



# 10 Things to Know About **Transnational Cooperation**



**Interreg**



*The role of Interreg transnational cooperation programmes in EU Cohesion Policy*

# Introduction

Interreg transnational cooperation programmes have been operational for more than 20 years, implementing actions in the framework of the EU Cohesion Policy.

These programmes bring together European regions and cities that are located in different countries yet are sharing many challenges and opportunities due to their common geography, history, and culture.

The geographic and cultural similarities defining the transnational programme areas provide an excellent basis for cooperation. In transnational projects, actors from the private and public sectors, universities and

civil society organisations work closely together to advance new or improved solutions designed to meet the most pressing needs of their populations.

But what does that mean in real terms? What do transnational cooperation projects and their results imply for the regions, cities, and citizens?

Whilst it is impossible to present the full scope, diversity and added value of transnational cooperation in just 16 pages, this document provides a flavour of what is involved via selected examples from across the territory of Europe.



This document was prepared by an informal working group including representatives from transnational programmes and interregional programmes\*, with the support and facilitation of Interact. The group aimed to identify a common set of messages about the role and achievements of the transnational programmes.

The paper represents the outcomes of this work in condensed form, along with examples to illustrate them. It is not a position paper, but part of the

programmes' overall visibility efforts. The 10 points included here present a set of distinctions that characterise transnational programmes.

*\* The following Interreg programmes are represented in the group: Adriatic and Ionian, Alpine Space, Atlantic Area, Balkan Med, Baltic Sea Region, CENTRAL EUROPE, Danube, MED, Northern Periphery and Arctic, North Sea Region, North-West Europe, SUDOE, and Interreg Europe. They were represented by their Joint Secretariats and in some cases the Managing Authorities.*

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Front page images: Red wooden houses of Lofoten, Norway: © Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic. Hilly landscape with vines and sea: © Piquet Design/Interreg MED.

# STRATEGIC VALUE of transnational cooperation



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Transnational cooperation underpins EU Cohesion Policy and other strategic EU priority areas, including environmental, transport, energy, social, and macro-regional strategies.

Transnational programmes bolster these strategies by bringing together stakeholders from geographically and culturally similar areas, to jointly address the challenges and opportunities that they have in common.

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# 1 Transnational cooperation helps to reduce regional disparities and increases cohesion in specific territories

By facilitating knowledge exchange, transnational cooperation empowers disadvantaged regions. It builds capacities and enables each territory to learn from the others, tapping into methods and solutions that are developed or applied elsewhere in the region.



## Example: Transforming food systems | Baltic Sea Region

**BERAS (2002-2006) & BERAS Implementation (2007-2013)** empowered towns and municipalities in disadvantaged regions of Europe to create local benefits from a more ecological recycling agriculture.

In 2017, the United Nations picked up the experience gathered in transforming food systems. BERAS is now part of the main measure to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goal 'Sustainable Consumption and Production'.

High levels of agrochemicals and toxins in food, deteriorating soil quality and massive wildlife decline are frequently reported. People increasingly call for ecological agriculture involving less pesticides and fertilisers. How can we bring ecological agriculture up to scale?

Starting in 2003, researchers from Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Poland and Germany compiled knowledge available in the region and drew up an easily transferrable food system including three interlinked concepts: 1) Ecological Regenerative Agriculture: In organic farms, nutrients are recycled and neither mineral fertiliser nor pesticides are applied. 2) Diet for a Green Planet: Individuals and communities are encouraged to eat in a way that supports ecological

regenerative agriculture, i.e. adopt a diet based on local, organic, and seasonal food with a smaller share of meat. 3) Sustainable Food Societies: Local networks connect organic farms with distributors, processors and consumers.

These concepts were successfully applied in Södertälje, a municipality near Stockholm. Today, 24,000 sustainable meals are served in public schools and care homes each day, and farmers from the "sustainable food society" in Södertälje report a 20% higher income compared to the standard organic system.

Transnational cooperation helped set up more than 50 demonstration farms and information centres to support farmers in converting to sustainable agriculture. Also, several towns in Europe such as Lomza (Poland), Moletai (Lithuania), and Mollet del Vallès (Spain) are now implementing BERAS diets.



