



Dear Reader,

In 2022, the Interreg programming period 2021–2027 has finally taken off and current developments show: cohesion in Europe is more important than ever. Most programmes have been submitted to the European Commission for approval and the first calls for projects are underway. At the start of the new programming period, the Federal Conference 'Transnational Cooperation of Cities and Regions in Europe: Interreg B 2021 to 2027' on 12 and 13 May 2022 in Berlin provided comprehensive information on the new orientation of the six Interreg B cooperation areas with German participation. On pages 2–3, we will give a more detailed report on the event.

On pages 4 and 5, Dr. Heike Hagedorn, chair of the North Sea Region and North-West Europe Monitoring Committees, will give an interview about the orientation of the two Interreg programmes. In the new programming period, the focus in both programme areas is on the 'green turnaround'. The circular economy also contributes to the European Green Deal. It is considered as a driver of sustainable and resource-saving spatial and regional development and is therefore a new thematic focus of the Interreg programmes 2021–2027 (pages 6 and 7). We will also present five new brochures on the thematic priorities of Interreg B funding opportunities on page 8.

The Interreg Team of the BBSR
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Federal Conference ‘Transnational Cooperation of Cities and Regions in Europe: Interreg B 2021–2027’

Since the 1990s, the transnational cooperation programmes – or in short: Interreg B programmes – have been helping to achieve greater solidarity and cohesion in Europe – a topic that has once again come into focus in view of the current political situation. But why is Interreg so crucial for the European idea? Which topics can be addressed with transnational projects in the current 2021–2027 programming period? What is the added value of Interreg as a funding programme? How are the Interreg B programmes supporting current social and spatial transformation processes? This was the topic of the Federal Conference on ‘Transnational Cooperation of Cities and Regions in Europe: Interreg B 2021–2027’, which took place on 12 and 13 May 2022 at Tagungswerk in Berlin. The Conference was organised by the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR).

More than 200 interested attendees came together to gain a political, technical and practical overview of issues concerning the reorientation of the six Interreg B cooperation areas with German participation. The participants were able to obtain comprehensive information while newcomers to Interreg were very welcome. Personal exchange was particularly important, which was made possible again by this face-to-face event following two years of Covid restrictions.

Interreg programmes strengthening the European idea

On the first day, State Secretary Rolf Bösiinger from the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building welcomed the guests. In his welcome address, he emphasised how, especially during these difficult Covid times and the war in Ukraine, the Interreg B programmes strengthen the European idea by creating places for people to meet and exchange ideas. This is expressed by the many innovative and inspiring projects. ‘Interreg B is the most important instrument for cooperation in Europe’, the State Secretary said. Transnational cooperation brings together stakeholders from different countries: cities and regions, public service providers, universities, associations and companies. Working together, they develop new concepts and strategies and implement them in pilot projects on site.

Managing transformation in European regions

Futurologist Andreas Reiter from ZTB Zukunftsbüro made it clear in his keynote speech: ‘The world is in a state of upheaval’. To be ‘fit for the future’, regions needed a powerful future narrative (‘How do we want to live?’), smart public services and collaborative ecosystems. It was crucial for rural regions, in particular, to attract or retain young professionals – especially

young women. To achieve this, these regions needed affordable housing, education, culture and family-friendly infrastructures. The ‘collaborative capital’ of a region was also important for its resilience. This included interregional and intermunicipal cooperation, a good balance between self-interest and the common good, digital services of general interest and the bundling of infrastructures, as well as compensation principles, for instance, regarding carbon or development costs.

Interreg bringing Europe together

In his video message, Niklas Nienaß of the Greens, Member of the European Parliament in the Committee on Regional Development, stated that we should learn from each other across regions and countries so that the European idea can flourish.



Panel discussion: Dorothea Palenberg, Dr. Daniel Meltzian, Dr. Beate Ginzler, Klaus Ulrich, Dr. Oliver Hermann © Markus Braumann, Offenblende

Shaping transformation with Interreg B

Under the title ‘Actively shaping transformation’, Dr. Daniel Meltzian (Head of Division at the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB), Klaus Ulrich (Head of Department at the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy), Dr. Oliver Hermann (Mayor of the City of Wittenberge) and Dr. Beate Ginzler (Head of Division at the City of Leipzig) discussed how Interreg B projects can contribute to managing the current processes of change. The discussion was moderated by Dorothea Palenberg (blue! advancing european projects). When it came to the added value of the Interreg projects, special mention was given to the establishment of contacts, the possibility to tackle future issues, the practical implementation of innovative projects, the development of pilot blueprints and learning from each other. Dr. Oliver Hermann stated that the ‘will to deal with the specific topic of the project’ was the secret of success for small cities wishing to participate in Interreg. Everyone agreed that it was important to check whether the topic of the project was on the agenda of the local town or city council.

