

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

December 2021

Because neighbours give a hand

Entrepreneurship & Innovation actions
in cross-border cooperation programmes along
the external borders of the European Union



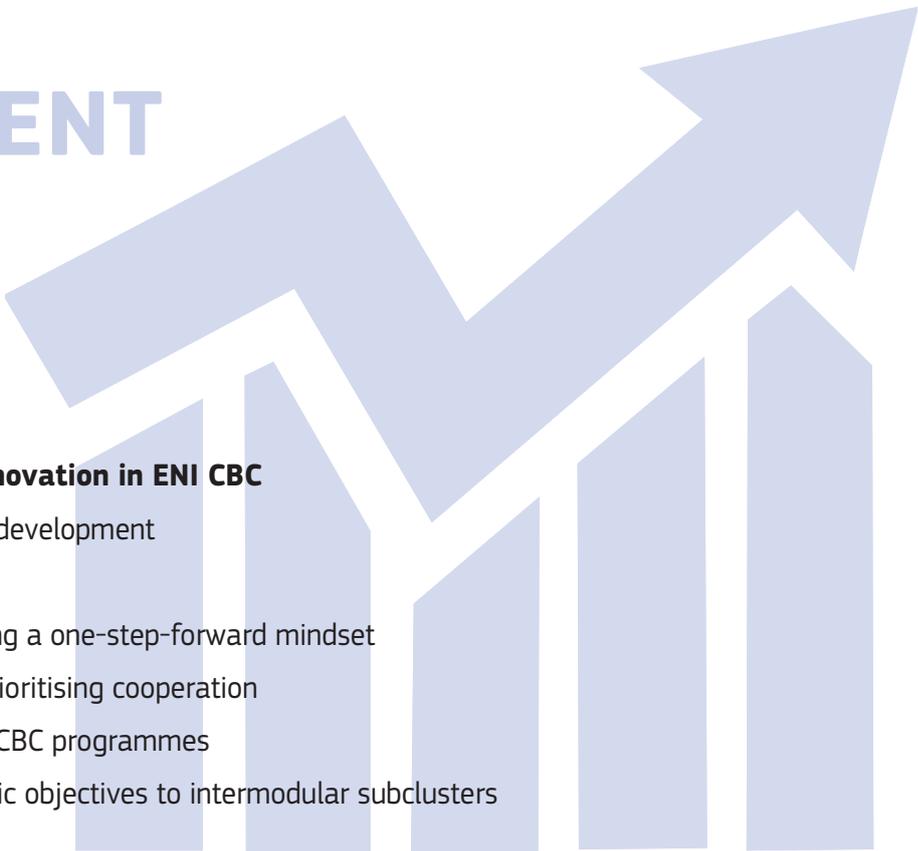
Funded by the
European Union



Technical Support to the Imple-
mentation and Management of ENI
CBC programmes, implemented
by a consortium led by Particip

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Cross-border cooperation programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI CBC) are a key component of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Strategic Partnership with Russia, and they have an important added value to other associated regional policies such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Eastern Partnership.* The 15 ENI CBC programmes, involving 31 participating countries, are at the moment in full implementation, and almost 950 cross-border cooperation projects are funded to date: from environmental protection to economic development, from infrastructures to people-to-people cooperation, they are building a greener, more social, more cohesive Europe and its neighbourhood. We keep analysing this precious material, to find out how and in which sectors these projects improve the lives of the citizens in both Member States and Partner Countries, paving the way to the programming cycle 2021-2027.

* Within this document, the term “cross-border” applies to all types of programmes: land borders, sea-crossings and sea basins.