## 2 Transnational cooperation builds trust across borders and fosters European integration for a more competitive Europe

Cooperation zones are the right scale for building effective partnerships. Each zone shares similar challenges and cultures, which facilitates trust-building and seamless cooperation. Thousands of businesses, universities and organisations have found that when regions and cities work closely together, they all become stronger.



### Example: Transboundary flood risk management | Central Europe

**LABEL (2007-2013)** enabled joint risk management along the Elbe River. The Elbe (Labe is the Czech name for the river) is characterised by conditions which are typical for many rivers in central Europe: Near-natural river landscapes, economic potential for tourism and transport, an attractive living environment and settlements. However, all these developments along the river face a high flood risk, which is exacerbated by climate change.

When the century flood of the Elbe River occurred in 2002, all regions along the river took measures, but these were not coordinated beyond borders. The floods were pushed further downstream, magnifying the problems for downstream regions and their people and businesses. At that time there was hardly any exchange between the authorities in the Elbe countries. They did not even know each other. The LABEL project changed that. The project covered most of the river basin, 70% of the German and 50% of the Czech area. Hungarian and Austrian regions were also involved.

LABEL brought together public and private stakeholders along the Elbe River to jointly develop solutions for potential conflicts of interests amongst different sectors. With growing trust among the stakeholders,

the project created harmonised methods, standards and tools for flood protection beyond borders.

LABEL also developed a transnational risk management strategy. Amongst other measures a study was conducted to collect valuable information where to establish houses and businesses safely. In one of many concrete cases in which the project study was consulted, a Czech entrepreneur opened a new marina in an area with low flood risk. The study showed that an upstream plain forest greatly reduces the risk of big floods in a specific location, which he then chose for his new business.

As a result, the subsequent floods could be contained more efficiently and caused less damage than the one in 2002.



# 3

## Transnational cooperation funding is decisive in making macro-regional strategies work

Many initiatives that underpin and implement the EU macro-regional strategies are funded by transnational Interreg programmes. These programmes are well-suited to provide targeted solutions designed for the specific regions, bridging gaps between national and EU-wide initiatives.



### Example: Promoting freight transport via inland waterways | Danube

Did you know that a captain navigating the Danube River from Bavaria to the Black Sea needs to overcome hundreds of administrative barriers and fill in 77 forms?

**The DANTE project (2014 - 2020)** aims at identifying and eliminating administrative barriers for inland waterway transport on the Danube and its navigable tributaries.

Inland waterways are an underutilised and climate-friendly option for transport of goods compared to freight transport via roads.

This project exemplifies how joint efforts contribute to reaching the targets set by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the Danube Transnational Programme.

DANTE facilitates the work of EUSDR Priority Area 1a (Inland Waterways) and is acknowledged by the Directorate General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) of the European Commission as part of their efforts to reduce administrative barriers in the transport sector.

DANTE actively involves the Danube Commission and

therefore also functions as an information exchange platform between related efforts of the Danube Commission and the European Commission.

This facilitates the involvement of public authorities responsible for tackling these barriers, and empowers the project to achieve its results and ensure their implementation on the ground.

DANTE focuses on five thematic areas: Border police, tax & customs, navigation/traffic control authorities, port authorities, waterway and canal administrations, and other public authorities playing a role in barriers (e.g. health control, disaster management, etc).



# IMPACT

## of transnational cooperation



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Transnational cooperation projects work with applied solutions and innovative approaches to complex challenges. In addition, they often explore how novel or improved solutions can be scaled up.

In the next pages, you can learn more about how transnational cooperation creates impact on the ground.

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# 4 We deliver territorial cohesion: Our most important results are new knowledge, shared experiences and enhanced capacities

Transnational partnerships typically explore new terrain and test new approaches to common, complex, and deep-seated problems, creating new ideas and building capacities as they unfold. Participants in transnational projects develop a habit of cooperation and a strong sense of shared interests, which often results in framing problems in a territorial perspective.



## Example: Smart management of built heritage | SUDOE

**Smart Heritage City (2014-2020)** applies smart city management approaches to cultural heritage. The preservation of cultural heritage - in particular built heritage - faces difficulties due to lack of comprehensive planning.

Until now, buildings and cultural goods have relied on individual management plans. In addition, the management did not include proactive measures, but mainly involved reacting to damages and problems after they had been detected.