Transnational cooperation from a European Commission perspective

Talking about the direction pursued by transnational cooperation in the 2021–2027 programming period, David Matzek-Lichtenstein from the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy at the European Commission first gave an overview of cohesion policy: With an amount of 331 billion euros, it still forms one of the three large pillars of the EU's budget. 8 billion euros of this amount are allocated to European Territorial Cooperation, which also includes Interreg B. Another 2 billion euros are reserved for external funds. Many simplifications have been realised for the current programming period, for instance, the regulation itself is only half as long as the previous one, there are simplified cost options, such as lump sums, and technical assistance is proportional to implementation rather than eligible costs. There is also a new approach to transnational cooperation: The Commission has, for instance, presented an 'orientation paper' for each programme area, in which it sets out its ideas of the area and the opportunities offered by the Interreg programmes. Of the 9.9 billion euros for all 96 Interreg programmes, 2.3 billion euros are allocated to the Interreg B programmes in the current programming period.

Transnational cooperation from a Federal Government perspective

Dr. Heike Hagedorn from the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) spoke about the direction pursued by the six 2021–2027 Interreg B programme areas with German participation. She emphasised that all areas had their specific characteristics while providing an overview of the policy objectives chosen in the programme areas. All of the programmes with German participation, for instance, strive for a smarter Europe and a green, low-carbon Europe.

Federal Transnational Cooperation Programme: support of projects

Jens Kurnol, Head of Division at the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR), then presented the Federal Transnational Cooperation Programme. The Programme supports German partners and lead partners in transnational projects that are of particular interest to the Federal Government. The key criterion for funding is whether the projects contribute towards sustainable spatial development. There are three funding categories: The 'seed money' category supports the application process, the 'co-financing' category supports the co-financing of EU funds on a pro-rata basis and the 'additional funding' category finances additional project components of Interreg B projects.



Klara Geywitz, Federal Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Building during her keynote speech © Markus Braumann, Offenblende

Strong for Europe, strong for the region

The second day of the conference focused on interactive exchange between the participants. First of all, however, the new Federal Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Building, Klara Geywitz, highlighted the advantages of participation in Interreg projects in her presentation, which include financial support, learning about new approaches, working across disciplines and levels, trying out experimental approaches and drawing attention to topics by participating in an EU project. In addition, interpersonal exchange is promoted. She emphasised that cooperation with transnational partners is very important in Germany, last but not least due to the country's geographical location. 'Interreg B is place-based, interdisciplinary, citizen-oriented, and local stakeholders are actively involved,' the Minister said.

After two keynote speeches by Michael Keller (Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action) and Prof. Dr Andreas Pinkwart (Minister of Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitalisation and Energy of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia), participants were able to exchange ideas in parallel forums. The first round addressed the different thematic fields of Interreg B 2021–2027 and the second round the six programme areas with German participation. The moderators provided an insight into the priorities and topics that are being promoted in the six programme areas with German participation. In addition, two Interreg projects were presented in each workshop, the project coordinators talked about the advantages, challenges and success factors of transnational cooperation and gave practical tips for applications and project implementation. Afterwards, the audience used the opportunity to ask questions.

Detailed event documentation:

<https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2021/DE/Aktuelles/Meldungen/News/220629-doku-interreg-konf-mai22berlin-allg.html>

Heike Hagedorn on the new Interreg B programmes for the North Sea Region and North-West Europe



Interview with Dr. Heike Hagedorn, expert for European spatial development policy and territorial cohesion at the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) and currently chair of the North Sea Region and North-West Europe Monitoring Committees

'The focus of both programme areas is on the green turnaround'

This year, at a very exciting time, Germany is taking over the chair of both the North Sea Region Monitoring Committee and the North-West Europe (NWE) Monitoring Committee: The funding programmes from the 2014–2020 programming period are entering their final phase while the programmes for the current 2021–2027 programme period are just starting.

