

Einhorn B. (2019). **Rock and roll**. Testimony for the European Commission on the contribution of the RockTheAlps project to EUSALP macro-regional strategy, published in the article "*Interreg: the European spirit in action*", PANORAMA, No. 69/Summer 2019 (p. 12).

## “Rock and roll” *in: “Interreg: the European spirit in action” (p. 12)*

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One of the major natural risks in the Alpine area concerns falling rocks resulting from, among others, thawing of the Alps' permafrost. *'Through RockTheAlps, local experiments are now being extended within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region to better integrate the forest ecosystem service in protection against rockfall,'* explains Benjamin Einhorn, director of the French Alpine Centre for Natural Risk Prevention. A new transnational inventory of 10 000 rockfall events is the starting point for creating risk-zone maps based on an analysis and comparison of topographic conditions in the affected regions. This enables the modelling of prevention activities while better managing forest ecosystems to reduce the risk of rockfalls.

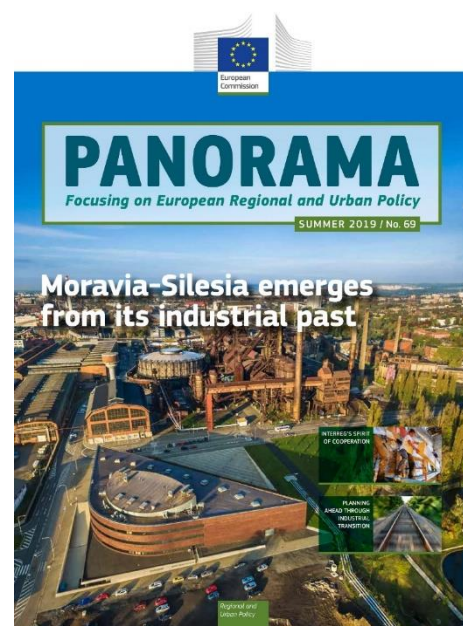
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Project web site:

<https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/rockthealps/en/home>



**Pôle Alpin Risques Naturels**  
Alpine Center for Natural Hazards and Risks Prevention

# Interreg: the European spirit in action



**Interreg transnational cooperation is helping to solve joint challenges and bringing benefits to the citizens in cities and regions across Europe.**

**W**ho ensures that coping with wildfires in the Balkan area, naval accidents in the Baltic Sea, climate change in the Alpine region, air pollution in European metropolises or protecting the biodiversity around the Danube estuary is taken care of? These are not just matters of national concern, which is why it is easy to see why cooperation across national borders and in wider European areas is vital to protect both people and nature. And how does this happen? Well, Interreg transnational cooperation projects are currently helping to solve common challenges such as these.

What about saving energy by adopting new technologies while, at the same time, cutting greenhouse gas emissions? Or testing new solutions for more environmentally friendly yet accessible transport infrastructure in cities and remote areas? The best way is to talk to your neighbours: working together and exchanging knowledge saves everyone time and money. However, what works around the Mediterranean is not necessarily the best solution for central European regions.

Interreg transnational cooperation also delivers territorial cohesion. As an entrepreneur, you may have an idea for a new product but are unable to find a forum to discuss it or a laboratory to test it. Providing access to and sharing innovation infrastructure in wider circles can prove very useful. Interreg cooperation helps identify such opportunities, enhances access to research, and prepares small and medium-sized enterprises for conquering global markets.

## **Added value**

Transnational cooperation projects bring together people from the public sector, research and academic institutions as well as businesses and civil society organisations from different countries. Matters of joint concern motivate them to get engaged in transnational cooperation to help build trust across borders and foster European integration.

Fifteen transnational programmes have been set up across Europe with EUR 2.1 billion provided by the EU's budget for 2014-2020. Transnational cooperation brings added value to citizens as well as to businesses across EU regions. It demonstrates a pragmatic approach to delivering a safer, greener, smarter, more connected and prosperous European Union.