49
calls for proposals



4.824
applications



945
projects funded



1.076 M€
total budget of funded projects
(includes EU and national co-financing)

3.602
organisations
involved



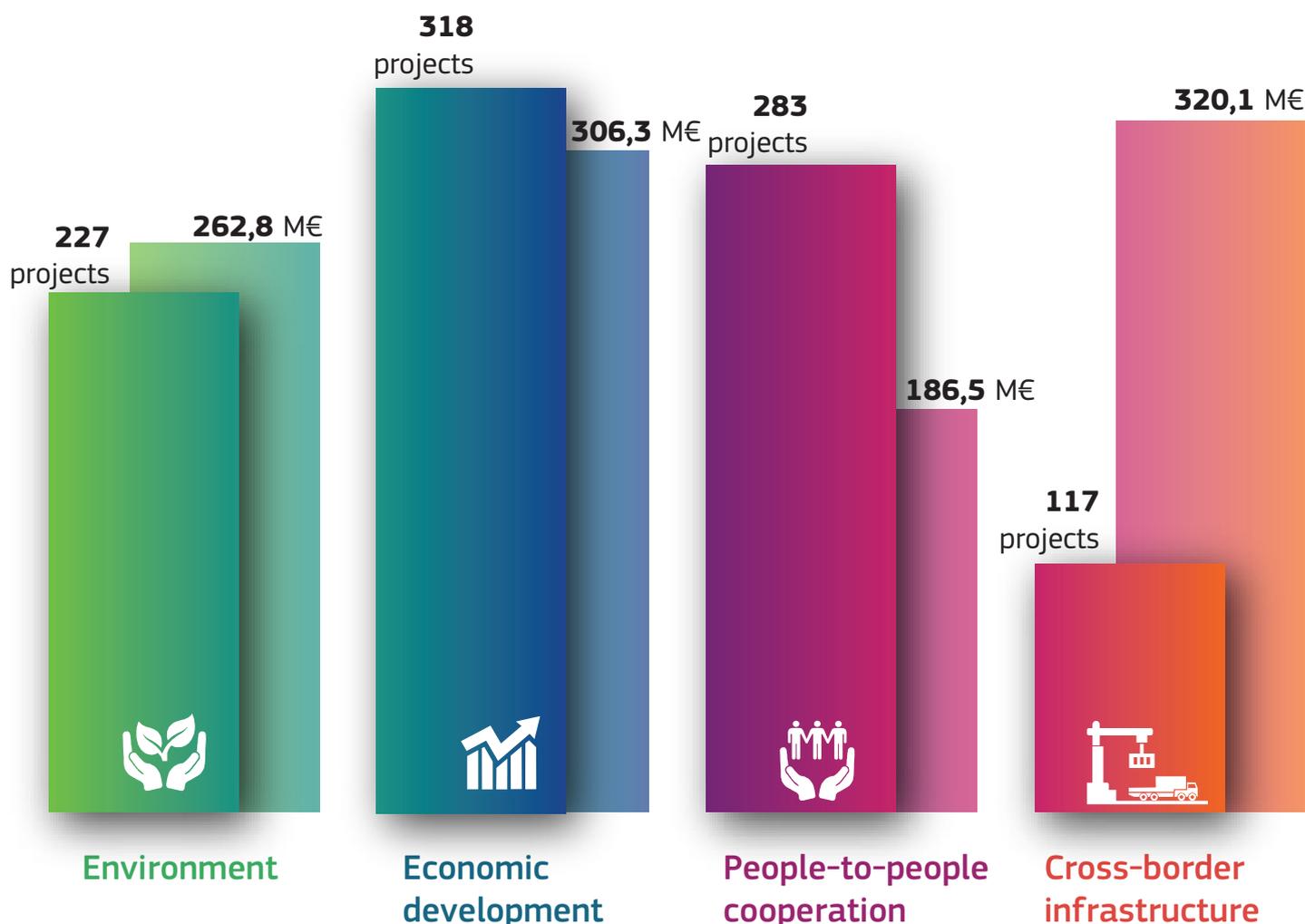
1.888
EU Member States
& Norway



1.714
CBC Partner
Countries

Following the analysis of the running projects, TESIM has identified four clusters of action: environment, people-to-people (P2P) cooperation, economic development and cross-border infrastructures. They are an attempt to show in a structured way the richness of the cross-border cooperation initiatives being implemented along the external borders of the EU.

When confronting the four clusters, both in terms of number of projects and funding, the overall ENI CBC picture is as follows:



As can be seen, the economic development cluster represents the bigger share of all the actions being currently implemented, with 34% of the projects and 29% of the financial allocation. The average size of economic development projects is around 960.000 €, higher than the average budget for P2P but lower than projects under environment or cross-border infrastructures.

In this publication we will describe the economic development cluster in terms of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (E&I). We will analyse the wide range of topics covered by the cluster and we will introduce those projects that we have found more illustrative with the aim of highlighting the importance of E&I actions in cross-border cooperation programmes along the external borders of the European Union.

Enjoy the reading!
The TESIM team



Entrepreneurship & Innovation cooperation in ENI CBC

Two drivers of economic development

The creation of economic opportunities across the European borders is one of the biggest challenges faced by cross-border cooperation. Projects seek to foster business and to help people improve their skills, with benefits for all communities on both sides of the EU border.

EU support to cross-border cooperation under ENI CBC copes with different regulatory schemes and uneven development levels among the countries that challenge effective cooperation around economic development issues. By exchanging experiences and building common local strategies, the [ENI CBC Programming Document](#) aims at reducing the “frontier effect” between the EU and its neighbouring countries. In this context, the ENI CBC strategic objective “A”, aiming at “promoting economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders”, fosters alliances among socio-economic players and between businesses, research and innovation and education systems.

From a bird’s eye view, the economic development strategies as adopted in the ENI CBC Joint Operational Programmes (JOPs) express their full potential through the double driver of E&I. These two concepts, entrepreneurship and innovation, are fully present across the strategies of all the programmes and are further declined through three operational dimensions, addressing distinctly or jointly:

- ◆ **enhancement of sectoral value chains** in a cross-border perspective, with an entrepreneurial mindset and a business-oriented approach, targeting traditional or innovative industries;
- ◆ **capacity building and skills development** approaches through practice sharing, mentoring, development of support services and training for entrepreneurs and businesses;
- ◆ **development of innovation** to industry and enterprises, including digital services or implementation of open innovation integrated schemes.

Shedding a light on the said experiences is not only a communication effort to showcase good practices, but first and foremost an exercise of capitalisation towards a greater contribution of E&I in the post-2020 scenario under Interreg External Neighbourhood Programmes (NEXT).

Setting the stage

E&I are key levers to economic development, sustainable growth and job creation. In ENI CBC areas, local cross-border cooperation projects and large-scale operations target a field-oriented convergence process to support a harmonised territorial development.

When we speak about entrepreneurship, we largely refer to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The European Commission, through [DG REGIO](#), stipulates that “SMEs are vital for the EU’s economy, accounting for more than 99% of European businesses and two thirds of private sector jobs”. The identification of SMEs as the prevailing engine of economic growth is especially suited to the peripheral regions of the EU and to the cross-border territories, where the existence of a myriad of small or even micro enterprises is confirmed. This variegated galaxy of small and very small productive realities needs a favour-

