

Stories of European cooperation

EU values



Interact



Interreg



Introduction

As the European Union prepares for a new political and financial cycle, the time is right to reflect about the aim and objective of the Union and why we are building this 'story' together.

At the heart of this lies the concept that it is 'good' to live in peace and harmony and that developing together will take us further in human terms than working in isolation from each other as if we were all islands. Peace and harmony send us back to core values such as democracy, tolerance, equality and equity, dignity and respect for human rights.

In this institutional transition period, the cooperation community (meaning, the Interreg family) decided to put EU values at the centre of our conversations throughout 2024. Because these values matter so much, they define who we are and who we want to become.

One of the EU's instruments where these values are most visible is Interreg, and territorial cooperation at large. Almost by definition, Interreg projects strive to build on EU values as they bring together partners from different horizons to jointly implement actions, improve policies, learn from each other.... This in itself contributes to our values and puts into practice tolerance and understanding for others. It also values the act of learning from each other, accepting that we are not omniscient and that peers might have something valuable to offer.

In my own unit in DG REGIO, we are very proud to take these values a step further and share them with colleagues, partners and peers from countries that are not (yet) in the European Union but nevertheless are valuable neighbours. Our Interreg programmes and projects operate along all external borders of the Union, including in the outermost regions, and expose neighbours to our values, while also giving us a chance to learn from them. For those on the path towards EU accession, this is a concrete opportunity to be fully associated to the functioning of EU cohesion policy, which is an added bonus.

These 'Stories of European cooperation' tell us about such Interreg projects in different regions of Europe and beyond. Storytelling allows us to listen to the voices of citizens and practitioners who might not always receive the credit they deserve. Let's make sure we listen to them and share their stories.



Nathalie Verschelde

Deputy Head of Unit - Macro-regions,
Transnational / Interregional / External
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Democracy



Empowering youth for effective public administration

The project Eurocidade 2030 seeks, with activities such as ‘Youth 2030’, to give a voice to youngsters so that they can share ideas to improve the quality of life in rural areas

By Carlota Santalices Álvarez

Eurocidade 2030, funded by the cooperation programme Poctep, is an Interreg project that promotes cross-border cooperation between Galicia and Northern Portugal. More precisely, it focuses on the challenges shared by Galicia and Portugal, such as population ageing and demographic decline, which directly affect youth, forcing them to look for opportunities outside these regions.

The final goal is to make public administration more effective by encouraging legal and administrative cooperation among citizens (with particular focus on young people), civil society, and institutions. The idea behind this is to overcome legal and other regional challenges.



Two of the key activities for Eurocidade are ‘Youth 2030’ and ‘Citizenship 2030’. The first seeks to improve institutional cooperation of cross-border services to promote the inclusion of young people; the second strengthens administrative collaboration and creates tools to consolidate cross-border citizenship. Taking this into account, the project reinforces the cross-border cooperation actions already developed by the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Eurocity Chaves-Verín, promoting institutional advances in culture, demography, social action and transport.



‘Rural Youth of Europe’ Creative Jam in Eurocity Chaves-Verín.

The EGTC Eurocity Chaves-Verín: fostering synergies to create common policies

Ultimately, Eurocidade 2030 enhances the operational and intervention capabilities of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Eurocity Chaves-Verín. What does EGTC mean in practice? It’s a regional partnership that fosters synergies to create added value and establish common policies across various sectors, including culture, tourism, trade, education, research and development, and social policies.

Rural Youth of Europe: Debating Rural Europe

Eurocidade 2030 participates in ‘Rural Youth of Europe’, a transnational public discussion forum for participatory and creative young people in a common debate: rural Europe. This forum enables young people, experts and opinion leaders to analyze the future of European rural youth

to design, facilitate, inform and reflect on rural youth. How does it do this? Through hackathons, online events, and creative jams, among others things.

The expected results are the following:

- The consolidation of Eurocity Chaves-Verín as an instrument of sustainable and inclusive development.
- Improve the quality of life of the citizens of the Eurocity of Chaves-Verín and its surroundings.
- A more active and participatory citizenry in the construction of the Eurocidade.

TESTIMONIAL



Interview with **Alexandra Carneiro**, participant in the Eurocidade 2030 project

1. What specific activity have you participated in?

I was present at the New Ruralities activity of the project Eurocidade 2030, and my presence there stemmed from my participation in other European projects such as Rural Youth of Europe or the Project DYAS (Digital Young Ambassadors for SMEs) which was an Erasmus+ project.

2. Could you explain what the project consists of?

The main idea behind the New Ruralities activity of the project Eurocidade 2030 was to help young people with similar interests connect and to discuss the opportunities to be had in rural areas, specifically places that are changing into new ruralities, that can bring new spaces of action for young entrepreneurs. There was also space to learn about tools that can help develop projects in these areas, be them corporate or small businesses, or even associations.

3. What would you say the project has brought you personally?

I do volunteer work in a cultural development association, so, for me, it's really important to understand how I can better my work in order to bring higher quality activities to the people I am trying to help. These sorts of projects are great, because, yes, they give you new tools to improve, but most of all, they give

you contact with other people, who have different experiences and can give you a new perspective on what you are doing. The most important part of any project is the sharing. I feel like that is the engine for good results everywhere.

4. What would you say the project has brought you professionally?

I wouldn't completely accredit this achievement to the project Eurocidade 2030, but to all the projects I have had the pleasure of participating in, but this past year my work life suffered drastic changes, for the better. When I first started participating in EU funded projects I was working in retail, which was fine, but not my area of expertise. Having met so many wonderful people, and being able to gain important life skills that I wouldn't have otherwise developed, I was able to find a place of employment in my small town, doing my dreamjob, which is film curatorship, and event production. That kind of growth would have been twice as difficult without the tools that I have been given by these initiatives,

5. What would you highlight about the project's impact on the community?

I feel like the most important thing to come out of this project is the point of contact. All the participants now know the people running the institutions that can help them with their life projects, and that can help them better their life in their hometowns. Having a connection is essential for improving your surroundings.



'Rural Youth of Europe' Creative Jam in Malta.

More information:

https://www.facebook.com/eurocidade.chavesverin/?locale=es_ES



Carlota Santalices Álvarez

- Age: 29
- Nationality: Spanish
- Region where you are deployed:
Santiago de Compostela, Galicia (Spain)
- Write three words that define 'European cooperation' for you:
empathy, prosperity, progress.



How can we truly embrace climate-friendly living?

The project NUDGES: practical steps to change our behaviours and save the planet

By María Belén Benzaquén

The climate crisis is knocking on our door, and, more than ever humanity needs to change. We simply cannot afford to keep acting as we have been during the last decades. There are a lot of climate change technology solutions. Still technology alone is not enough, especially if we want to meet the goal set up by the EU, which is to be climate-neutral by 2050 and have an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. We need to change our behaviours, to be more sustainable and greener as a means to save our planet.

Making change happen

Changing people's habits is not easy. That's where the NUDGES project comes in. It's part of the 'Green Living Areas Mission', a thematic

community under Interreg Euro-MED that aims to reduce the negative impact of climate change in the Mediterranean. The project focuses on encouraging people to adopt more climate-friendly behaviours in Cyprus, Spain, Slovenia, Italy, Greece, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bulgaria.

