The European Union’s Interreg B programmes promote cooperation in transnational cooperation areas. Various German federal states and regions are involved in a total of six Interreg B programmes (Alpine Space, Danube Region, Central Europe, North Sea Region, North-West Europe and Baltic Sea Region). The cooperation programmes focus on themes such as innovation, reducing CO₂ emissions, the environment, transport, climate change and governance. Social, or non-technological, innovations play a key role when it comes to dealing with the consequences of demographic change. Potential project partners include municipalities and regions as well as stakeholders from the fields of business, science and civil society.

In the 2014–2020 funding period, a total of around 1.4 billion euros will be made available from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to projects in the six cooperation areas. Although Interreg projects have less funding at their disposal than other EU funding programmes, they are capable of stimulating innovations and promoting creative pilot approaches. Projects also bring together the strategic and the local implementation level and thereby promote common transnational awareness.

Projects need to include partners from at least three countries (generally from at least two EU Member States). Much bigger consortia are common, though, as, depending on the project topic and problem definition, it often makes sense to involve partners from several countries in a transnational project. The total costs of a typical Interreg project, which usually runs for three years, varies between 1 and 5 million euros. Depending on the programme area, between 15 and 50 per cent of expenditure must be co-financed by the project partners.

Numerous transnational projects in the previous funding period came up with interesting solutions in the thematic field of “social innovation/services of general interest/demographic change”, including products which contribute to a self-determined life in old age, services to support age(ing)-sensitive personnel management in businesses and new networks for shaping the labour market. These themes will be taken forward in the current funding period, some of them with new focal points. At the same time, the requirements on transnational projects have shifted, meaning that they now have to be more result-oriented.

Social innovations – a definition
Social innovations are “new ways of achieving goals, in particular new organisational forms, new regulations, new lifestyles, which change the direction of social change, solve problems more effectively than in the past and which are thus worth copying and institutionalising.” ¹ Another author came up with a similar definition: “Social innovations are, in short, socially consequential regulations which deviate from the traditional ways in which activities and approaches have been regulated. They are possible everywhere in social systems, ultimately they constitute changes in behaviour and are related to, but not the same as, technical innovations.”²

technological innovations, the preconditions for social innovations to arise are scientific progress and practical experience.

The EU applies the same definition of social innovation. According to a paper published by the Bureau of European Policy Advisers in 2010, social innovations are “an effective way of responding to social challenges, by mobilising people’s creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources” and thus go beyond purely technological innovations and at the same time promote innovative and learning societies. The Europe 2020 flagship initiative Innovation Union also describes social innovation as an important area which should be expanded. The flagship initiative defines social innovation as the development of new ideas, services and models for facing up to social challenges. Both public and private players and civil society should contribute to identifying new ways to respond to social challenges to which the public sector has not been able to find suitable solutions. Themes include climate change, healthcare and dealing with the consequences of demographic change (e.g. networks providing neighbourhood assistance to older people who live alone).

Social innovations – a European theme

Demographic change, its consequences and how they are dealt with are important drivers of social innovation in EU policy. First, the declining number of people of working age, the rising number of older and old people and the resulting consequences for the economy, the health and social welfare system, and municipal facilities and offers are addressed in this context. Disadvantaged groups are also addressed. Second, reference is made to the consequences of increasing migration, as a result of which integration and delivering the necessary infrastructures are becoming more pressing issues. The matter of specific spatial impacts, i.e. that demographic change might increase regional inequalities, social polarisation and the environmental impact on certain regions, is also raised.

In this context, social innovations can be very different things. They can be products (e.g. to enable a more self-determined life in old age), services (e.g. to support age(ing)-sensitive personnel management in businesses), different types of practical assistance (e.g. manuals, training materials, coaching and training programmes) or model solutions which take account of social needs and aim to create new social cooperations, often networks.

In the 2007–2013 funding period, Interreg projects contributed to achieving those objectives. The themes addressed ranged from raising awareness for issues in the field of demography, various aspects of securing services of general interest or tapping into the potential of voluntary work to developing sustainable strategies for dealing with demographic change.

For more information go to: www.best-agers-project.eu and www.best-agers-lighthouses.eu/
I-stay@home: Intelligent residential areas using innovative ICT solutions

Against the backdrop of the demographic change which is underway in Europe, this project identified and tested suitable IT-based solutions for people, housing associations, and cities and municipalities which enable older and disabled people to live a self-determined life at home for as long as possible. Particular attention was paid to the areas of safety, health and comfort. The project was able to get housing associations, technical service providers and scientists from North-West Europe for the first time to the table. Key objectives were to offer the general public a Europe-wide catalogue of available systems, to share know-how and to carry out first test runs of suitable assistance systems in selected homes. A platform bundles various technical support available via a tablet PC on a uniform interface and makes it easier for older people to use the equipment. Additional communication and service functions are also made available to those in the target group.