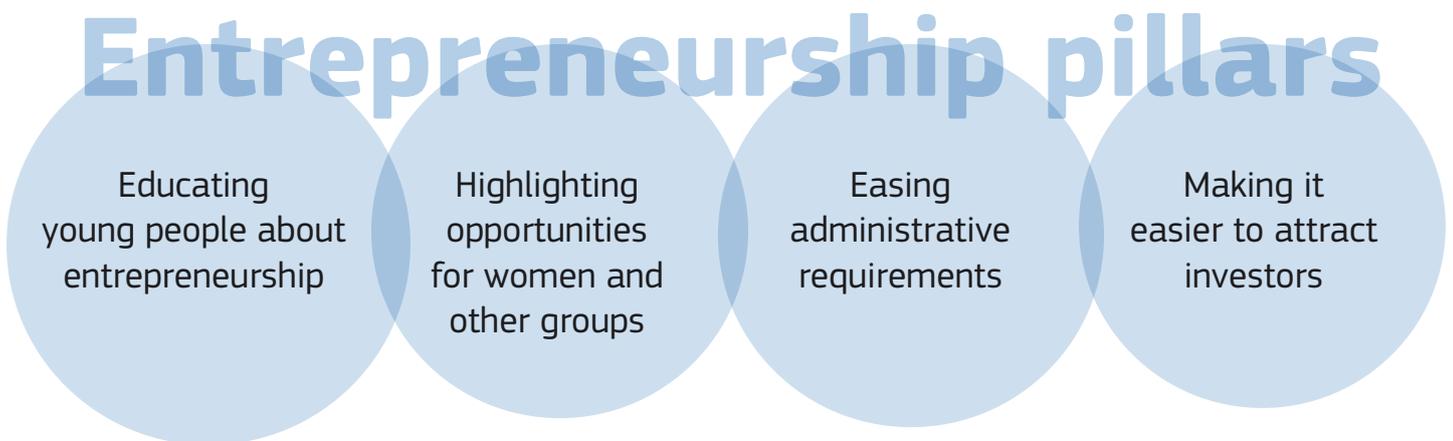
able ecosystem, capable of providing the propitious context and the enabler factors that make it easier to take root and thrive. More than anything else, these enterprises need to acquire the ability to adapt to the ever-changing needs of the market. Improving the competitiveness of SMEs is one of the 11 thematic objectives for Cohesion Policy in 2014-2020, but SMEs are also supported under other thematic objectives, particularly research and innovation, the low-carbon economy and information and communication technologies.

As is immediately evident, the very concept of entrepreneurship is inextricably linked to that of research and innovation. The reason is simple: the market is dynamic, rapidly evolving, hyper-connected and globalized. According to what is stated by [DG REGIO](#) “Sustainable growth is increasingly related to the capacity of regional economies to innovate and transform, adapting to an ever changing and more competitive environment. This means that a much greater effort needs to be put into creating the eco-systems that encourage innovation, research and development and entrepreneurship, as stressed by the Europe 2020 strategy and its Innovation Union flagship initiative”. In this context, the only way for companies to keep up is to constantly update their products, their sales and marketing channels, their production system and therefore their business model. Not all SMEs, especially the smallest ones, have the internal capacity to do this; often they do not even recognize the need, or they don’t know how to do it.

Entrepreneurship

fostering a one-step-forward mindset

The European Parliament and Council define entrepreneurship as “[an individual’s ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation, risk taking, ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives](#)”. It is not surprising if the concept of entrepreneurship is closely related to innovation, fostering a “one-step-forward-mindset”. The [2020 EU Action Plan to promote Entrepreneurship](#) rests on four pillars, enabling the analysis of the JOPs different strategies for business and SMEs development.



From all four pillars emerges the inclusive connotation of economic growth of which attention to women and young people and other groups at risk of economic exclusion is an integral part. This principle of an economic growth that leaves no one behind is common in the ENI CBC approach.

Another transversal element in ENI CBC is the transition towards a sustainable and digital Europe and neighbourhood territories, aiming at a considerable increase of the number of SMEs engaging in sustainable business practices as well as employing digital technologies. Other relevant topics refer to an improved access to financing and the support to networks and services for SMEs. This includes making the ENI CBC territories more attractive to new business, favouring their growth and access to local markets and beyond. This attention to the incubation and nurturing of start-ups is well rooted across the ENI CBC programmes and proves to be consistent with the so-called [EC SME strategy](#) whose priorities are, among others, “to ensure that enterprises make the most out of cross-border activities, both within the EU Single Market and outside the EU”.

Ultimately, the concept of entrepreneurship as conceived by ENI CBC programmes deeply adapts to the contexts for which it is designed: it takes the shape of the hosting productive sectors, be they tourism, fishing, agriculture or industry. In cross-border environments, entrepreneurship becomes “situational”, adapting to the legal, cultural, structural or market spheres.

Innovation

a definition prioritising cooperation

Innovation goes beyond the concepts of entrepreneurship, market and economic growth. It can refer to a new or improved product, but also to a new process, identifying in the end a global approach.

“To accelerate the modernisation of the EU industry, the uptake of product and service innovations, use of innovative manufacturing technologies and the introduction of new business models is necessary. The Commission develops policies that help speed up the broad commercialisation of innovation and engages in many activities that support innovation in the EU”. [European Commission](#)

Innovation pillars

Workplace innovation, including a change in business structure, human resources management, relationships

Business innovation observatory, focusing on the latest innovative trends in business and industry

European and Regional innovation scoreboard, which includes comparative analyses of innovation performance

Social innovation, new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations

These domains are particularly suitable for introducing the subject of cross-border cooperation. On one hand, innovation consolidates its symbiosis with the economic domain. On the other, it is not confined to the economic sphere, but it also embraces a social dimension, a concept [accepted with conviction by the European policy.](#)

Furthermore, innovation is not limited neither to the technological or digital field, nor to the very specific area of product innovation. It grows as a broad and transversal concept, embracing people, actions and processes, and not just things.

The idea of innovation that matters most is not necessarily the most innovative, but the most capable of adapting to contexts by stimulating change and evolving territories towards a positive impact. This means that the concept of innovation upheld in the CBC context is not an abstract one, conceived in a laboratory, but a drive firmly linked to the specific projects' environment, resulting in a “grounded innovation”.

Under this frame, innovation funding covers all financing schemes aimed to support the generation, implementation and diffusion of result-based innovation activities, from applied research to large scale demonstrators or improvement of framework conditions.