Promoting green living areas in the Mediterranean

The 'Green Living Areas Mission' is dedicated to improving life in the Mediterranean by creating green living spaces. This mission supports projects that help communities develop in environmentally friendly ways, reducing climate impact and enhancing resilience.



The staff of the project NUDGES in a working session.

Two main projects manage this mission:

1. Thematic Community Project: This project helps build a network among related projects and supports resource sharing and technical strategy development.
2. Institutional Dialogue Project: This project focuses on improving policies by fostering dialogue between policymakers and stakeholders.

greener areas, engaging citizens, and launching the Institutional Dialogue Process.

This event was a significant step in amplifying the efforts of the community to promote green living and make a real impact on climate change. By working together and changing our behaviours, we can create a more sustainable future for everyone.

A gathering for change

On April 10-11, 2024, the 'Green Living Areas Mission' Thematic Community met in Turin, Italy. This was their first in-person meeting, aimed at finding ways to work together. During the first day, the event focused on building the community with introductions, workshops, and networking. The second day was open to the public, featuring the exchange of best practices for creating



INTERVIEW - Evdokia Balamou, Lead Partner of the project

What is the clear targeted initiative that aims the project?

The NUDGES project is all about speeding up the shift towards eco-friendly behaviours. We're testing 'nudging' techniques to help people make greener choices in their daily lives. This involves designing decision-making processes in urban climate policies for local, regional, and national authorities. We're focusing on cities in seven Mediterranean countries to show how we can use local differences and cultural similarities to make these strategies work.

What strategies do you suggest to effectively address the challenge of changing unsustainable behaviours?

To make it easier for people to adopt sustainable habits, we need to create climate nudges that are exciting and engaging. These nudges will be tailored to local cultures and daily activities like healthy eating, physical activity, mobility, recycling, and using sustainable products. The goal is to show that we can make real changes in a fun and impactful way.

Why is this project significant?

This project is crucial because it will provide six proofs of concept through experimental pilots. Five

of these pilots will explore how collective sensory experiences (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) can influence behaviour, while the sixth will focus on engaging the younger generations.

Our multifaceted approach aims to:

1. Bridge the gap between climate-responsible attitudes and behaviours in the Mediterranean.
2. Offer policy insights on using climate nudges as alternatives to regulations and financial incentives, promoting ecosystem change and community resilience.
3. Generate evidence on the role of cultural and behavioural factors in making nudging strategies more effective.

We believe that lasting change is only possible with the active support and consent of citizens. By making these behavioural changes enjoyable and engaging, we can achieve our climate goals together.



Key elements of the project

1. Six proofs of concept have been collected, based on results from six experimental pilots, in 27 months of project duration.
2. Focus on new generations: the project ensures the involvement and education of younger populations.
3. Sensorial experiences: Five of the six pilots will explore how collective experiences involving sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch can influence behaviour.


NUDGES


**Interreg
Euro-MED**


 Co-funded by
the European Union

Bridging the gap between climate attitudes and behaviours in the MED population.

Educating MED policymakers about the potential effectiveness of climate nudges as tools for change.

Offering evidence of the cultural and behavioural factors that influence the effectiveness of nudging strategies.


Total budget
 € 599 940


Project duration
 27 months


Interreg Funds
 € 479 952










The poster of the project NUDGES.

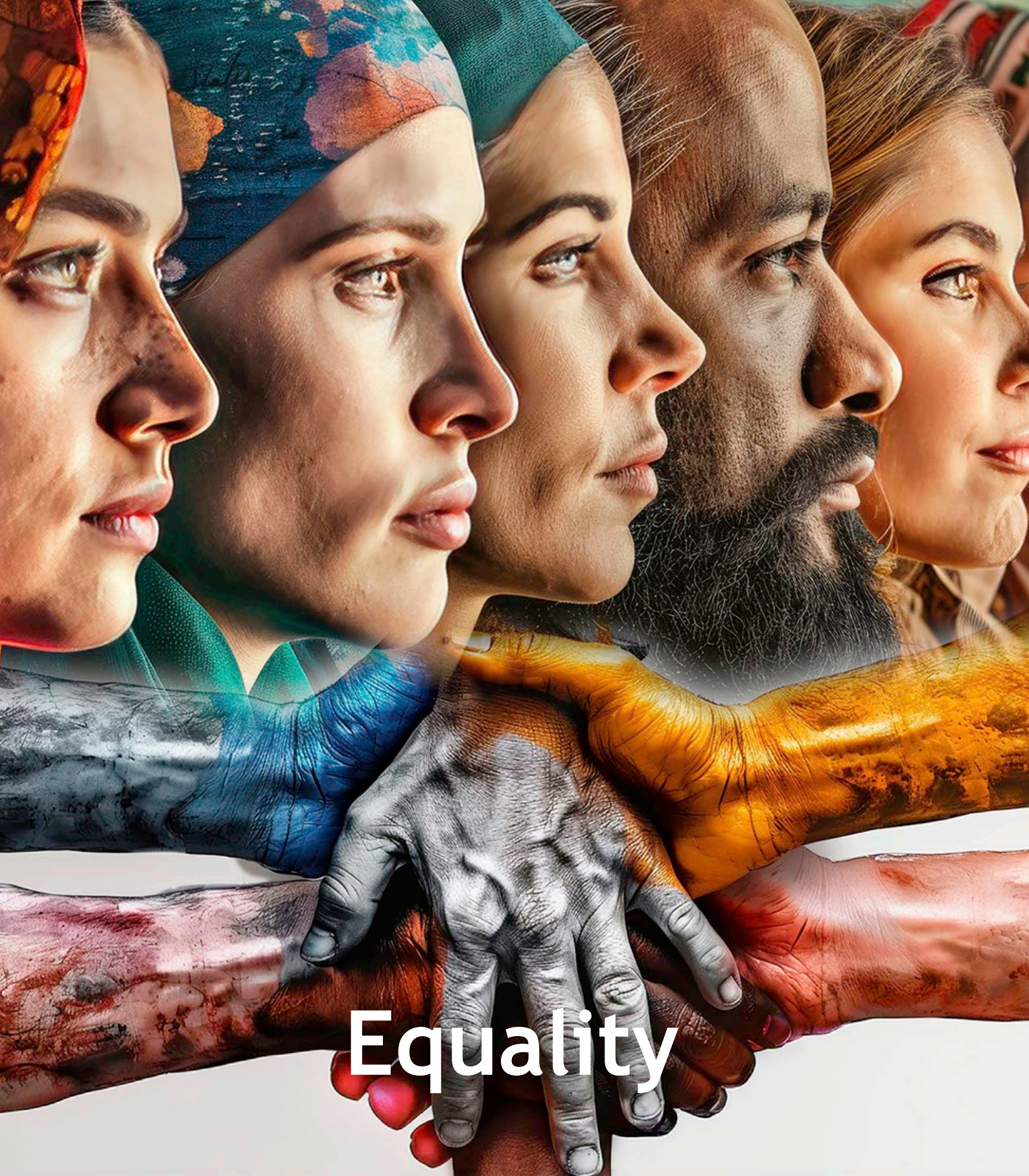
More information:

<https://green-living-areas.interreg-euro-med.eu/>



María Belén Benzaquén

- **Age:** 29
- **Nationality:** Italian and Argentinian
- **Region where you are deployed:** Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (France)
- **Write three words that define 'European cooperation' for you:** opportunity, friendship, diversity.