Conversely, smart urban planning processes generally do not pay attention to the specific issues that apply to cultural heritage and historic towns. With this in mind, Smart Heritage City has developed a solution harnessing new technologies to anticipate heritage preservation needs and facilitate dissemination.

Smart management of historic towns facilitates owners' decision-making and accelerates tourism development. The solution supports managers by providing precise diagnoses based on specialised knowledge of buildings and their environment, and fosters knowledge exchange between specialists. It supports tourism via a digital app that disseminates facts and data, raising awareness amongst visitors and

citizens on the importance of heritage preservation.

Thus, this innovative solution contributes to smart and efficient management of the rich cultural heritage found across Southern Europe. It provides owners and managers with accurate data which is key for strategic decision-making that ensures resources optimisation, effective promotion and enhanced tourist experiences.

It also contributes to the preservation of historic heritage as part of European citizens' collective memory and identity - a key factor in the social cohesion of the European Union.





# 5 We enable regions and cities to make better use of limited resources

Through partnerships that tackle common challenges, regions and cities can join forces instead of reinventing the wheel. Transnational cooperation plays a key part in knowledge generation and exchange, which allows regions to stay ahead of developments by pooling ideas and resources. This is important when addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by the huge structural changes facing Europe, from disruptive technologies to automation, globalisation, and the ageing workforce.



## Example: Biobased economy | North-West Europe

**Bio Base NWE (2013-2017)** aimed to support the development of North-West Europe as a leading European region in the biobased economy by providing support to SMEs active in this sector.

To help SMEs move their innovations across the so-called 'valley of death' and reach the level of marketable products, bio-based economy experts from eight organisations in five countries created resources which included: substantial investments to upgrade the pilot plant facility in Ghent, Belgium where testing can be upscaled to a 'just-before-market' scale, a coupon system of up to €30,000 per coupon, a transnational network, training tools and policy recommendations.

They provided technological solutions and networking opportunities to more than 755 SMEs, creating 43 jobs, with an estimated 275 jobs in the future, and over €71 million of leverage to the regions and cities.

One illustration was the Scottish SME Celtic Renewables which tested its innovative process to produce biobutanol as a carburant for cars from the waste produced in the whisky industry at the Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant in 2014.

This successful scaling up from lab-level to market-

able quality and quantity in the pilot facility enabled Celtic Renewables to gather a next round of investments worth €1.5m in Scotland.

In addition, in 2015 Celtic Renewables landed an £11 m grant after winning a competition run by the UK Department for Transport to build the world's first plant dedicated to the production of advanced biofuel from the residues of the whisky industry. This plant is now under construction in Scotland.



Thanks to its concrete results, Bio-Base NWE was the winner of the RegioStars Awards 2017 under category 1: "Smart specialisation for SME innovation."

# 6 We enable regions and cities to jointly tackle challenges that go beyond borders

Water pollution, maritime spatial planning, and integration of transport systems are examples of issues that each country cannot solve separately from its neighbours. Only by working together, regions and cities can successfully tackle such challenges.



## Example: Boosting blue growth & fighting forest fires | MED

The MED Maritime Integrated Projects (2007-2013) were the result of a pioneer call intended to create a community of projects coordinated by one project designed for this specific purpose.

This call gave birth to a cluster of 14 projects aiming to boost blue growth, a top priority for the Mediterranean area. It involved a network of policymakers and high-level experts in maritime issues from across the region. The cluster focused on numerous subthemes ranging from fisheries and aquaculture to blue energy, sustainable maritime transport, sustainable tourism.

This approach created a step-change in the management of cooperation projects in the Mediterranean. The new Interreg MED Programme 2014-2020 based its entire architecture of projects on this previous pioneer experience.

Today, there are 8 consolidated thematic communities of projects – from Blue Growth to Sustainable Tourism – actively spreading an impact of clustering between 600 private and public partner institutions from 13 European countries of the area.

The CypFire project (2007-2013) explored and tested the concept of using fire-resistant trees to fight fires in the Mediterranean forests, where climate change is causing increased frequency of wildfires.

When a fire wipes out 20,000 acres of vegetation in the Valencian region of Spain on 1 July 2012, this is not unusual. However, amongst the ruins, something has survived: A patch of 946 cypresses are hardly scarred by five days of fire. This is a testimony to the incredible fire resistance of this tree, a quality which the CypFire project exploited in its design of a new forest fire prevention strategy: Constructing fire barriers of cypresses to slow down and cut off the most stubborn wildfires.