E&I according to the ENI CBC programmes

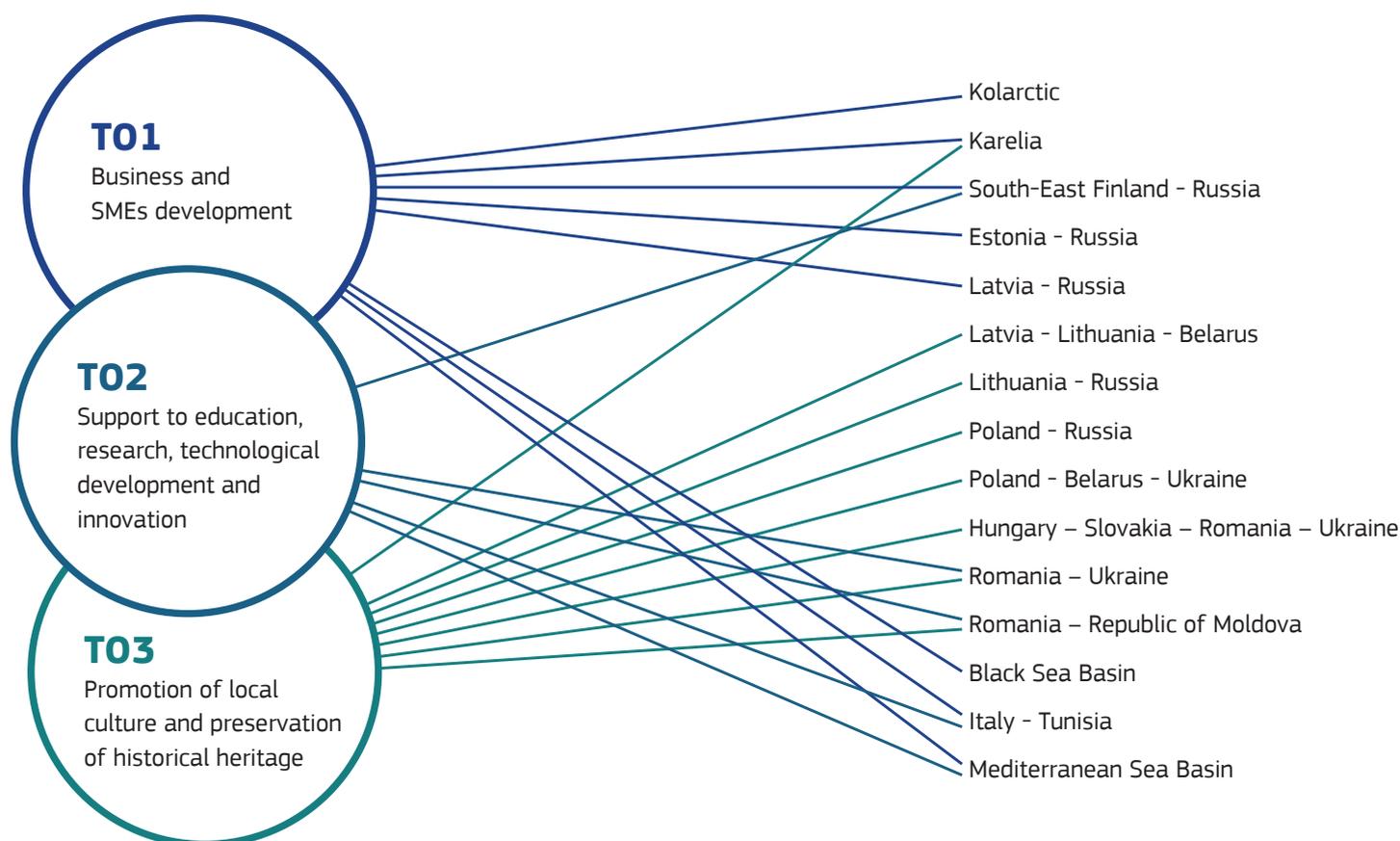
When considering the [ENI CBC Programming Document](#), E&I is particularly identifiable in three thematic objectives (TOs), all related to ENI CBC strategic objective “A” (Promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders):