Equality



OMNIS: Discover a new era of accessible travel

This project offers tourism packages for travelers with special needs, such as the visually impaired people with guide dogs

Blind dinner experience at the Focus Group, December 2023 in Cagli (Marche Region).

By Emma Magistri

Have you ever thought that visiting cultural sites and points of interest in another region can be a real challenge for some travelers? Did you know that some of them don't feel that travelling is 'a pleasure' but quite the opposite? To help these people with special needs who travel with dogs or other pets, the cooperation programme Interreg Italy-Croatia has launched the project OMNIS.

This initiative is set to transform the travel experience in coastal and inland areas of Italy and Croatia. By developing inclusive, sustainable, and digital tourism itineraries, this project aims to foster a seamless and enriching experience for tourists, especially those traveling with pets, including guide dogs. The ultimate goal is to drive sustainable economic growth and promote social inclusion within local communities.

In an innovative move, OMNIS partners have issued a call for ideas, inviting tourism stakeholders to contribute insights on accessible and sustainable points of interest, itineraries, and attractions in the Catria and Nerone Mountain Union and the Split-Dalmatia Region. During the events they organised, it emerged that it is not that difficult to offer services for people with disabilities and I think this is a very important and useful thing to underline. This initiative seeks to harness local expertise, gathering "hyperlocal" information to create a vibrant and inclusive tourism experience.

Key objectives include identifying potential accessibility challenges at these sites and promoting sustainable practices that align with



Focus Group to validate the 10 travel themes, December 2023 in Cagli (Marche Region).



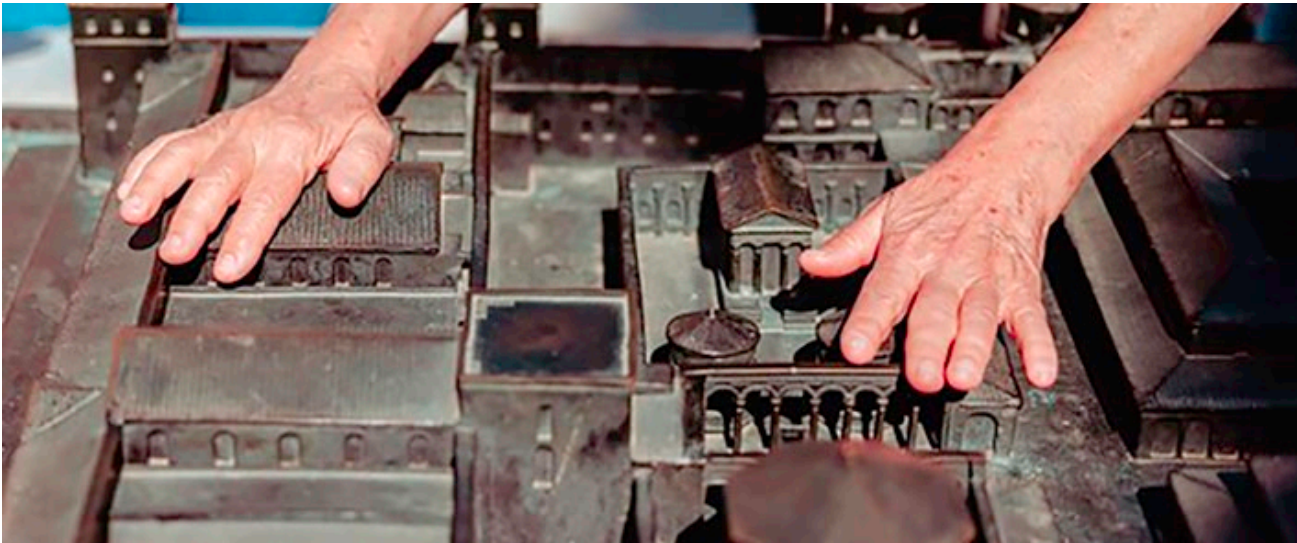
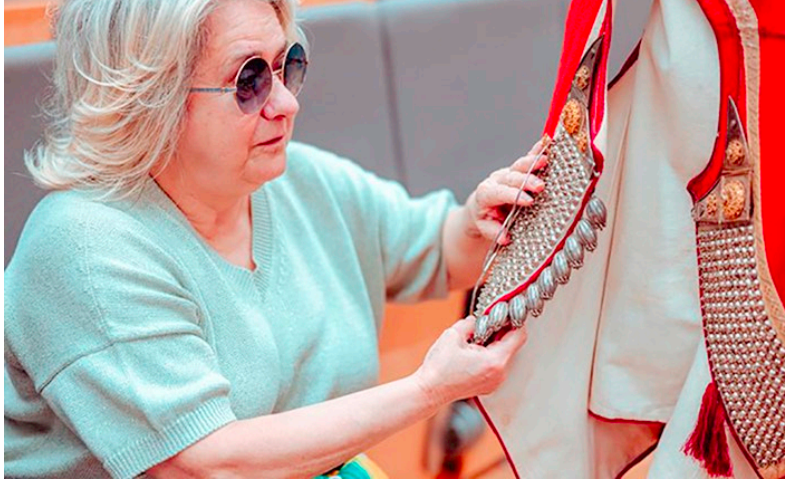
Sopanik - traditional dish workshop with OMNIS tourists and their dogs.

the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. By addressing these barriers, this project is committed to ensuring that every traveler can fully enjoy their journey.

But OMNIS isn't just about enhancing the travel experience—it's about going even a step further.

By promoting collaboration and inclusivity, the project aims to shift the behavior of tourism operators, creating balanced tourist flows and benefiting local communities. Central to this mission is creating online resources and a community platform designed to support niche markets, particularly travelers with special needs. How does it sound?

In the end, this cooperation approach blends inclusivity, sustainability, and equality for all, fostering economic growth while ensuring that tourism is accessible to everyone, especially vulnerable individuals. OMNIS is dedicated to breaking down the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from enjoying travel to the fullest. By raising awareness and encouraging collaboration among industry stakeholders, the project envisions a more inclusive and vibrant tourism market.



Tactile experience during the Split Exchange Visit, May 2024.

Accessibility for all: a crucial aspect sometimes overlooked

Accessibility is a vital yet often overlooked element in the tourism sector. This oversight largely stems from a lack of awareness and collaboration among key tourism stakeholders. Accessible tourism aims to remove the barriers that prevent people with disabilities or special needs from fully enjoying travel experiences. By prioritizing accessibility, we can promote sustainable offerings, enhance visitor experiences, and create more inclusive and resilient destinations.

When tourism integrates both sustainability and accessibility, it significantly contributes to equitable and responsible development. This approach

ensures that everyone can enjoy the beauty of our planet in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Currently, there are gaps between the tourism industry and vulnerable groups due to a lack of collaboration. To bridge these gaps, it is essential to unify individual efforts into a cohesive strategy and communication framework. By doing so, we can cultivate a more inclusive, responsible, and enduring tourism industry. This collective effort not only fosters equitable and responsible economic and social development and ensures the preservation of natural and cultural resources for future generations.