Transnational cooperation, in the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), gives an important dimension to territorial cooperation. It allows us to look at our continent from a wider strategic perspective, allowing us to better identify the opportunities and challenges our citizens, our administrations and our businesses face on a daily basis. I believe that a lot was done, and a lot can still be done in Europe through transnational projects, in that way bringing our continent closer together in a meaningful and strategically sound way.

*Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the Committee of the Regions*

## TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION HELPS MAKE MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES WORK

A macro-regional strategy is an integrated framework, endorsed by the European Council, whereby countries and regions in a defined geographical area address their common challenges that cannot be solved in isolation but require transnational cooperation.

### Currently, there are strategies for four macro-regions:

- > Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR)
- > Danube region (EUSDR)
- > Adriatic-Ionian region (EUSAIR)
- > Alpine region (EUSALP)

### How transnational Interreg programmes support the strategies:

- > Interreg transnational projects actively contribute to the strategies' goals and actions. In return, they benefit from political backing and higher visibility.
- > Transnational programmes are one of the funding opportunities for implementation of the strategies.
- > Transnational programmes notably support governance of the strategies through a number of measures, ranging from financing the priority area coordinators to organising events with stakeholders and promoting the strategies.

*“When you see that other people see the same opportunities, face similar problems and find ways to overcome that, and come to not quite the same but similar conclusions on what to do next, it empowers us to say this is the way it is, it shows up in every country.”*

*RemoAge project partner, Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme*

## THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

When faced with natural catastrophes, accidents affecting larger geographical areas, the impact of climate change or biodiversity decline it is obvious that cooperation beyond borders is the most efficient way to protect the common European good.

On average, wildfires destroy about 4000 square kilometres of EU territory every year, exerting a devastating impact on ecosystems, human health and the climate. Furthermore, longer dry seasons are turning fields and forests into fuel for fires.

Interreg project partners from neighbouring countries are joining forces to assess and respond to risks, and to protect the affected areas more efficiently. For example, an online service developed by the **DriDanube** project is monitoring droughts and issuing warnings in a timely manner in 10 countries across the Danube region. 'Setting up the dialogue between different stakeholders at a national or regional level brings better understanding of the problem. We are better prepared by acting together,' says Zorica Srđević from the Faculty of Agriculture at Serbia's University of Novi Sad. An inter-institutional management strategy frames cooperation among national authorities, farmers and water managers before, during and after drought events, not only for exchanging information but also for conducting joint interventions, when necessary.

### From crisis to risk management

'Forest fires are an endemic with incalculable consequences on the environment and population. That is why we need a common space to manage emergencies, where we can help each other, promoting both the culture of solidarity and transnational cooperation,' says Juan José Muñoz Iglesia, head of the fire prevention service in Deza Galicia, Spain.

Thanks to the Interreg project **Fire RS Territories**, France, Spain and Portugal are now better monitored for potential wildfires. In practice, a Spanish satellite, Portuguese

drones and a French control centre work together in a system that detects forest fires in wider cross-country areas. Another Interreg tool, **WRF-SFIRE**, analyses weather conditions – wind, temperature and humidity – to inform rescue services and communities in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece about the paths fires might take. The system developed by the Interreg project **DISARM** has been taken up by public services following a successful pilot during fires in Greece in summer 2018.

Apart from pooling services and tools developed transnationally, an important aspect of coping with crisis situations is aligning operating procedures, which was proved, for example, during the Italian Costa Concordia cruise ship's fatal accident in 2012. Now, with support from the Interreg project **DiveSMART-Baltic**, rescue coordination centres in Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden use the same standard operating procedures and situation reports to respond to emergencies better and faster in the shared waters of the Baltic Sea.

### Rock and roll

One of the major natural risks in the Alpine area concerns falling rocks resulting from, among others, thawing of the Alps' permafrost. 'Through **RockTheAlps**, local experiments are now being extended within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region to better integrate the forest ecosystem service in protection against rockfall,' explains Benjamin Einhorn, director of the French Alpine Centre for Natural Risk Prevention. A new transnational inventory of 10000 rockfall events is the starting point for creating risk-zone maps based on an analysis and comparison of topographic conditions in the affected regions. This enables the modelling of prevention activities while better managing forest ecosystems to reduce the risk of rockfalls.