What is the current status of implementation of the Interreg programmes for the North Sea Region and for North-West Europe?

As far as the projects from the 2014–2020 programming period are concerned, I first had to understand that the timeline for EU funding programmes is calculated differently. The last funding period has not yet been completed. 55 of the 73 projects in the **North Sea Region** from the last funding period are still underway and will end this or next year. The programming periods therefore merge into one another, which is good because this means there is no gap until the new programme period is up and running. The programme for the North Sea Region was officially submitted to the European Commission in February 2022 and I expect the Commission to approve this programme soon.

In **North-West Europe**, we are also still in the middle of implementing the projects from the previous programming period. Of the 102 approved projects, 17 have already been completed, 35 will end in 2022 and 50, that means almost half of them, will run until 2023. The programme was also submitted to the European Commission for review in February 2022. On an informal level, we have already exchanged views with the Commission and there were no substantial requests for changes. Therefore, I also expect the programme for North-West Europe to be officially approved soon.

What are the priorities and challenges for the programmes in the new 2021–2027 programming period?

The focus in both programme areas is on the 'green turna-

round', i.e., climate and environmental resilience, a smart and just energy transition and a place-based circular economy.

The **North Sea Region** also aims to promote robust and smart economies. The last and, at the same time, new priority may sound somewhat unwieldy, but it is essential: better governance. This means to improve how our society is organised, so that our goals can be achieved. In my opinion, this is not an easy focus, but a very worthwhile one. We need institutional capacity, for instance, to drive marine conservation, digitalisation and social innovation. We also support new and existing networks, so that international strategies and policies can be translated into joint transnational action plans.

In **North-West Europe**, the focus is not only on green issues, but also on an inclusive approach. Funding here is primarily geared to the labour market and employability of disadvantaged groups, health and access to healthcare, as well as culture and sustainable tourism. Another focus is on improving regional and territorial resilience, which is to be strengthened by expanding innovation capacities. While there will always be change, the question we need to answer is how well municipalities and regions can adapt to this change.

How do you rate the programmes compared to previous programming periods?

In terms of content, green issues have become even more important in both programme areas. This fits in with our upcoming transformation processes.

As far as the partner countries are concerned, both programme areas have to change because the United Kingdom is no longer involved. In the North Sea Region, the coastal regions in the north of France will be added. In addition, two more regions in Flanders and four in the Netherlands have been included. This means that all of Flanders and the entire territory of the Netherlands are part of the programme area, opening up new opportunities for cooperation. There have also been some

changes in project proposals: For the first time, small projects in the North Sea Region can also apply. The application procedure has become much simpler for these projects. This makes it easier to try out innovative project ideas.

For the 2021–2027 period, grants of 167.5 million euros will be available in the **North Sea Region Programme**. These funds will be used to reimburse up to 60% of the costs incurred for approved projects. The North Sea Region has a population of around 60 million.

The future Interreg **North-West Europe Programme** promotes a green, smart and just transition. The focus here is more on the use of innovative solutions. In terms of territory, the focus has also expanded, so that all regions – including those outside the big cities – are explicitly addressed in this programming period. In addition to existing project sponsors, public and small stakeholders are also encouraged to apply to the Programme. The aim is to support balanced development and to make all regions more resilient. In the 2021–2027 programming period, the Programme will receive a total of 310 million euros from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The funding rate is also 60%. An estimated 180 million people live in the North-West Europe programme area.

What is on the agenda this year for the North Sea Region and North-West Europe programme areas?

In the **North Sea Region**, we are getting ready to enter project funding. Now that the programme documents have all been prepared, the next step is to select and finance the specific projects of the first call.

In June 2022, the programme committee met for the first time in person in Hanover and decided upon small projects and expressions of interest for ‘normal’ projects. It was also nice to finally meet the colleagues ‘for real’. Up to then, we had only known each other from our computer screens. A decision on the full applications of the first call will then be made in September 2022. First projects can then start before the end of 2022. After that, things will happen very fast. The second call will open on 1 August 2022 – with a deadline in autumn 2022.