Visit to an olive oil farm with OMNIS tourists.

Accessibility in tourism

Accessibility in tourism refers to creating environments, services, and tourist offerings that are usable by everyone, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities. The goal is to ensure that all people, including those with disabilities or special needs, can fully enjoy tourist experiences. There are different types of accessibility in this sector:

- **Physical Accessibility:** Related to infrastructure and transport.
- **Sensory Accessibility:** Includes visual and auditory information.
- **Assistive Technology:** Devices and applications that facilitate access to tourist information for people with sensory disabilities.
- **Cognitive Accessibility:** Refers to information presented in simple and accessible language.
- **Digital Accessibility:** Ensuring digital platforms are accessible. All these contribute to the creation of Inclusive Tourist Experiences that can be enjoyed by everyone, such as accessible guided tours, adapted sports, and cultural routes that consider different needs.

More information:

<https://www.risposteturismo.it/omnis-project/>



Emma Magistri

- **Age:** 26
- **Nationality:** Italian
- **Region where you are deployed:** Venice, Veneto (Italy)
- **Write three words that define 'European cooperation' for you:** inclusivity, implementation, collaboration.



Promoting inclusive growth in the Italy-Austria border

The Strategy HEurOpen supports cooperation in these regions through the funding of cultural, social and economic projects that can reduce cross-border differences

Fusine lakes.

By Lisa Adami

What is HEurOpen? It's the acronym of the three local action groups or LAG (Open Leader, Euroleader and Region Hermagor) that promote the Strategy with the same name, involving regions of two countries: by the Italian side, Gemonese, Canal del Ferro, Val Canale and Carnia territories (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region) and by the Austrian side, the Hermagor-Presegger See area and the Gailtal. Most of the area is covered by forests, rich in a variety of animals and plants. Due to the importance of the natural environment, a quarter of the HEurOpen area falls within protected areas.

Local communities lead to real cross-border development

Funded by the Interreg Italy - Austria programme, the first Strategy 2014-2020 was approved in 2016 because of the work of the three local action

groups, located in the northeastern most border area between Italy and Austria. This Strategy was written based on analysis and indications from cross-border workshops, which took place between 2017 and 2019 to promoting innovative, sustainable and inclusive growth through integrated cross-border actions shared with local actors.

It was the first strategy written and implemented with a community-led local development (CLLD) approach. In other words, CLLD translates to a bottom-up approach to local development that involves citizens at the forefront of managing activities and decision-making processes. And this is key to promoting equality within society and making citizens voices really heard.

The Strategy acts through funding small projects (3.000-50.000 euros) and medium projects



Grazing cow.

(50.001-200.000 euros) proposed and developed by at least one Austrian partner and one Italian partner.

During the 2014-2020 programming period, 28 projects were implemented, of which 16 were small projects and 12 medium-sized projects in the field of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the cross-border area.

Learning from the past

One of the main challenges with the HEurOpen 2014-2020 Strategy was managing the differences between the two regions involved. These were cultural and geographical differences between the Italian and Austrian approaches to work amplified by the difficulty of understanding each other. Moreover, the Italian area was much larger than the Austrian area (42 on the Italian side and 9 on the Austrian side).

Therefore, the local action groups often had difficulties finding cross-border partners, especially in the Austrian area. In order to be

able to find more project partners and expand the area of action, in the new Strategy HEurOpen 2021-2027 the Austrian area has been reviewed including 6 more municipalities, bringing it to 15.

Despite the problems from the past strategy, and thanks to the experience gained and the relationships created, the new HEurOpen Strategy 2021-2027 was approved in 2022.

The aim of the new Strategy 2021-2027 is to contribute to addressing common cross-border challenges in these areas:

- innovation and enterprises
- climate change and biodiversity
- sustainable and cultural tourism
- reducing cross-border administrative barriers

Taking into account previous experiences, the final goal is to increase the level of integration between partners and to let local communities experience the benefits of working together.



INTERVIEW - BARBARA MATELLON - Manager at LAG Open Leader

1. What are the main advantages of cross-border cooperation in your opinion?

The main objective of cross-border cooperation is to find joint solutions to common challenges. Impactful ideas, projects, and strategies can better emerge from exchanges, mutual knowledge, and shared experiences.

Cooperation is perhaps more difficult in the HEurOpen area than in other areas. First and foremost, there are marked differences between the Carinthian and Friulian areas in language, which makes daily communication extremely complex and tiring. However, it is precisely from diversity that the greatest synergies and added values can arise.

All projects that are funded under the Strategy must demonstrate that they have real cross-border added value. They must demonstrate how the joint implementation of project activities enables direct benefits and open opportunities that can only be grasped from a cross-border perspective and not from a national, regional, or local approach.

The challenges we face are considerable (environmental, economic and social challenges). Through joint planning, we will have a better chance of finding appropriate answers both by systemizing experiences already implemented and enabling their replication in similar areas, and by seeking new solutions, but together!

2. What lessons have you learned with your team and your region?

When the LAG Region Hermagor, the LAG Open Leader and the LAG Euroleader started to work for creating the Strategy, we first had to create the cross-border collaboration from the ground up our working group.

An additional challenge was the knowledge and understanding of the structures in the respective areas. Since the beginning, it is essential to identify potential project partners and joint project development of the project ideas.

Our working group makes daily efforts to collaboration work between subjects and potential beneficiaries of our projects. We met regularly met online to work together.

During the implementation of the 2014-2020 Strategy, we set as our primary goal to start and intensify cross-border cooperation between the involved areas, by connecting stakeholders in the area and organizing thematic working tables. These opportunities for exchange were later interrupted by the pandemic Covid19 and continued online, with more difficulty, but they made us realize the importance of shared moments and confrontation.

An important lesson we have learned is the importance of believing in these projects and not being discouraged by a somewhat invasive bureaucracy, but always keeping a firm focus on what you want to achieve.

3. Where do you see the HEurOpen area in 2030?

It is clear that we will not be able to break down all the obstacles of cross-border cooperation alone. However, I like to think that in 2030, at the conclusion of the 2021-2027 programming period, the HEurOpen area will have its own identity. There will be strong cross-border partnerships that are able to plan and work together on project solutions that can become a driving force for the development of the area.



LAG's staff and stakeholders in Hohenthurn - Energy focus group, June 2023.

IMPACT IN NUMBERS:

- **58 municipalities** involved, **28** in the LAG Euroleader, **15** in LAG Open Leader, 15 in LAG Region Hermagor
- **101.600 inhabitants** in the HEurOpen area (hay una foto sobre esto)
- **3.692,4 km** of territory covered by the HEurOpen Strategy
- **1120 people** involved in the HEurOpen activities so far
- **16 small projects** approved, funding amounts to about **€ 610.523,00**
- **12 medium projects** approved, funding amounts to about **€ 1.870.758,00**
- **8 workshops** with the local communities in 2014-20 programming period
- **7 focus groups** with the stakeholders for setting up the new Strategy 2021-27
- **4 focus groups** with the local communities in 2021-27 programming period... and more and more to be organized.

More information:

<https://heuroopen.eu/>



Lisa Adami

- **Age:** 23
- **Nationality:** Italian
- **Region where you are deployed:** Pontebba, Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy)
- **Write three words that define 'European cooperation' for you:** communication, challenges, growth.



