy changes (48%) reported by the less developed regions focused on structural change, which is more than that reported by the developed or transition regions (45% and 37% respectively). Conversely, the less developed and transition regions reported fewer changes related to improved governance (30% and 22% respectively than the more developed regions (33%).

The less developed regions have reported changes related to information, management, interventions, projects, and plans less frequently than the other regions. However, they have reported on changes related to programmes, selection criteria, monitoring, regulation, and guidance similarly to the other regions. This may indicate that in the less developed regions, there are fewer opportunities to influence changes in the form of new projects or improved management but more opportunities for influencing more general structural changes.

Partners from less developed regions account for up to 34% of all reported territorial effects. Breaking down by specific objectives partners from less developed regions reported most effects under projects supported by SO 3.1 (60%) and 4.1 (40%). But under SO 2.1, 1.1, and 4.2 they have reported more or equal number of effects as partners from transition regions.

Number of reported territorial effects by Specific Objectives

SO	1.1	1.2	2.1	3.1	4.1	4.2		
more developed	9	42	25	19	13	36	144	42%
transition	4	21	22	5	14	16	82	24%
less developed	5	14	22	36	18	19	114	34%
total	18	77	69	60	45	71	340	

In total, most territorial effects are reported under the domain Economy (42%), followed by Governance (29%), Habitat (20%) and People (9%). Partners from less developed regions reported more effects on the People domain (58%) than partners from the other regions and accounted for 38% of effects under the Habitat domain, 33% under the Governance domain, and 27% under the Economy domain.

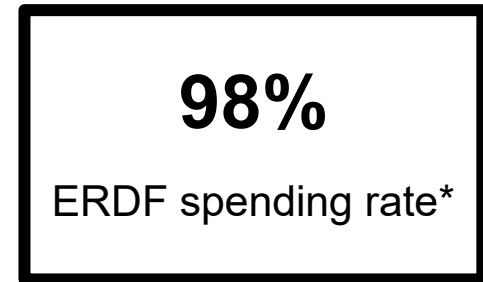
RECOMMENDATIONS

The external evaluators consider that the Interreg Europe programme has done very well in pioneering systematic monitoring of territorial effects of the policy and projects, which should be an ambition for other EU cross-border programmes as well. Yet, the system could be improved to ease the monitoring, analysis, and demonstration of the territorial effects.

To that effect, the external evaluators recommend to:

- (i) Clarify and visualise the expected territorial effects of the projects and the sequence of territorial effects. To structure the changes clearly, it is recommended to use predefined change categories (domains). The territorial effects may be structured along the four dimensions revealed during the thematic analysis. This will help both the project promoters as well as the programme communication to understand the policy effects.
- (ii) Update the monitoring system in such a way that it is easier to disaggregate the information on outcomes and effects. This could, for instance, be done by using some commonly defined indicators for different types of policy change, or by using the ERDF indicators. Furthermore, the system should be designed so that the extraction of information from different reports and tracking the sequence of change is possible.
- (iii) Include a consideration for the strength of evidence in the project reporting. Namely, to judge, whether the project caused the change or contributed to it, strong evidence linked to meeting minutes, strategies etc, where the project is mentioned, would strengthen the validity of the reported information.
- (iv) Consider applying a story-based participatory monitoring approaches (e.g. Outcome Mapping, Outcome Harvesting, or Most Significant Change) in the programme. This could provide evidence that covers wider causal chains and contexts, and potentially allows a clearer view of the programme's contribution and effects in the longer term.