### Growing biodiversity in EU farmlands

Interreg projects are also addressing the biodiversity crisis. One example is the **PARTRIDGE** project which proves that transnational cooperation can help to reverse the alarming decline in European farmland biodiversity. Using a bottom-up approach, farmers in the North Sea



region are turning 7% of their arable land into flower plots and beetle banks to benefit wildlife. The project has attracted significant interest thanks to the close cooperation among over 300 farmers, hunters, conservationists and local volunteers from five countries. Indeed, there are promising signs that birds and insects are returning to the sites less than two years later. The EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan and policymakers joined the iconic PARTRIDGE farm walks to learn how the measures, which have already been adopted by Dutch agri-environment schemes, work. 'I believe that we farmers should work with, and not against, nature,' says Oliver Mehuys, a Flemish farmer and a pilot site owner referring to the cooperation in the project.

A more biodiverse and safer EU is what every citizen would opt for. By cooperating beyond borders, Interreg is enabling a joint response to common challenges, and bringing this vision closer to the people.

**DriDanube (Danube):**

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/dridanube>

**FireRS (South-West Europe):**

<https://www.enerpatsudoe.fr/>

**DISARM (Balkan-Mediterranean):**

<http://www.interreg-balkanmed.eu/approved-project/16/>

**DiveSMART-Baltic (Baltic Sea):**

<https://projects.interreg-baltic.eu/projects/divesmart-baltic-4.html>

**RockTheAlps (Alpine Space):**

<https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/rockthealps/en/home>

**PARTRIDGE (North Sea):**

<https://northsearegion.eu/partridge>



*By monitoring rockfalls, experts can create risk-zone maps to better manage forest ecosystems*

## A CHANGE IS ON THE WAY

Three-quarters of the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions come from the energy and transport sectors. This challenge is a driving force for Interreg projects to actively contribute to the climate and energy targets for reducing emissions by 40% until 2030, bringing benefits to citizens in their everyday life.

With a variety of technologies available across the energy chain in Europe, transnational projects are disseminating the benefits of implementing new energy-efficiency technologies around the continent at costs suited to our pockets.

### Saving energy on home comforts

'They brought the solution to where there was a need. I'm saving a lot of money on heating as everything is so much better insulated than before,' says Amélie Goblas from Longueau, northern France. Amélie is part of one of the families benefiting from the **E=O** project which is creating

a market for top-class and affordable net-zero-energy house refurbishments. In these houses, energy consumption is almost equal to energy production. The concept developed in north-west Europe, based on a one-week



*Older town buildings and local housing alike can benefit from eco-renovation and innovative energy-saving techniques*



*Well-insulated windows with shutters save energy and provide for a healthier living space*

smooth implementation, follows a successful model from the Netherlands which delivered 2 000 refurbishments across the country. Thanks to the project, 17 pilot homes in the UK were completely refurbished, enabling the roll-out to over 300 other households. In France, after 22 pilots, 6 500 more homes will be retrofitted.

While net-zero house retrofits seem to be an obvious choice for cutting GHG emissions and contributing to Europe's 2020 climate and energy targets, efficiency in buildings is not restricted to households. For example, the renovation of old town buildings is the focus of **ENER'PAT**, another transnational project which is piloting the renovation of four buildings in Portugal, France and Spain using non-traditional construction materials. 'ENER'PAT allows us to test eco-renovation techniques in buildings. The project also supports exchanges at the EU level, which encourages our commitment and is spreading this ambitious approach to three other cities in south-western Europe,' says Jean-Marc Vayssoze-Faure, Mayor of Cahors, France.