Human dignity

Sustainable tourism and human dignity: building a better future for all

Dialogue4Tourism promotes innovative policies for greener, smarter and more resilient travel industry in the Mediterranean

By Georgios Karapatouchas

In a world where travel has become more accessible than ever, the tourism industry holds immense power to influence both the environment and communities around the globe. The Interreg project Dialogue4Tourism, funded by the programme Euro-MED, works in that direction and aims to transform tourism making it greener, smarter and more resilient. Embracing the fourfold approach of the mission: circularity of tourism services, environmental neutrality, sustainable ecosystem services, and cultural and natural preservation of resources.

Human dignity and human rights in tourism

Sustainable tourism must champion equality and accessibility for all travelers. Access to

monuments, museums, beaches, and other tourist attractions should be inclusive, particularly for people with disabilities. Enhancements such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms make these spaces more navigable for everyone.

Providing information in formats like Braille or audio guides also enriches the experience for visitors with visual or hearing impairments.

To further promote cultural heritage accessibility, free admission for students, children, and the



Accessible ramp for people with special needs as regards mobility.



The kick-off meeting of the project.

unemployed is recommended, alongside family packages.

The role of sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism strives to minimize negative impacts while maximizing positive benefits for the environment, economy, and local communities. This broad field encompasses eco-tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, and more. The positive impacts of sustainable tourism can be categorized into resource conservation and economic benefits.

Resource conservation

Sustainable tourism practices promote the conservation of natural resources such as water and energy through eco-friendly accommodations and waste reduction initiatives. Additionally, these practices help protect biodiversity by reducing impacts on wildlife and natural habitats and combat pollution in oceans and coastal areas by

addressing issues like plastic waste and water contamination.

Economic benefits

Sustainable tourism engages local communities in the planning and decision-making processes, ensuring their needs and perspectives are heard. This empowerment fosters greater social cohesion and stability. By promoting and respecting local traditions and cultural heritage, sustainable tourism helps preserve cultural identities.

In conclusion, integrating human rights and dignity into sustainable tourism ensures that tourism development is ethical, equitable, and respectful of local cultures and environments. This approach not only enhances the well-being of all stakeholders but also supports the long-term viability and resilience of the tourism industry. Sustainable tourism rooted in human dignity creates a more just and inclusive global community.



Waste from tourism in the seas.

On a more personal note...

I am deeply grateful for the incredible opportunity to contribute as a volunteer at Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY). This experience has not only allowed me to collaborate within a dynamic team environment but also provided invaluable insights into European projects while connecting me with inspiring individuals brimming with innovative ideas.

My hosting institution, the European Public Law Organization (EPLO), stands as an intergovernmental organisation dedicated to championing circular and sustainable practices, fostering the integration of circular economy principles across all policy domains. As a proud partner of the project Dialogue4Tourism, EPLO assumes crucial roles, in which I have been involved.

In this sense, I have helped to spearhead the communication efforts to showcase and disseminate transformative tourism solutions, and I have contributed to leading advocacy and policy initiatives underscoring EPLO's commitment to driving meaningful change on the global stage.

INTERVIEW - Alexia Spyridonidou

Dialogue4Tourism Technical Project Manager

In what ways do you believe this initiative contributes to community improvement?

Dialogue4Tourism is what we call a 'governance' project and it lasts 7 years. Its primary goal is to mainstream sustainable practices in all sectors of tourism with the aim of safeguarding the natural and cultural capital, making tourism destinations more resilient to climate change, and supporting the 'Just transition' towards a climate neutral and circular economy.

All this might seem 'environment oriented', but there's a strong social component behind the word 'just'. The 'transition' has economic, environmental, social, and cultural impacts directly affecting communities. For this transition to be 'just', communities must be at the heart of this process to shape long-lasting initiatives that safeguard their resources, ensure inclusivity, provide opportunities for declining professions while creating space for new ones, and, most importantly, protect vulnerable groups who are most affected by climate change, over tourism and various crises.

Our project addresses these issues by adopting a multi-level governance approach, enhancing interaction across different governance levels, from local to national and even EU levels. By involving citizens, stakeholders, and vulnerable groups, the project ensures collaborative advocacy efforts, making them the voice of the future of tourism in the Mediterranean.

How will the durability of the project results be guaranteed?

From the outset, our project successfully brought together over 50 key organizations from both the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, all committed to transforming tourism into a greener, smarter, and more sustainable sector. This coalition includes policymakers from every Mediterranean country, ensuring that the project's outcomes will have lasting impact from their formal

positions. Additionally, our multi-level governance approach, as described before, ensures ongoing engagement and true transformation. Early involvement and collaborative vision and strategy development have proven essential for achieving meaningful and lasting change.

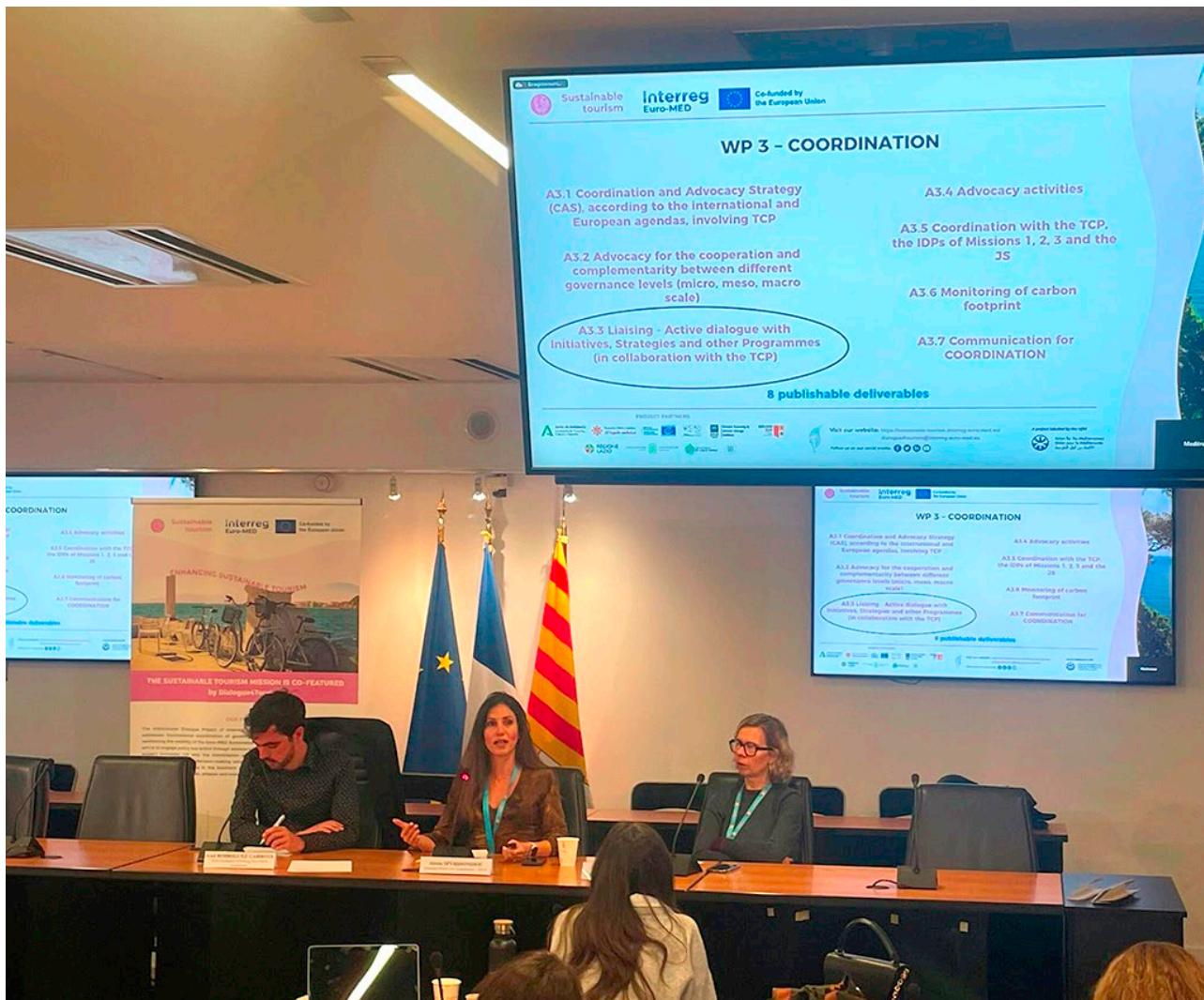
Which are the actions supporting you to achieve your goals?