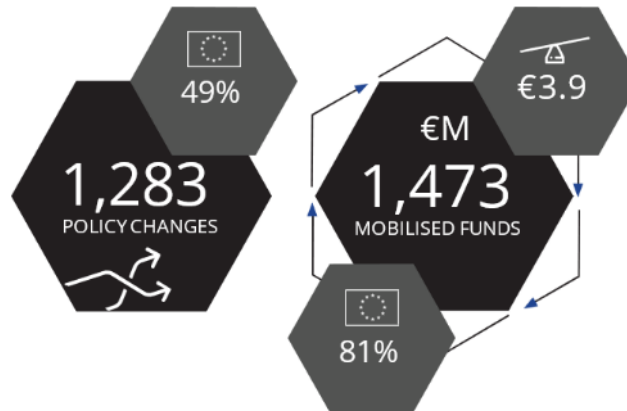
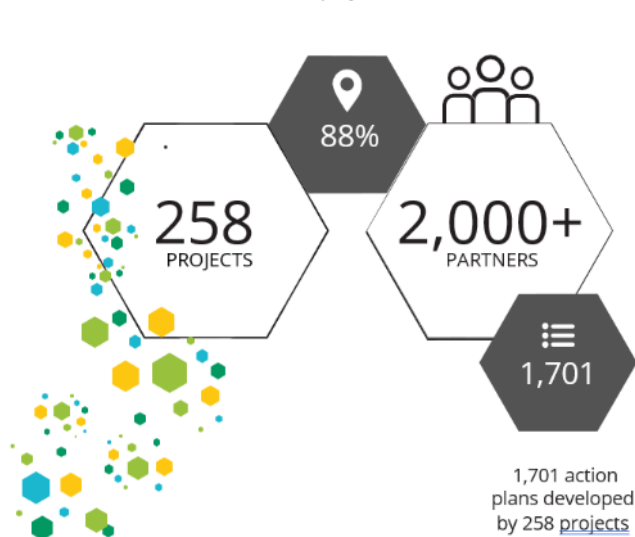
Annex 02: Overview of projects' achievements



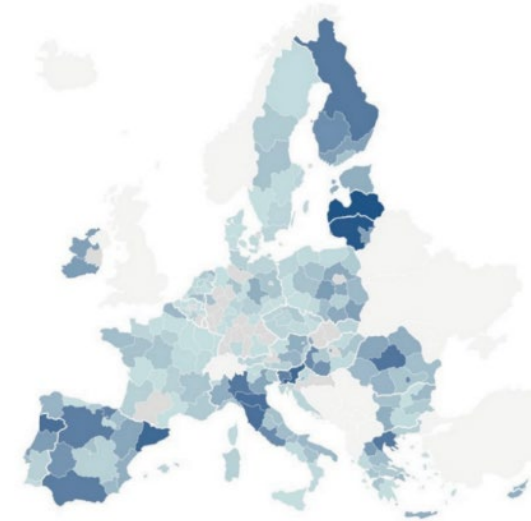
90% of European regions represented in projects

1,283 policy improvements achieved
49% of these involved Structural Funds programmes

For 1 euro invested,
3.9 euros of local, regional or national funds mobilised



1,473 MEUR mobilised to implement the policy improvements
81% of these funds come from Structural Funds programmes



Number of policy improvements in Structural Funds programmes



* Subject to change until final programme closure



Independent ageing with telemedicine

Elderly people in Cyprus are benefiting from telemedicine. A good practice from Slovenia inspired Cypriot health providers to set up telecare services to enable their ageing population to preserve their independence and continue to live at home.



The project 'Delivery of innovative solutions for home care by strengthening quadruple-helix cooperation in regional innovation chains' (HoCare) brings together eight regions from eight countries. Their ambition was to bring together their home care users, businesses, research institutes and public authorities as 'quadruple-helix' stakeholders. They wanted to organise cross-fertilisation to generate new ideas and have these ideas tested and prototyped in real-life settings.

The Nicosia Development Agency (ANELI) led the project partnership. The agency's goal was to examine how the quadruple-helix approach could help in enhancing e-health care in Cyprus, one of the priorities of their 'Competitiveness and Sustainable Development Operational Programme'.

The Agency took inspiration from the Slovenian good practice, Ekosmart. Ekosmart delivers telecare and telehealth services for the elderly and for physically less able people using technology that detects a need for intervention if a user cannot make an urgent call due to a fall or other health condition. This technology enables the elderly and chronically ill to continue to live independently in their own homes.

The Development Agency's work led to interest from the Cypriot Ministry of Health, which mobilised 400,000 euros of local Structural Funds to enable Cypriot hospitals to adopt similar telemedicine technology.



www.interregurope.eu/hocare

Cutting pollution with electric buses

Prague's citizens and tourists can now contribute to cutting CO₂ emissions in the city by taking the first electric bus in town, line 140. Ideas from Cyprus and Italy helped the City to launch electric bus trials and the purchase of a new fleet of buses.