For more information go to www.i-stay-home.eu

SEMPRE: Innovative ideas for social services in rural areas

The partners in the SEMPRE project aim to establish networks at local, regional and transnational level in order to be able to identify, develop and test suitable approaches to empowering the providers and target groups of social services. One important project objective is to enable social service providers as well as disadvantaged groups to better identify needs and, by promoting social entrepreneurship and public–private partnerships, to develop new and innovative offers and services. Sustainable improvements are thus to be made to the living-situation and participation of disadvantaged social groups in rural regions of the Baltic Sea Region. The reason is that infrastructure offers are often lacking in rural areas, especially in the fields of education, health and mobility, as established players are not, or no longer, able to meet these needs. At the same time, small and new players such as neighbourhood initiatives, cooperatives, social enterprises often (still) lack networks and access to funding.

For more information go to www.sempre-project.eu

Funding priorities in current cooperation programmes

Interreg is geared to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU’s ten-year growth strategy. In the 2014–2020 funding period, all transnational programmes are required to become more thematically focused and to select a limited number of themes from among their priorities. To enable diverse account to be taken of themes and projects which address demographic change, the term “innovation” was broadly defined in the Interreg programmes and encompasses both process and social innovations.

All six transnational programmes, in which German partners are involved, were given a new priority axis in the new funding period, namely “promoting innovation in the context of regional development”. Most of the programmes focus on sustainable networks and synergies available in businesses, research and higher education centres, and public administrations (Danube Region, Central Europe, North Sea Region and Baltic Sea Region), better framework conditions for R&D (Alpine Space, Danube Region, Central Europe) and boosting regional innovative capacities (North Sea Region, North-West Europe). However, they also address social or non-technological innovations, which contribute to the delivery of better public services and services of general interest and to developing the social environment. The involvement of various (affected) population groups plays a key role in this.

Alpine Space: The priority “innovative Alpine Space” aims at maintaining services of general interest through social innovations. Projects can, for instance, develop models and implement pilots activities which look at involving social groups in the design and delivery of social services.

Danube Region: Under the priority “innovative and socially responsible Danube Region” as well, non-technological innovations are promoted. They are seen as cross-cutting issues to which special attention is to be paid. Examples include projects which look at meeting social needs in conjunction with demographic change and the ageing population.

Central Europe: Starting points for addressing social innovation can also be found in the “innovation” priority. Examples include developing strategies and instruments for building management capacities in companies (also) as regards social innovation (e.g. health, social inclusion of minorities, older residents) or developing and testing innovative learning sys-
tems in order to be able to meet the challenges of demographic change (e.g. ageing society, youth unemployment, shortage of skilled workers).

**North Sea Region:** The priority “economic growth” also covers the development of innovative solutions to securing services of general interest. Projects can improve know-how regarding public services and identify possibilities for facilitating their delivery by means of (social) innovations. Projects can address the needs for new products and services with regard to common challenges faced (e.g. ageing population, shortage of skilled workers, rural exodus, scarce financial resources). They can also support businesses in developing innovative solutions to securing services of general interest provided by public authorities.

**North-West Europe:** In this cooperation area social innovations are stressed in the priority “innovation”. Projects can, for instance, develop services and products for population groups threatened by exclusion or evolve instruments for meeting the challenges posed by demographic change.

**Baltic Sea Region:** In this cooperation area the priority “innovation” explicitly leaves room for non-technological innovations. The public sector is to be strengthened as a promoter of technological and non-technological innovations and the market launches of innovative products by SMEs are to be promoted. In particular, competences and knowledge bases of the relevant stakeholders are to be improved to that end. More specifically, this can mean creating networks to boost food security or improving older people’s quality of life through IT-based solutions in the health sector.

The advantages of transnational cooperation

Here are just a few good reasons for getting involved in transnational projects:

- As a project partner you will receive significant funding from the EU, and pooling capacities in a project can lead to further cost savings.
- Transnational cooperation means you can benefit from the know-how and expertise of other project partners and get a different perspective on your own challenges. Projects open up the opportunity of simply giving innovative ideas a go.
- Taking part in an EU project focuses greater attention on your project topic and your institution at regional, national and European level – both in the media and in the eyes of political decision-makers. This can help speed up developments and, in the best case, give your image a boost.
- The added social value should not be underestimated either: Taking part in a project shows that you are “living Europe”. You will gain an insight – and thus also an understanding – of other countries, structures and procedures. Networks established with colleagues, institutions and businesses often endure long after the project ends and can lead to better work results even beyond the project term.

Further information

A wide range of information is available on the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development’s Interreg webpage. Besides general information about the Interreg programmes, it provides good examples, a project database, publications and tips on implementation, and lists contacts in your Interreg cooperation area: www.interreg.de

European Territorial Cooperation, better known as Interreg B, is part of the European Union’s structural policy for promoting transnational cooperation in cross-border cooperation areas with the aim to achieve an integrated spatial development.

The Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) publishes information for the specialist audience, supports results transfer, organises a Germany-wide exchange of ideas, represents the Federal Government in programme committees and, on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, supports projects of special interest to the Federal Government as part of the Federal Transnational Cooperation Programme.

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