There are three key structures that will drive the Tourism Transition in the Mediterranean. Firstly, the 'Driving Tourism Transitions Panel' was created; it is a community of over 60 policy makers in the Mediterranean who are committed to leading the tourism transition from their unique position. The panel will be complemented by stakeholders from academia, industry, and the civil society.

Secondly, 'Sustainable Tourism Observatories' that already exist in several Mediterranean countries will be deployed to provide robust data on the status quo for Tourism indicators in their territories. They will also act as hubs and lighthouses of transformation building on their long experience and networks and -most of the time- their formal role in tourism (usually they are part of ministries and regions).

Furthermore, the 'Tourism Leaders Summit' will gather frontrunners, especially influential politicians and other personalities in Tourism representing the bolder, courageous and ready-to-act leaders that will inspire others to follow their example.

Finally, a cross-network alliance is created gathering different programmes, bodies and initiatives in Europe and beyond that are supporting territorial cooperation, innovation, and scale-up of solutions for sustainable tourism. The goal of this alliance is to improve the alignment of their programs to increase the impact on their beneficiaries. Concrete cooperation (for instance, in the framework of joint funding calls) is already discussed among Interreg Euro-Med and other programmes.



Alexia Spyridonidou, responsible for the coordination of the project.

More information:

<https://sustainable-tourism.interreg-euro-med.eu/>



Georgios Karapatouchas

- **Age:** 19
- **Nationality:** Greek
- **Region where you are deployed:** Athens, Attica Region (Greece)
- **Write three words that define 'European cooperation' for you:** collaboration, unity, trust.



Ensuring dignified elderly care: the CrossCare projects

This initiative has developed a joint model for integrated and personalised elderly care in Italy and Slovenia

By Luka Čavdek

When we think about today's Europe, we stumble across many topics that are divisive, such as migration, war engagement, welfare policies, or green transition, just to name some of them. One interesting point that hasn't been really the focus of public debate is how to guarantee an equal and humane elderly care.

According to the latest **EUROSTAT** report (February 2024) the demographic trends that many European states share aren't really promising. Europe faces a demographic challenge with a declining birth rate and a growing population aged 65 and over. Addressing this issue head-on, the project CrossCare (2014-2020) and CrossCare 2.0 (2021-2027), funded by the Interreg Italy-Slovenia programme, are pioneering solutions to improve elderly care.

Many of us know someone—a friend, parent, or grandparent—struggling with the challenges of aging. Imagine how the innovative results of the

CrossCare projects could enhance their daily lives. The CrossCare initiative tackles common challenges in the ageing population across the Italy-Slovenia region. The primary goal is to foster cooperation between public authorities and operators from both countries. A standout achievement of CrossCare is the development of a joint model for integrated and personalized elderly care.

For many elderly individuals and their families, deciding to move into a retirement home is heart-wrenching. Leaving a home filled with cherished memories is never easy. CrossCare offers an alternative by creating a care model that maximizes existing local services, allowing the elderly to remain at home longer. How? By providing a model of elderly care that allows to take advantage of all services present in the area, and are meant to ease the care of elderly in at their homes and postpone the need for retirement homes.



CrossCare 2.0 shows the results that will be achieved to help shape a better and more equal social welfare.

A unique approach to make the elderly active participants in their daily care

This joint model includes the establishment of Elderly Service Points (PSA), located in retirement homes partnered with CrossCare. These centers create individual care plans tailored to each elderly person's needs. The process begins with an introductory talk and a home visit to assess the elderly person's condition and needs. Care managers, trained during the CrossCare project, guide families in activating relevant services to improve the elderly person's situation.

A unique aspect of this model is its long-term sustainability. It focuses on making the elderly active participants in their care decisions. This approach helps keep them engaged and mitigates feelings of being a burden.

The integrated and personalized care model was tested during the CrossCare project, benefiting 120 elderly individuals and their families. The

positive results were shared in the project's final stages, with the hope of establishing this model as a standard practice across the region and beyond.

Europe's ageing population poses significant challenges to national welfare systems, with a shrinking workforce and fewer taxpayers. However, when formulating policies, it is crucial to remember that elderly people deserve equal and respectful care plans that honour their dignity. While projects like CrossCare may not seem as thrilling as other initiatives, their impact on social welfare is profound.

The CrossCare project, and the forthcoming CrossCare 2.0, aim to create a fairer and more inclusive society, ensuring that every elderly person receives the care and respect they deserve. It is true that the ageing population represents a huge challenge for a country's welfare system, the decline in workforce, and people who actively contribute to the tax system are both big talking points. But when we are



The staff of the project CrossCare.

speaking about which policies to introduce and carry out, we should not forget that elderly people have the right to a care plan that is equal for everyone and respects their human dignity.

Unfortunately, projects that tackle such topics are usually perceived as not that appealing and

don't get the same level of attention as projects on other topics. However, I believe that the results achieved by the CrossCare project and results that are going to be achieved in the capitalisation project CrossCare 2.0 could help shape a better and more equal social welfare.



Final event with beneficiaries of the standard project CrossCare.



Kick-off meeting of the project CrossCare.



More information:

<https://www.ita-slo.eu/en/crosscare-20>



Luka Čavdek

- **Age:** 22
- **Nationality:** Slovenian
- **Region where you are deployed:** Friuli-Venzia Giulia (Italy)
- **Write three words that define 'European cooperation' for you:** hope, future, sustainability.

Interact Academy short stories



A story of storytelling in Interact Academy



Nebojsa Nikolic, Interact

Once upon a time, a hopeful project applicant filled out the application form and sent it in a box, along with 1000 pages of other documents. Many years have passed since that fateful deadline rush, but both the project and the programme officers are still using the same dry project description, as if bound to it by some ancient curse.