The project 'Innovations in Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans for low-carbon urban transport' (InnovasUMP) brings together nine partners from eight countries to decarbonise transport, which is the main source of CO₂ in their cities. The partners are looking for innovative sustainable mobility solutions that will cut CO₂ and air pollution and lead to a more sustainable use of energy.

The City of Prague joined the project with the objective of increasing the share of public, pedestrian and cycling traffic to above 70%. So the City has looked for new ways to make its public transport system more attractive and accessible as well as to discourage car use.

Policy improved directly by the Managing Authority for EU Structural Funds in Prague.

This led the City to modify the Operational Programme Prague the Growth Pole of the Czech Republic, and to open two new calls on sustainable mobility and the smarter use of energy. The inspiration came from Cyprus and Italy. One call aimed specifically at pilot testing the electrification of the 140 bus line and was inspired by the project discussions in Cyprus on integrating mobility, energy and climate planning. The second call was for the purchase of the electric vehicles, and was inspired by the system in Ravenna, Italy. The overall allocation for the two calls was 13.6 million euros.



www.interregurope.eu/innovasump

Helping SMEs to use resources efficiently

SMEs in Greece's Central Macedonia have been adapting their business practices for the circular economy with the help of a new one-stop liaison office and a voucher scheme. Inspired by ideas from Denmark, the office is promoting resource efficiency in the region through networking among SMEs.



Policy improved directly by the Managing Authority for EU Structural Funds in Central Macedonia.

In the project 'Circular economy for SMEs' (CESME), nine partners from six countries have helped their SMEs transform environmental challenges into business opportunities. Their goal has been to bring their regional and local authorities and business development agencies together to design SME support solutions to help them make the most of the circular economy.

Development Agency of Eastern Thessalonik's Local Authorities joined the project together with the Region of Central Macedonia to identify circular economy solutions for Greek SMEs. They wanted an effective mechanism for promoting the circular economy in the region and thereby generate resource efficiency initiatives by SMEs, which would be funded through the regional operational programme.

Thanks to ideas from Denmark, they developed a 'one-stop' liaison office at the Region's premises to promote the circular economy to SMEs. The office organises seminars and workshops about various good practices and open calls for funding. The liaison office puts SMEs in contact with each other, so that they can discover whether their waste can be someone else's raw material, or vice versa.

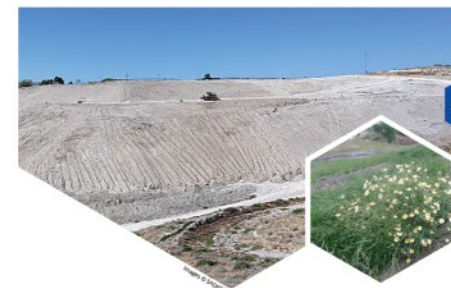
The regional operational programme provided 920,000 euros for the liaison office. Moreover, SMEs can apply for innovation coupons which they can use to improve the resource efficiency of their facilities or to adopt other circular economy practices.



www.interregurope.eu/cesme

Giving landfills a better cover

Landfills in Spain's Andalusia region will soon provide their towns with a new land, safely recovered in novel ways using ideas from Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. 2.36 million euros from the Structural Funds is making better landfill management in the region possible.



The project 'Consortium for a coherent European landfill management strategy' (COCOON) brings together eight partners from six countries. Their goal is to improve landfill management in their regions and turn it into an economic opportunity with new jobs, more safe recovered land, and a more efficient use of resources, such as landfill gas or water.

Sanitation Cordoba (SADECO) joined the project to bring good practices in landfill management from other countries in Europe to Andalusia in Spain. They looked for resource-efficient and environmentally sound landfill management solutions which could be funded by the regional operational programme.

SADECO brought several ideas to the region. During a site visit in Germany, they saw a safe yet less expensive and faster method

for sealing a landfill using construction and demolition waste. The Baena landfill in Cordoba is now being sealed the same way.

Another idea came from the Netherlands, where landfills are partially excavated so that the land can be better recovered for safe use. SADECO developed a similar landfill mining project for Dehesas Viejas, which will provide the town in Granada with additional usable space. SADECO also decided to map their landfill sites for a better overview for their management, inspired by similar IT tools used in Germany and Belgium.

The three projects received in total over 2.36 million euros from the regional operational programme.



www.interregurope.eu/cocoon