## The mobility challenge

The transport sector accounts for a quarter of GHG emissions, highlighting the need for robust cooperation among regions to improve the efficiency of mobility systems. In central Europe, transport is the second largest energy-consuming sector and the fastest growing in terms of energy use. Thus, new initiatives from Central Europe, the North Sea and Mediterranean areas were put in place to introduce measures addressing the negative effects of urbanisation and growing transport demands.

Thanks to the **RUMOBIL** project, new mobility services are better connecting the sparsely populated peripheral areas, following pilots in eight Central Europe countries. Passengers benefit from info-mobility tools, user-oriented applications, experimental multimodal bus/rail connections and flexible bus services based on community engagement. The results – improved quality of life and an enhanced local economy – are evidenced by new public transport services attracting new passengers. On average, the pilot projects have increased the number of passengers by 13%, with the highest growth of 28% in the Czech region of Vysočina.

Limited mobility and accessibility in cities and remote areas, insufficient links to main transport hubs and high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are considerable challenges for transport infrastructures. As demonstrated by the **SHARE-North** project, Interreg is helping public authorities to improve this situation. It has successfully promoted the concept of shared mobility hubs by offering attractive alternatives to individual car ownership, and spreading the concept from Bremen in Germany to municipalities in Belgium and Norway. Thanks to Interreg, many car-sharing enthusiasts in Bremen have opted either to sell their car or not buy one, resulting in a reduction of over 6000 privately owned cars. This corresponds to saving 25 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over 2.5 years and free urban street space equivalent to more than 10 football pitches!

Another major challenge is to support the uptake and implementation of these pioneering approaches which provide flexible and cleaner mobility options. For instance, this is being addressed by the Mediterranean Urban Transports community of projects which provides solutions in local sustainable urban mobility plans. The community hosts a network of seven projects, implementing pilot

activities in more than 30 Mediterranean cities, ranging from electro-mobility networks and smart mobility systems to tackling traffic congestion generated by tourists' mobility. For example, Misano Adriatico, a tourist town in Italy, adopted a mobility plan thanks to the **MOBILITAS** project. This will cut the daily traffic on mainland roads by 6.2% and on coastline roads by 14.7%, thereby reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 6.6% and 7.5% respectively.



*Cycle paths are helping to reduce the use of cars in Adriatic Misano in the Italian coastal region of Emilia-Romagna*

Interreg proves how strategic work across borders fills a gap for joint activities to improve energy efficiency and access to environmentally friendly and flexible mobility options, while bringing tangible benefits to citizens.

### **E=0 (North-West Europe):**

[www.nweurope.eu/e=0](http://www.nweurope.eu/e=0)

### **ENER'PAT (South-West Europe):**

[www.enerpatsudoe.fr](http://www.enerpatsudoe.fr)

### **RUMOBIL (Central Europe):**

[www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/rumobil.html](http://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/rumobil.html)

### **SHARE-North (North Sea):**

[www.share-north.eu](http://www.share-north.eu)

### **MOBILITAS (Mediterranean):**

[www.mobilitas.interreg-med.eu](http://www.mobilitas.interreg-med.eu)

## IF YOU START ME UP, I'LL NEVER STOP

Setting up a business is challenging and running a successful company even more so. It requires skills, creativity, knowledge and access to financing. In transnational Interreg projects, cities and regions cooperate beyond borders and learn how to better support entrepreneurs at all stages of their business journey.

Small and medium-sized companies represent 99% of all businesses in the EU. They also create around 85% of new jobs and provide two-thirds of private-sector employment in the EU.

But only 37% of Europeans would like to be self-employed, compared to 51% in the US and China. Through Interreg projects, cities and regions are working with education and business support experts across Europe to change

this. They exchange experiences and develop new approaches encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs.

In the **Atlantic Youth Creative Hubs** project, partners have created a transnational platform to empower young creatives. In 'creative jam sessions' they help people aged between 16 and 30 to realise their business ideas from scratch. One example is João, who says that he 'found inspiration, training and coaching for entrepreneurship and learned a lot about brand management'. Today, he is a successful young fashion designer in Portugal. Soon after the jam session he joined the fashion business and the Santo Thyrso factory design incubator in Porto and went on to win the Portuguese New Creators Fashion Contest, making his debut at Portugal's most important national fashion event.