Sounds scary, right? It looks even worse when a communication expert takes that formal bureaucratic description from the application form and posts it on Facebook, illustrated with a bad photo from a boring meeting.

This is not how we are supposed to communicate with any of our target groups. Even if you are sending a report to the people in the European Commission, it is better if your project description is easy to read and understand. Don't just list the number of park benches you procured within the project. Leave the dry quantitative descriptions for the auditors. Instead, explain how the park benches have helped the local community to enjoy the park better, to get together and socialize. You can tell the whole story with two photos and three words - 'before and after'.

Storytelling doesn't mean that you need to sound like the Brothers Grimm. It doesn't even mean that you must be original or clever at all cost. Storytelling simply means that instead of writing a report about the important things we have done, we can tell a story. How do we do that? Simply put, we can use a few basic writing techniques to make our content relatable and easier to understand.

Within the Interact Academy we have created a thorough storytelling training that teaches exactly that. You can turn your project descriptions into engaging texts that people will actually want to read and, more importantly, retell. Here are some example of such stories, written by our Interreg colleagues. Enjoy the read!

More information about the Interact Academy:
<https://academy.interact.eu>

Shooting for a brighter future

What if we could create an arena for female filmmakers to meet and exchange ideas?



By Ivona Begic, desk officer in the Interreg Sweden-Norway programme

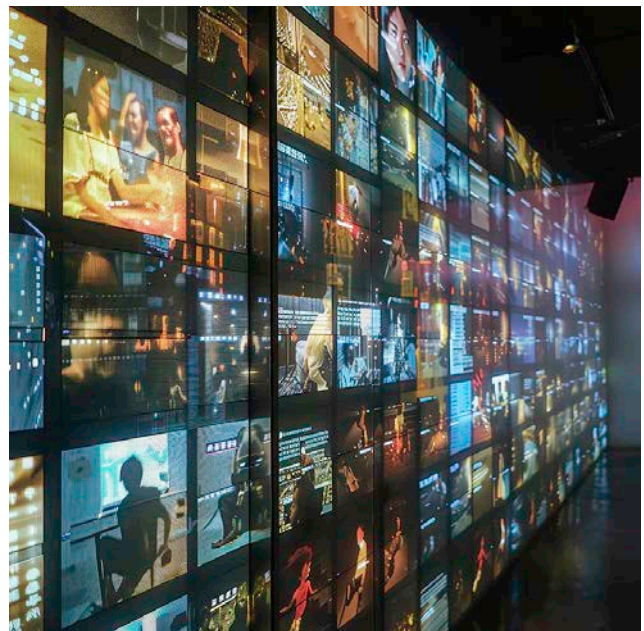
Filmmakers in central-north Sweden and Norway have enhanced their business skills and audience reach through the Mid Nordic Film Export (MNFE) project, supported by Interreg funds. The initiative has offered guidance, networking, and training, building on previous EU-backed efforts. "Mid Nordic Film Export opened new doors to an international network through key industry events and support at festivals," explains Åvard Wettland Gossé, Managing Director of Spætt Film AS.

Around 50 filmmakers or film companies have participated in the project. Thanks to the MNFE support, seven one-person companies turned into larger operations, and 11 people underwent training which enabled them to start their own film businesses. In addition, 36 films reached the national market and 20 were distributed internationally through the project's activities.

The project explored new distribution methods for films from Trøndelag (Norway), and Jämtland and Västernorrland (Sweden), supporting various film producers. Reaching larger markets helped the filmmakers showcase their work to a much wider audience. The greater recognition and visibility

should help project participants secure more funding and wider support for their future ventures.

MNFE's ongoing education initiatives will further strengthen cross-border filmmaking, building on successful collaboration between Film Västernorrland, Filmpool Jämtland, and Midtnorsk Filmsenter, funded by the Interreg programme Sweden-Norway.



A blend of exotic and local flavors: Omar's recipe for a more inclusive society

The 'See Me In' project helps migrant entrepreneurs to start their own business in central Europe



By Claudia Neri, programme assistant and communication officer in the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE programme



In the bustling city of Freiburg, Omar is a Syrian migrant with a passion for traditional cuisine. With over two decades of experience in gastronomy, he's determined to share the flavors of his home country with the locals while adding his own unique twist. However, starting his own business proves to be a challenging task. It requires not only culinary expertise, but also managerial skills and local connections.

Omar's journey is just one of many captured in the 'See Me In' project, an initiative that aims to support migrant entrepreneurs in Central European cities. Through the Intercultural Hub, an online platform that offers training, mentoring, and digital support tools, Omar gains access to valuable resources that equip him with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in his market. He also benefits from coaching and networking opportunities provided by public and private agencies, which help him build relationships with local suppliers and customers.

As the 'See Me In' project progresses, Omar and his fellow entrepreneurs continue to learn and grow. They're featured in the Culinary Treats Cookbook, a collection of recipes from migrants

working in the gastronomy business. The cookbook not only showcases their delicious creations, but also tells the personal stories behind each dish, highlighting the diversity and richness of their cultures.

Over a period of three years, this initiative has reached 168 small and medium enterprises in Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Germany, and Slovenia with a total of 160 persons trained and 600 attending events. Throughout the project, we witness the struggles and successes of migrant entrepreneurs like Omar in a context of global and social changes. We see how they contribute to their communities by bringing new ideas and flavors to the table, challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusion.

Omar is now running a successful catering service & food truck in Freiburg. His story is just one example of how we can thrive and inspire others, thanks to our talents and the power of cooperation. Check out all the details of this project and don't forget to pay a visit to Omar's food truck next time you are in Freiburg!

SEE ME IN - Interreg (interreg-central.eu)

Boosting youth employment: how the project SAIL is making a difference

What if employers had the right tools to help these
youth people regain their confidence?



*By Simon Kihlgren, head of communication at 'Arvika Näringslivscentrum'
(partner of the Interreg project SAIL)*

Long-term joblessness can hit young people hard, leading to mental health issues and low self-esteem. Both Swedish and Norwegian border towns face similar problems with their workforce and demographics. A growing number of young people are experiencing prolonged unemployment, which is a troubling trend.

But what if employers had the right tools and knowledge to help these young people regain their confidence and find jobs? That's where our project, SAIL, makes a difference. It shakes up the job market and supports systems on both sides of the border, helping young people get back to a manageable daily life and find employment.

Thanks to this initiative, we've developed courses on creating inclusive work environments. These courses are designed to help companies support young people facing complex challenges. Our goal is for businesses to benefit from a broader workforce and foster an inclusive culture.

Through our training, young job seekers can gain new skills in areas like customer service, computer skills, industrial work, and childcare. We're

offering both physical events and digital platforms to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration across sectors and countries. Our website and social media are buzzing with success stories, ideas, and tools for a more inclusive future.

In the first year, we hosted a conference that attracted 160 attendees from organisations that support the unemployed. Out of these, 32 individuals underwent our training in inclusive work culture. Their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn were truly inspiring. Also, we've equipped employers with the knowledge to help young people enter or return to the job market. In the second year, we're focusing on creating even more opportunities for these young individuals to develop the skills they need for employment.