TO1 *Business and SMEs development*

TO2 *Support to education, research, technological development and innovation*

TO3 *Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage*

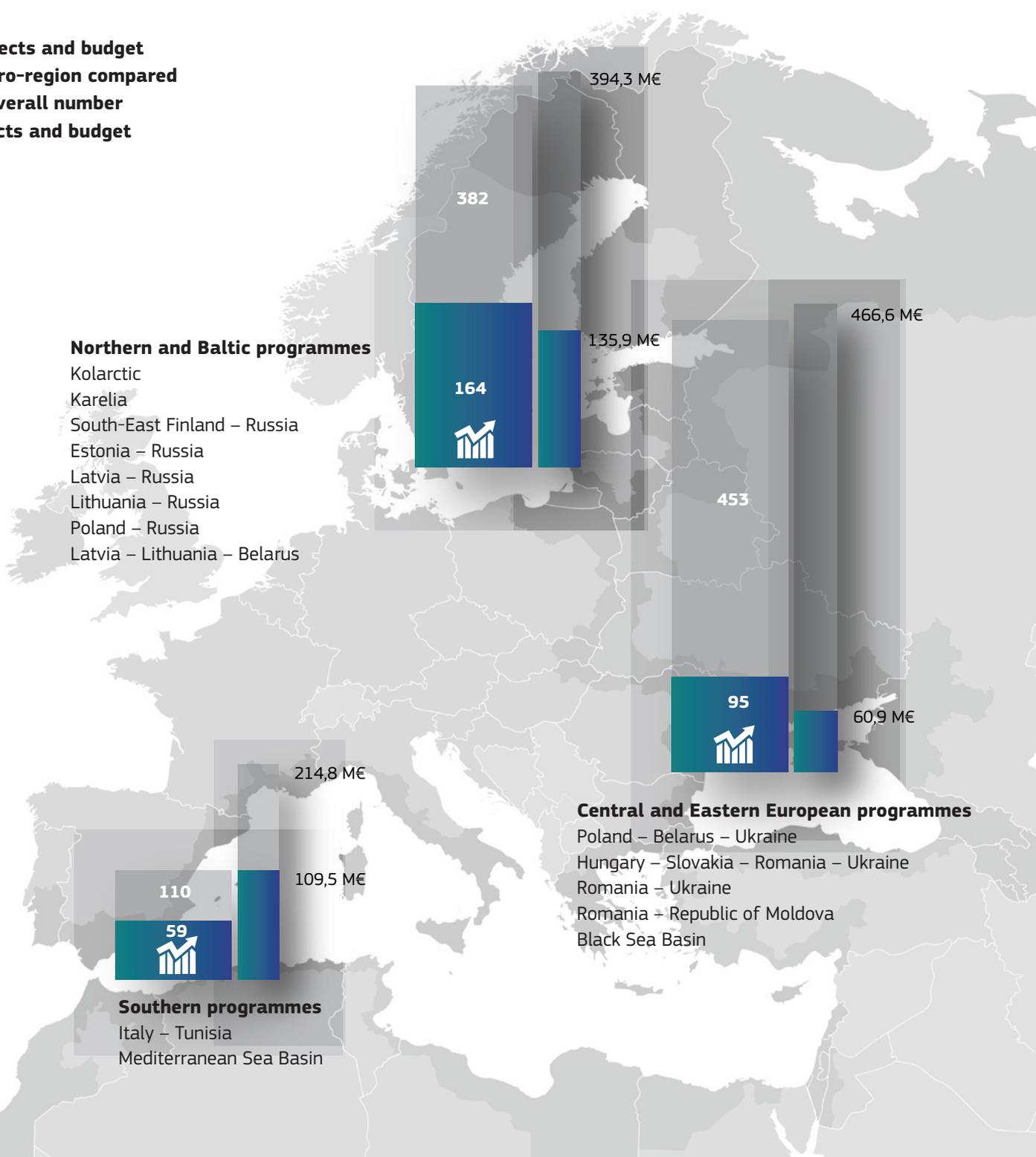
While E&I has a clear link with TO1 and TO2, its reference to TO3 is mostly limited to entrepreneurial or innovative aspects in sustainable tourism initiatives.* All ENI CBC JOPs have selected at least one of these three TOs. Out of 15, eight have adopted TO1, five TO2 and eight TO3. Irrespective the selection of TO3 or not, tourism is a key-sector in all JOPs. At the moment, 34% of the projects financed within the ENI CBC programmes are dedicated to the E&I cluster which absorbs 29% of the entire available budget. The E&I projects currently involve more than 1.150 organisations from 27 countries.



* In addition to the projects labelled under TO1, TO2 and TO3, several projects addressing economic development, job creation and innovation have been identified under other TOs.

Out of the 318 projects funded under the E&I cluster, 311 were selected throughout calls for proposals, almost all under TOs 1, 2 and 3. Additionally, seven large infrastructure projects (LIPs) have been granted a direct award, including the establishment of a modern and equipped research and industrial life science park, the construction and restauration of historical and cultural assets as promenades and cycle routes. As can be seen from the graphic below, half of the E&I projects (52%) is located in the Northern and Baltic region. At the same time, the Southern region, with only 19% of the projects, absorbs 36% of the E&I budget, with an average budget per project more than double compared to the rest of the territories.

E&I projects and budget per macro-region compared to the overall number of projects and budget



E&I actions

from thematic objectives to intermodular subclusters

The review carried out by TESIM of T01, T02 and T03 analyses the strategies and implementation schemes in each programme, with the aim of identifying the main trends and good practices. It also highlights possible paths to strengthening the E&I scope with a two-fold objective:

- ◆ increasing consistency with the priorities of the [post-2020 programming period](#), in a regulatory context gathering internal and neighbourhood instruments within a global European cooperation framework;
- ◆ reaffirming that cross-border cooperation remains highly appropriate to the EU political context especially in the E&I support mechanisms in the ENI CBC areas, as stated in the conclusions of the [mid-term review of the ENI CBC programmes](#).

Based on the analysis of the funded projects, it was possible to identify four subclusters.



Entrepreneurship

often addressed as a side-priority, which explains that a small number of projects, less than 20%, primarily focus on entrepreneurship mindset development.

Integrated approaches associating at least three of the following aspects:

- ◆ *training & education*
- ◆ *capacity building*
- ◆ *studies*
- ◆ *awareness raising*
- ◆ *promotion*



Business

the most important group, with 143 projects (45% of the total), of which 69 are related to T03, i.e. with examples of business development within heritage and tourism scopes.

Integrated approaches associating at least four of the following aspects:

- ◆ *marketing/promotion*
- ◆ *access to finance*
- ◆ *networking*
- ◆ *capacity building*
- ◆ *infrastructures*
- ◆ *training*
- ◆ *territorial development*
- ◆ *new services to enterprises*
- ◆ *digitisation*



Skills

often related to specific sectors or target groups. They mainly include training / mentoring and other capacity-building activities.

Integrated approaches associating at least three of the following aspects:

- ◆ *training & education*
- ◆ *capacity building*
- ◆ *networking*
- ◆ *new training products and curricula*