In the **North-West Europe** programme area 76 proposals were submitted in application step 1 of the first call, covering all specific goals. This positive outcome shows that the applicants agree with the topics. The first meeting of the NWE Monitor-



In both programme areas, the aim is to achieve a smart and equitable energy transition © pixabay

ing Committee under German chairmanship will be held in September 2022 in Saarbrücken. We will then decide on the project proposals of the first step.

What do you personally wish for the future of the programmes?

The **North Sea region** is characterised by a unique landscape. I would like to see good coexistence between nature and humans. This calls for creative project ideas. I hope to see many project proposals that contribute to this.

North-West Europe, however, is a very densely populated habitat. The region is very dynamic and I count on innovative approaches to shape and accompany the transformation processes.

More informationen:

North Sea region: <https://northsearegion.eu/>

North-West Europe: <https://www.nweurope.eu/>

The circular economy as a driver of a sustainable and resource-saving spatial and regional development

Which elements are needed to shape the shift towards a placed-based, resource-efficient economy? What strategies do cities and regions need to be sustainable and resilient? The concept of the circular economy is an approach that is becoming increasingly important in this context: In the Green Deal as well as in the EU's circular economy strategy or in the Territorial Agenda 2030, this concept can be found as an essential factor in the transformation towards a 'green Europe'. That is also why the circular economy is a new thematic focus in the 2021–2027 transnational Interreg programmes, offering municipal and regional stakeholders new prospects for cooperation.

Potential of the circular economy for rural development in Germany and Europe

The circular economy approach is also important for a sustainable spatial and regional development as it smoothens the transition to a placed-based and resource-saving way of doing business and generates potential for development. Many urban spaces have long recognised the potential of the circular economy and are looking for circular solutions to harness the economic, environmental and social benefits of this approach.

However, rural regions can especially benefit from integrated strategies for using the circular economy while helping to reduce disparities, promote social cohesion as well as create and maintain equal living conditions in the long term. This was the starting point for a current BBSR research project entitled 'Potential of the circular economy for rural development in Germany and Europe'. This project is investigating the development potential of the circular economy for an integrated rural development as part of the 'Shaping the Region' programme. One focus of the project is the analysis of spatial factors that are crucial for the successful implementation of a circular economy in rural areas. Successful case studies in Europe and Germany will be examined and conclusions drawn for the implementation of a placed-based circular economy in rural areas.

Definition and policy field analysis for rural areas drafted

The definition of the circular economy was further developed in this research project: Building on the original waste management understanding, the systemic approaches of the circular economy were integrated and tailored to the context of rural development. The reference to existing potentials and economic dependencies is essential for rural areas and therefore includes both biotic and abiotic material cycles.

The policy field analysis showed that regional strategies have so far rarely included the potential of a circular economy and

they have also rarely addressed the potential of rural areas. Exceptions to this are the Territorial Agenda 2030 or the Federal Government's High-Tech Strategy: Both policies explicitly deal with the spatial development potential of a circular economy for rural areas.

New thematic focus also in the 2021–2027 transnational cooperation

For German stakeholders, the Interreg B programmes for the 2021–2027 period offer new opportunities for European cooperation in the field of the circular economy. Here, too, the approach goes far beyond the understanding of waste management or prevention: The circular economy explicitly supports the sustainable development of cities and regions, the careful use of resources, climate neutrality and the mitigation of and adaptation to the effects of climate change. Depending on the spatial, economic, ecological and social conditions, different priorities are set for transnational cooperation in the Interreg B programme areas, which encompass a holistic approach. The importance of the topic for regional development stakeholders is reflected in the fact that almost all Interreg B programmes with German participation have chosen the circular economy as their own thematic focus and are promoting the implementation of regional circular economy strategies.

In addition to implementing regional circular economy approaches, for instance, in the field of the bioeconomy, the **Alpine Space Programme** also promotes the development of interregional approaches. This supports the use of regional products or the development of solutions along transnational value chains. Working together to improve expertise at all political levels and in the relevant economic sectors in order to implement circular economy strategies is another important field of action for both municipal and regional stakeholders. This also includes capacity building and cooperation with stakeholders on the ground.

In the **Central European Programme**, circular economy also means to shape the socio-economic change, not just some sectors of the economy. This requires a broad participation by all regions, which can, for instance, dedicate themselves transnationally to the following topics: recycling and recovery of raw materials, regional and interregional value chains of the circular economy or sustainable product design.