Healthcare access ensured by cross-border Emergency Center

What had been considered impossible in the Czech-Bavarian border region before 2016, is now becoming a routine



By Agnes Schelling, communication officer in the Interreg Bavaria-Czech Republic programme

Breaking your leg is bad enough but enduring a delay in treatment because you happen to have broken it on the wrong side of the border that separates Bavaria and the Czech Republic is even worse. Up until 2016, the Czech and Bavarian emergency services were unable to cross the border.

What did this mean in practice? A complicated path which involved picking up an injured Bavarian patient in the Czech Republic with a Czech ambulance, driving to the nearest border crossing, waiting for the Bavarian ambulance to arrive, loading the Bavarian patient into the Bavarian ambulance, and even taking him/her to a Bavarian hospital.

The solution to this is obvious, right? Ambulances from both sides of the border need to be able to move freely across it and the patient should be treated in the closest hospital. With the help of currently our third Interreg project, we (the Bavarian Red Cross in Cham, in Bavaria, and the emergency services in Pilsen, in the Czech Republic) are making it happen!

We were closely involved in drafting the relevant legislation, we addressed language barriers and



found a way to coordinate our response to emergencies. Also, we coordinate regular cross-border exercises and seminars and offer cross-border internships for our personnel. A further step has been the development of software solutions like an app designed to specifically tackle issues relating to language barriers. This app is used for translation and helps the user identify each country's emergency signs and symbols. Finally, we established a cross-border emergency coordination center, that employs both Czech and Bavarian emergency personnel.

What prior to 2016 had been considered impossible in the Czech Bavarian border region is becoming routine --the patient is picked up by the nearest ambulance and brought to the nearest hospital, independent of nationality. Let's keep on working together to make sure that access to proper healthcare becomes a reality in European cross-border regions.

Transforming medical care: innovations for equitable treatment

The Interreg project Kontiki improves patient safety for everyone, no matter where they live or who they are



By Kristina Axelsson, communication officer in the Interreg Sweden-Norway programme

In Sweden and Norway, many people live far from hospitals. At the same time, the number of elderly and frail individuals needing healthcare is rising, and diseases like heart failure are becoming more common. However, healthcare resources are limited due to staff shortages and fewer people of working age. Often, patients with chronic heart failure who need monitoring end up in distant hospitals, facing long waits.

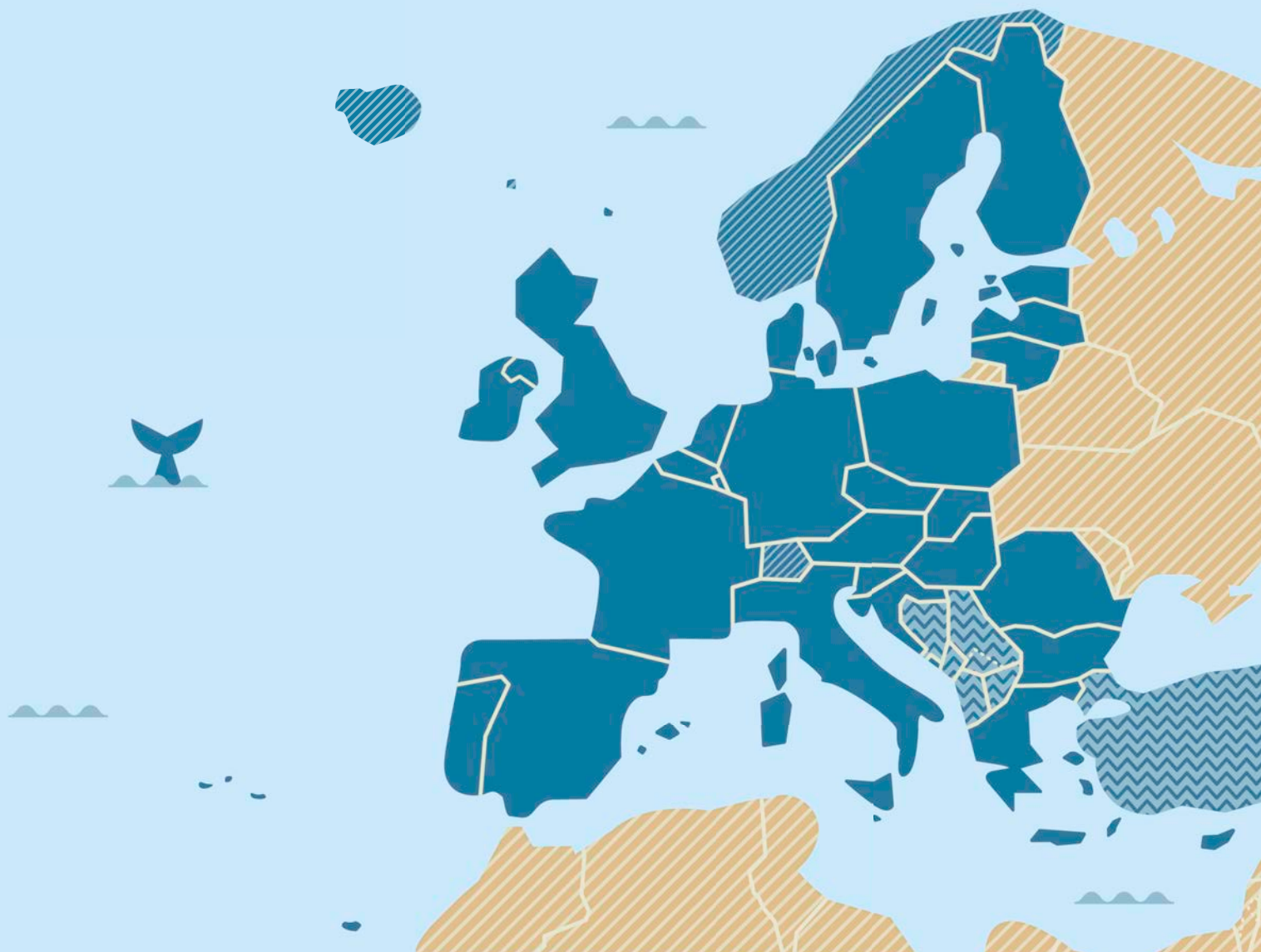
How can we address these healthcare challenges, ensuring that those far from hospitals receive the same treatment while using resources efficiently? Digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) offer a solution. With welfare technology and AI-based decision support, patients can monitor their health at home and contact healthcare professionals as needed, regardless of their location.

Patients with chronic diseases, including heart failure, can use electronic devices like smartwatches or tablets to track their health in real time. These devices can provide instructions on medication adjustments, increasing patients' sense of security and control over their illness, which is crucial for their quality of life.

AI can alert patients when to seek medical attention and automatically direct them to the appropriate clinic, reducing unnecessary hospital visits—a significant benefit for elderly and frail patients. AI learns each patient's symptoms, allowing for personalized care. It helps detect, diagnose, predict, and even prevent acute illnesses or worsening chronic conditions.

AI-based decision support in healthcare enhances patient safety with more accurate and objective diagnoses, freeing up time and resources for healthcare staff. The Swedish-Norwegian Interreg project, Kontiki, aims to make healthcare more equitable and precise. Our vision is to improve patient safety for everyone, no matter where they live or who they are.





Want to read more interesting stories about how Interreg
is benefiting people all over Europe?
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<https://interreg.eu/interreg-highlights/>