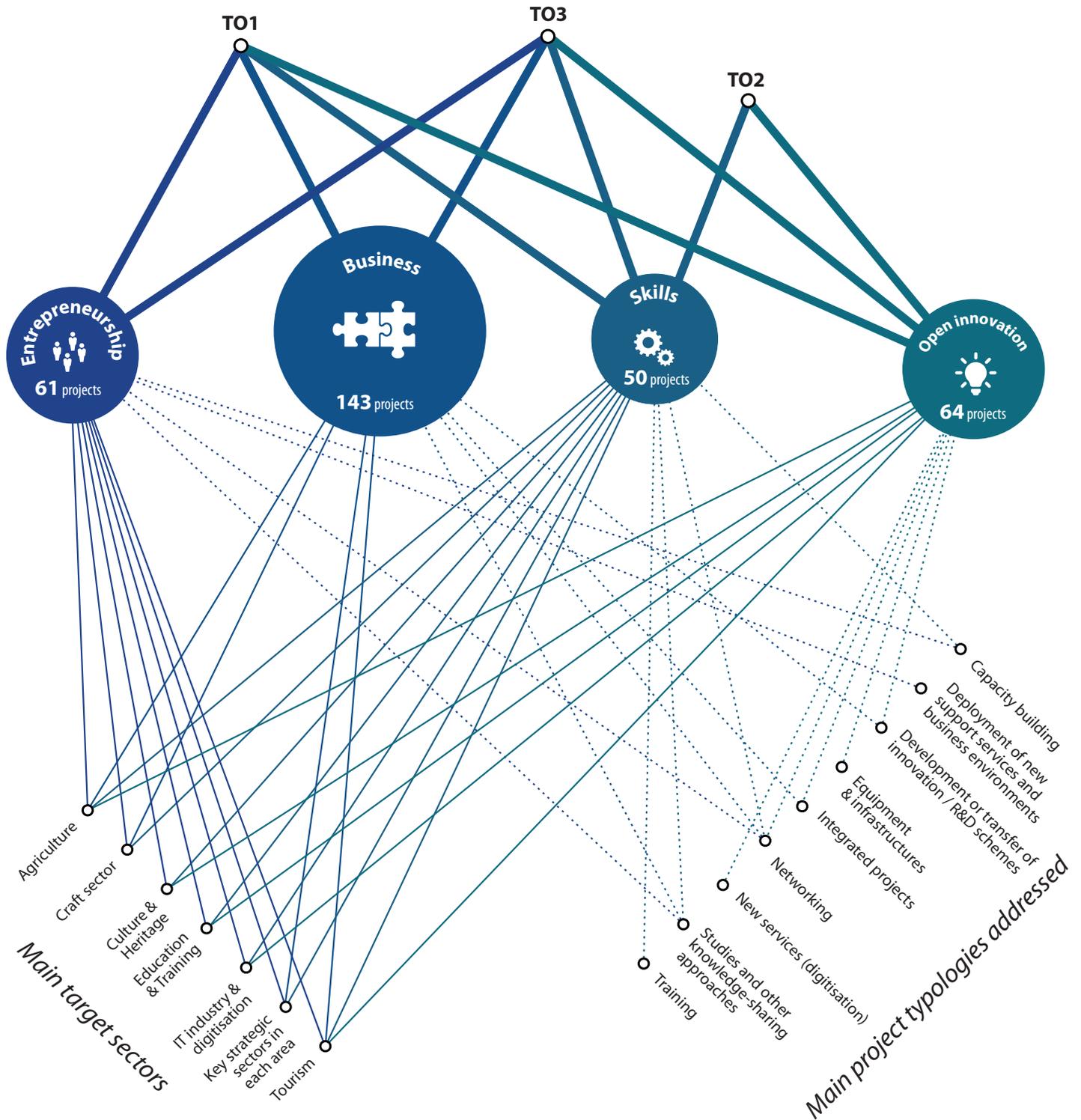
Open innovation

distributed or blended between two main project categories: technology-driven operations and integrated projects touching on living-lab approaches and processes.

Integrated approaches associating at least three of the following aspects:

- ◆ *R&D&I infrastructure*
- ◆ *triple helix (clustering and networking, collaborative approaches)*
- ◆ *open innovation (living labs)*
- ◆ *social innovation*
- ◆ *capacity building*

These four subclusters do not exclude one another. They are conceived as modular dimensions for organising the universe of projects in a complementary way. This is not to say that the subclusters are inconsistent or of little use. The following illustration lists the types and minimum number of key-factors used to decide whether a project belongs to this or that subcluster.



It is equally important to read these categories imagining the permanent coexistence of the double connotation of E&I, as described in the previous paragraphs.

Facts and figures

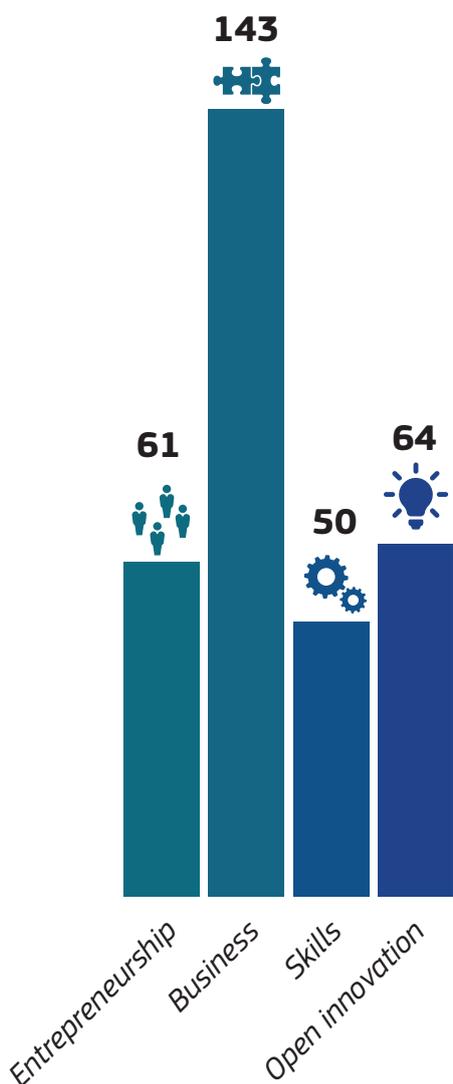
All 318 funded projects have been analysed and grouped according to the four mentioned subclusters.

The combination of the two subclusters Entrepreneurship and Business development involves 64% of the projects and 62% of the budget, representing the bulk of the E&I cluster. Open innovation, with 20% of projects, stands as more represented if compared to the skills development subcluster, which counts only 16% of the projects. The primacy of the open innovation in respect to skills development increases if we look at the budget, with 29% for open innovation against a 9%.