The project results and impacts are widely recognised, inspiring many regions within and beyond Europe. CypFire was featured at the 2017 European Cooperation Day during the EU Malta Presidency.



# 7 We help public authorities to offer better services for citizens and companies

Transnational projects typically lead to time-saving, innovative or improved solutions and methodologies which save resources and increase efficiency. This improves cost-efficiency, accelerates the uptake of current best-practice approaches, and facilitates wise use of public resources in the region.



## Example: Co-creating public services | Northern Periphery and Arctic

IMPROVE (2014-2020) is using co-creation and technology driven, new solutions to enhance public sector services in remote areas.

Public service providers in the Northern Periphery and Arctic region are faced with the challenge of reconciling limited resources and a lack of critical mass with an increasing demand for public services. Whilst the use of technology in public service provision has been a trend for some years now, its use in combination with a public services co-production model, with open innovation and living labs, is a novel approach.

IMPROVE has developed a co-production methodology for authorities to establish user-centred, inclusive, responsive and transparent services in close dialogue with the citizens. First, 62 “local champions” were trained to lead the co-production of services in two categories: eHealth/eCare and ePlanning. As a result, Västernorrland (Sweden) is piloting four ICT-based

solutions: Key-free home care, safety camera for night visits, sensor technology for individual toilet assistance, and digital patient care planning.

Each solution has already produced a measurable impact. For example, an app that unlocks patients’ doors reduced the time required for planning and handling of keys. In case of emergency, the caretaker can drive directly to the patient without having to go back to the office to get the right key. This saves time and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions whilst ensuring a prompt response to alarm situations.

In addition to increasing efficiency and cost savings, these solutions provide better services to citizens and help caretakers feel safer when supporting the growing number of elderly and disabled people, especially during the night or in bad weather conditions.



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# 8

## We fund cooperation projects which deliver visible results attractive for cities and regions across Europe

Despite waves of Euroscepticism, we see a surge in the demand for transnational projects amongst European regions and cities. This is based on a real need to pool and improve existing knowledge in order to tackle complex, joint challenges in the most efficient way.



### Example: Leisure sports & enhanced accessibility | Atlantic Area

NEA2 (2007-2013) aimed to develop a cutting-edge marine leisure sector in the Atlantic Area, by developing a variety of measures in the areas of economic innovation and performance, protecting and valuing the environment, quality of life and social cohesion.

NEA2 focused on three aspects of the marine leisure sector: Economic, environmental and social. For example, it developed a range of watersports adventure trails and created the Atlantic Marine Leisure Sector Observatory. The project also produced an inventory of sites and facilities adapted for people with disabilities and developed inclusive marine leisure events allowing disabled people to join.

The project supported the development of the Atlantic Watersport Games, a championship for promising young watersports talents from the Atlantic Area regions. The games took place in Portugal 2009, Spain 2010, the UK 2011 and France 2012.

The NEA2 partnership also actively engaged in initiatives of the European Commission. For example, local events were arranged during European Maritime Day, and then NEA2 partners made a collective contribution to the consultation on the Atlantic Region Strategy.

START (2007-2013) helped improve the accessibility of Atlantic Area regions and supported the inter-connection of passenger transport networks. The project helped establish a transnational network of regional and local authorities and other actors.

START developed solutions to make it easy for people to travel to, from and around the region, combining local public transport and inter-regional transport services. It designed high-quality information services for travellers, developed easy-to-use advanced ticketing systems, and established a common brand and concept for seamless travel as a recognised, sustainable product within the Atlantic Area.



# 9 We are an innovative catalyst that triggers further public and private investment and accelerates urban and regional development

Our projects are living laboratories creating opportunities for developing and testing new ways of addressing major challenges. Transnational projects develop tailor-made solutions which require strategic international partnerships. They often serve to kick-start changes whose reach and momentum keep growing over time, as they stimulate significant national and international investment and action.