Further funding opportunities for spatial and regional development stakeholders are available under the **North Sea Region Programme**. In this case, projects can be implemented that relate to the implementation of holistic circular economy



Circular economy for rural development © Maarten Zeehandelaar - stock.adobe.com

systems or merely focus on a specific aspect of the approach. Other fields of action for the North Sea Region include supporting circular approaches in agriculture and forestry or to improve packaging methods.

The **North-West Europe Programme** also addresses the circular economy as a separate, specific objective. The focus here is on the circular economy in conjunction with the implementation of spatial strategies that are to make a long-term contribution towards promoting sustainable regional development in the programme area. In addition to approaches for waste avoidance, recycling or circular production processes, the development of regional strategies and new business models is also supported.

In the **Baltic Sea Region**, the transition towards a circular economy is supported. The holistic approach is to take into

account the areas of water, energy, transport and land use that are relevant for the Baltic Sea Region and explicitly integrate and test the circular economy in spatial strategies too. In addition, measures to help companies implement circular approaches or activities to change ways of thinking and behaviour can be promoted.

The **Danube Region** has not chosen its own specific goal for the circular economy. However, transnational cooperation opportunities exist here too: The specific objective of 'Enhancing innovation and technology transfer in the Danube Region' includes the promotion of the circular economy in resource-consuming sectors, such as electronics and ICT, packaging, textile production or construction. Future fields of action, for instance, include the harmonisation of policies and strategies in the field of circular economy or promoting the implementation of new technologies in this field.

More informationen:

Programm „Region gestalten“ – Vorhaben „Potenzial der Kreislaufwirtschaft in Deutschland und Europa“:
<https://www.region-gestalten.bund.de/Region/DE/vorhaben/kreislaufwirtschaft/Kreislaufwirtschaft.html>

Five new brochures provide information on the thematic priorities of Interreg B funding



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The thematic approaches to transnational cooperation are as diverse as its topics. The funding themes of the Interreg B programmes are aligned with the political objectives of the EU cohesion policy for a smarter, greener, more social, better connected Europe that is closer to citizens. Cooperation for better governance is another important goal of this collaboration. The specific starting points and challenges of the programme areas are taken into account when designing the funding themes.

Against this background, five new target group-related brochures now present the five thematic priorities of transnational cooperation. The German-language brochures published by the BBSR show how cities and regions benefit when they address their issues transnationally with Interreg B: What is the political relevance of the respective topic in Germany and the EU? What are the thematic funding priorities of the different programme areas in the respective thematic field? What good Interreg B project examples already exist and what is the secret

to their success? The publications provide compact information on these questions.

Are you interested in funding offered by the transnational programmes? Yes, but for which subject area? Innovation and digitalisation? Or rather mobility and transport? Are you interested in climate and resource protection and how you can step up your activities on the ground through transnational cooperation?

Brochures have been published on the following main topics:

- **Innovation and digitalisation in cities and regions with Interreg B.** Funding opportunities for transnational cooperation in the 2021–2027 period in the field of innovation and regional competitiveness.
- **Climate and resource protection in the city and region with Interreg B.** Funding opportunities for transnational cooperation in the 2021–2027 period in the field of energy, climate and environment.
- **Social participation and public welfare in the city and region with Interreg B.** Funding opportunities for transnational cooperation in the 2021–2027 period in the field of work, education, health, culture and tourism.
- **Sustainable mobility in cities and regions with Interreg B.** Funding opportunities for transnational cooperation in the 2021–2027 period in the field of transport and mobility.
- **Integrated urban and regional development with Interreg B.** Funding opportunities for transnational cooperation in the 2021–2027 period in the field of multidisciplinary and multilevel approaches.

Brochures available free of charge

The (German-language) brochures can be ordered free of charge and downloaded from the BBSR website:

https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2021/DE/Service/Veroeffentlichungen/PublikationenDesBBSR/publikationen-des-bbsr_node.html



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In the context of the European structural policy objective „European territorial cooperation“ - familiarly known as Interreg B - the European Union supports transnational cooperation in cross-national cooperation areas in order to realise an integrated spatial development. The Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) informs the public and supports the transfer of results, it organises exchange across Germany, represents the Federal Government in programming or steering committees and supports projects of special interest to the Federal Government in the context of the Federal Transnational Cooperation Programme on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB)

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