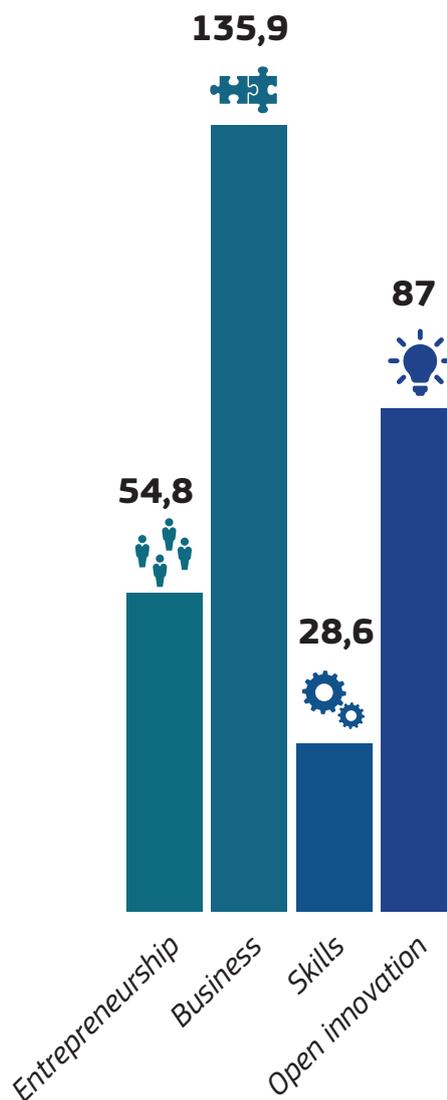
Having said this, the capacitation, the training and capacity building component proved to be a quite constant and transversal ingredient for the majority of projects.

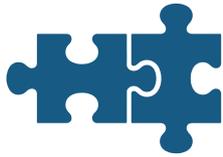
Let's see more in detail the main features of each subcluster.

Number of projects per subcluster



Millions of € per subcluster





The most represented subcluster is **Business**, with almost half of the projects. The areas covered by these projects represent all the possible samples of the economic sectors existing in the vast variety of territories covered by the ENI CBC projects. They range from more traditional economic activities, such as agroforestry and fishery, to emerging sectors, such as slow tourism or cultural and creative industries. The main activities are aimed at positioning the private sector within the evolving market, trying to exploit the opportunities offered by the gaps of the cross-border context. Almost half of these projects develop business opportunities in the sphere of tourism and cultural heritage. Beyond the sector that projects deal with, they address marketing, access to financial services or research. Enabling technologies, first of all digitization, stand as a typical asset to be adopted.



The **Entrepreneurship** subcluster is very close to Business development, with a crucial difference: it focuses on the human factor rather than the market potential. The goal is above all cultural, and involves the affirmation of a mentality, an approach capable of promoting self-confidence. This need of changing a mindset is particularly important in many of the cross-border territories, often characterized by being peripheral to the major central hubs and poles of attraction. Projects are spreading the “entrepreneurial spirit” in territories where the myth for a permanent job, better if public, has traditionally dominated the mentality. There are 61 projects undertaking this challenge, which is almost 20% of the total.



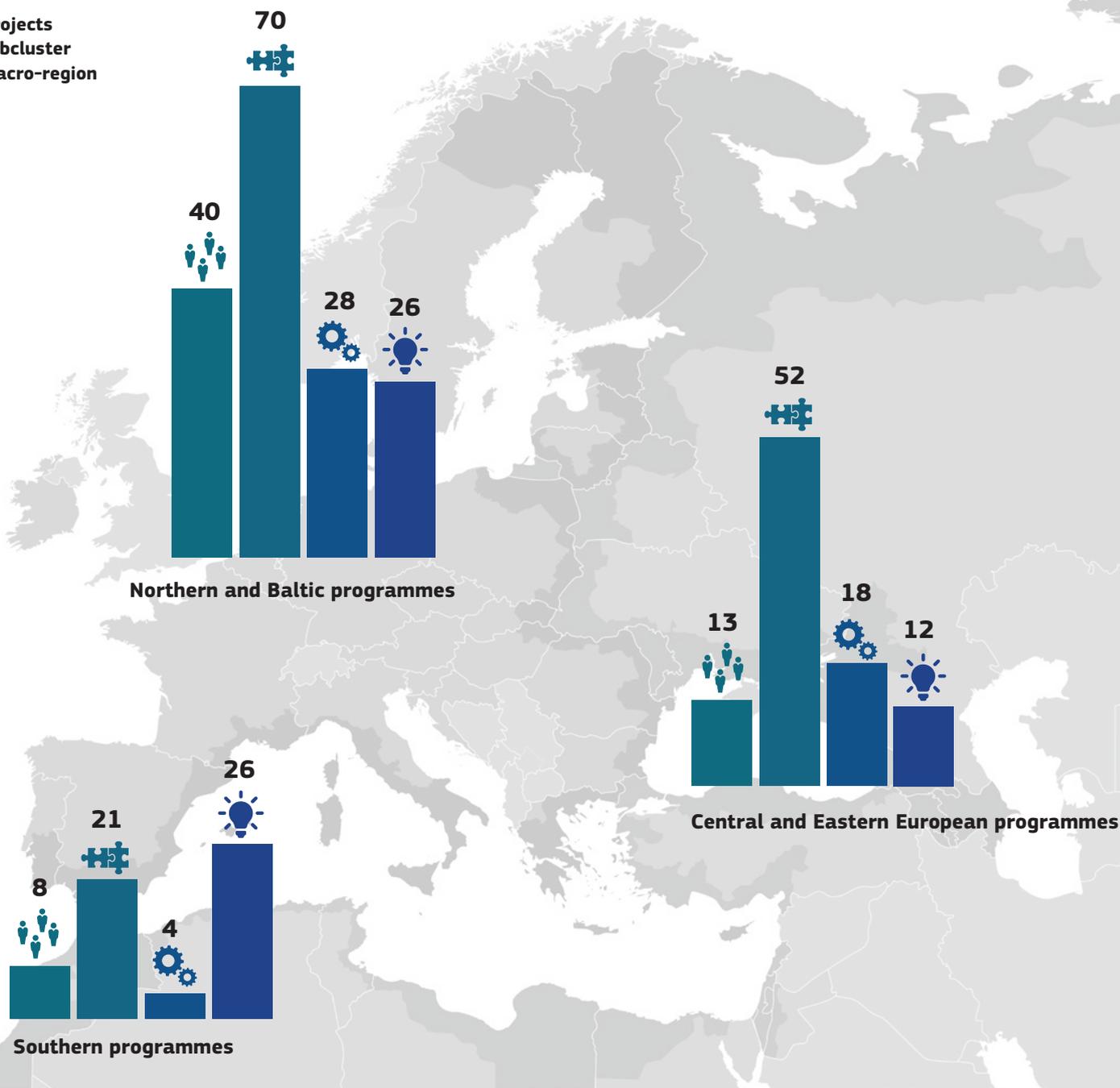
The **Skills** subcluster, with its 50 projects, accounts for almost 16% and reaches just 9% of the total budget, with an average of € 572.000 per project. Complementary to the entrepreneurship subcluster, it is aimed at improving the professional skills of human resources, lowering the employability threshold, first of all among young people and women. Professional upgrading is also clearly present, aimed at retraining professional skills in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving context. The subcluster includes also measures aimed at reducing the digital divide among generations or social categories and it is characterized by the cross-border exchange of skills and professionalism between ventures and universities or think tanks, through networking activities, internships or exchanges.