## Example: Catalysing investment in our future | North Sea Region

**Water City International II (2000-2006)** created social and economic value based on the restoration of polluted watercourses in cities. Using inventive methods, previously unsightly 'no-go' zones were turned into attractive green areas with clear rivers and canals. Today, these areas are sought by the public for recreation and provide a basis for tourism activities as well as business clusters. With a budget of €10 million, the project soon triggered additional private and public investments of more than €50 million in five North Sea Region countries. Today, €3-400 million has been spent on related activities in the province of Fryslan alone, and the developed concepts are being disseminated widely within and beyond the North Sea Region, reaching as far as South Korea.

**Dryport (2007-2013)** introduced smart logistics hubs in the hinterlands of sea ports, with a view to moving inland sea cargo transport off the road and on to rail and inland waterways. The concept enhanced transport cost-efficiency whilst reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The Dryport partnership successfully secured approximately €57 million in complementary financing to establish the concept around the North Sea. Experts and investors from around the world have visited the Dryport sites to learn about the concept. For example, in the Dutch province of Drenthe, the

concept is being further developed; new hubs have been established in Sweden; and a large new Dryport was recently designed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

**Build with Care (2007-2013)** helped transform costs, design, and quality of new low-energy housing. Its innovative solutions led to the construction of nearly 300 passive housing units in the East of England, and the project's ideas for how to overcome barriers to low-carbon construction provided valuable input to the EU Energy Efficiency Directive.

**North Sea Ballast Water Opportunity (2007-2013)** developed six type-approved ballast water management systems and contributed significantly to EU and international regulatory processes. It secured about €20 million in additional financing. The Ballast Water Management Convention entered into force in 2017, and the knowledge created by this project now provides a basis for related further investments.



# 10 We improve policy making and initiate change, and therefore have long-term impact

Transnational projects develop new approaches, methodologies, and practices and demonstrate their feasibility. The demonstrated effects often inspire policy-makers to create frameworks that facilitate the upscaling of the new solutions. This is one of the key reasons why our projects often deliver their full potential only years after a project has ended.



## Example: Bolstering sustainable transport policy | Alpine Space

**iMONITRAF! (2007-2013)** helped establish common policy measures to make transport more sustainable in the Alpine region.

The Alpine zone is particularly sensitive to the negative impacts of freight and passenger transport. This is due to high shares of heavy goods vehicles, specific topographical features, limited spatial resources and highly vulnerable ecosystems. Nine regional governments joined forces already in 2005 in the MONITRAF project, to tackle common challenges along the corridors Brenner, Gotthard, Mont-Blanc and Fréjus and develop joint solutions for sustainable transport.

With the follow-up project iMONITRAF!, a major milestone was reached in May 2012, when seven regions developed a common strategy to reduce the concentration of traffic and the impact of transport in the Alpine Space. The regions also agreed to work jointly on the harmonisation of existing regional measures (e.g. a ban on night driving for heavy goods vehicles), a policy to promote modal shift (e.g. from road to rail), and a pollution control system for road freight at Alpine level.

In 2013, the regions involved in iMONITRAF! established

a common structure to support the implementation of the coordinated transport strategy. In 2016, the regions focused their work on gaining policy support for the harmonisation of road tolls along and between the transport corridors.

Not only did iMONITRAF! bring solutions up to the political level with these common measures for sustainable Alpine transport. The project lead partner Land Tirol also leads the action group on “intermodality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport” of the Alpine macro-regional strategy (EUSALP). The close link between the project and the EUSALP strategy provides a solid basis for ensuring long-lasting impacts of the project results.

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**Alpine Space**





## Helping to shape the **FUTURE OF EUROPE**

From blue growth and green mobility to remote area connectivity, ageing populations and migration: Interreg transnational cooperation is fostering strong partnerships where national, regional and local authorities, academia, NGOs, and private sector enterprises work together to tackle today's complex, transboundary issues.

These multi-sector alliances build on regional strengths and address real challenges that exist in real places across Europe. Learn more about results and spinoffs from Interreg transnational programmes:

[www.interreg.eu](http://www.interreg.eu)  
[www.keep.eu](http://www.keep.eu)

**1**

Reducing disparity

**2**

Building trust

**3**

Bolstering macro-regional strategies

**4**

Delivering territorial cohesion

**5**

Improving use of limited resources

**6**

Tackling challenges beyond borders

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Helping authorities to improve services

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Creating results attractive for regions

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Triggering investment in our future

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Creating enduring change

*10 things you should know about transnational cooperation and how it supports cohesion in the European Union*

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