### Helping start-uppers to start

João is proof that an entrepreneurial spirit is important but not enough. Starting a company requires skills and knowledge that young entrepreneurs often lack. The transnational **CERlecon** project is changing this in Central Europe. A new approach to inspire and train young people with business ideas is being tested across eight countries: **PlayParks** are co-working academies that encourage mutual social learning. They help to launch real products such as a natural chewing gum called 'Alpengummi' which is now appearing in supermarkets. 'During our six months at PlayPark Vienna we received valuable feedback and training to develop our business plan,' say founders Claudia Bergero and Sandra Falkner.

### Taking innovation forward

Experience shows that without continuous innovation, even encouraging start-ups like Alpengummi may soon stop thriving. So how can municipalities and research organisations support entrepreneurs to carry on innovating? Thanks to Interreg projects, testing new services such as design workshops anchors research within companies.

'Transnational cooperation provides us with access to the latest research results and business models. In practice,

*Fishermen at work off the picturesque white beaches around Trave di Portonovo near the city of Ancona in Italy*





this helps us to introduce new products to the market,' according to Maciej Bartoszek from Perfectwoodhouse. He is one of many entrepreneurs benefiting from the Interreg **BALTSE@NOIR** project. In design workshops across the Baltic Sea area, the project inspires furniture companies to create smart products adapted to senior needs, such as a mirror displaying personalised messages and a chair measuring blood pressure. All the design methods and tools will be made available in an online library to help companies assess the particular needs of seniors in a given country, adjust their products and facilitate their entry into other markets. At the same time, the integration of new technologies into traditional furniture design has a positive effect on seniors who want to stay independent longer.

This is equally true for other sectors. The **ARIEL** project holds brokering events in the Adriatic-Ionian region to support small-scale fisheries and aquaculture enterprises. Entrepreneurs and researchers jointly search technological and non-technological solutions for the challenges they face. 'If we want more local food production and a competitive European small-scale fisheries and aquaculture sector, fish farmers need to work together with both scientific and business organisations,' says Basilio Ciaffardoni, an Italian fish farmer who profited from one such brokering event.

### Better access to financing

Access to financing is another crucial issue when scaling up businesses and innovation. Florence Gschwend from Chrysalix

Technologies in the UK admits that 'as an early-stage start-up we are always strapped for cash'. Her company is developing an innovative biomass fractionation process using low-cost ionic liquids. Transnational Interreg projects like **BioBase4SME** offer an efficient way of testing new ideas to improve access to financing for such companies. The project developed a voucher system to support the commercialisation of innovations in North-West Europe's emerging bio-economy. 'This coupon helped us to get more value from the funding we have received while connecting us to a highly skilled organisation for our scale-up work,' Florence acknowledges.

#### AYCH (Atlantic Area):

<http://www.aych.eu>

#### CERlecon (Central Europe):

[www.interreg-central.eu/cerleco](http://www.interreg-central.eu/cerleco)

#### BALTSE@NOIR (Baltic Sea):

<https://projects.interreg-baltic.eu/projects/baltsenior-30.html>

#### ARIEL (Adriatic-Ionian):

<https://ariel.adrioninterreg.eu/>

#### BioBase4SME (North-West Europe):

<http://www.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/bio-innovation-support-for-entrepreneurs-throughout-nwe-regions/>

## Interreg Transnational cooperation



### IDEA

At the start-up phase, the AYCH project has developed a platform for training, coaching, business ideas and inspiration.



### START-UP SUPPORT

The essential skills and knowledge to start a company are provided by the CERlecon project.



### TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Entrepreneurs need support to innovate through research, workshops and brokering events, like those organised by ARIEL.



### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Access to finance is crucial to enable businesses and innovation to scale up, as shown by BIOBASE4SME.