Open innovation projects are undoubtedly the most expensive projects among those in E&I, with an average of around 1,35 M€ per project. This is partly justified by the additional cost of digital infrastructures needed for the enhancement of open innovation processes. Beyond that, open innovation is also a “soft” subject made up of research, expertise, networking and experimentation. The 64 projects included in this subcluster apply innovative models of sharing resources and processes in various areas, ranging from research-in-industry to transport, to the science of life as pharma, biotech and food clusters, to integrated urban policies. Many projects take advantage of the differential offered by cross-border discontinuity to test business models or new market opportunities, laying the foundations for new forms of collaboration that can sprout into real joint ventures.

Analysing the subclusters in a macro-regional perspective, it is possible to observe how the proportion between the four subclusters is essentially respected but with a tendency in the Northern and Baltic regions to express the largest number of projects related to E&I, 35% of which deal with business development and entrepreneurship. A different trend is expressed by the projects in the South, in which open innovation projects represent 40% of the total and absorb 68% of the budget dedicated to it, probably to bridge the large digital divide existing in the area.

E&I projects
per subcluster
per macro-region



In the following section, and even if there are no objective criteria to select good practices, several case studies have been identified by TESIM, based on their alignment to the dimensions previously described. The selection was not based exclusively on the achieved results or products, but also on the expected capacity to generate change. The case studies presented in this publication have been also chosen in accordance to an adequate geographical and thematic balance, to represent as much as possible the wide spectrum of ENI CBC contributions to E&I cooperation.

Take a look at how many different ideas and initiatives are being carried out across the external borders of the EU: "Because neighbours give a hand"!

ENI CBC

Case studies

Kolarctic
ICEOP

Using math to predict ice traps



Karelia
BUSY

Young entrepreneurs,
time to cross borders



South-East Finland – Russia
CROBODDIT

Disruptive technology at
the conquest of waste
management



South-East Finland – Russia
GB

From simple gateway
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Estonia – Russia
ACTIVE VILLAGE

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Financing young people
out of the shadow-economy



Italy-Tunisia
SINERT

Smart grid technology
driving renewable energies



Entrepreneurship



Business



Skills



Open Innovation

Northern
and Baltic
projects

Central
and Eastern
projects

Southern
projects

ICEOP

*Using math
to predict
ice traps*



PROJECT TITLE	ICEOP – Ice Operations
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	15.10.2018 – 31.10.2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	SINTEF Narvik (Lead beneficiary, Norway); Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov (Russia); Association of oil and gas suppliers “Sozvezdye” (Russia); Luleå University of Technology (Sweden); Storvik & Co Oy (Finland); Finnish Meteorological Institute (Finland)
PROGRAMME	Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	1.215.002 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	1.093.503 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Viability of arctic economy, nature and environment
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Business and SME development

The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.



“In some ways, the ice is so transparent. It carries its history on the surface.”

Peter Høeg
Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow

It is not only Smilla from the Høeg's book who highly thinks of snow and ice, and lives in a world of numbers and science. The Ice Operations (ICEOP) project team is also fascinated by the challenging conditions of the Arctic Barents Sea, with level ice, ice rubbles and ridges, icebergs and ice drifts. They try to explain all this using mathematical modelling, and in extreme weather conditions (low temperatures, snow and strong winds) they make predictions of ice forces, to estimate the local and global loads affecting the offshore structures in the Arctic.

This information is essential for the oil and gas industry companies operating in Arctic waters, for the safety of people and equipment, as well as for ensuring sustainability of their operation. A thorough understanding of ice mechanics as well as an in-depth knowledge of interaction between ice features and industrial structures is necessary, and these competences are now all available in the ICEOP project supported by the Kolarctic CBC Programme.

The main objective of the project is to provide opportunities for oil and gas exploration and production in the Arctic: the partners from four countries are working to obtain better knowledge of ice conditions and to develop more accurate models that could improve maritime accessibility, ensuring safe and environmentally friendly field developments. To achieve this, they jointly perform trips in the Arctic Barents Sea region, with the purpose to gather data and do the measurements.

The collected samples are analysed in the cold climate laboratories, which investigate the structure and the strength of the ridged ice: this information is used for the numerical modelling of ice structure interaction. Field exploration is coupled with desk research, based on data from the Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) images, remote sensing, satellites images and meteorological data. Last but not least, there is information from previous projects and expeditions, which allows for the mathematical modelling of sea ice, ice ridges and icebergs, to be produced.

This is how Terje Nordvåg from SINTEF Narvik (project lead beneficiary) describes the data collection during the field expeditions: “We combine the visual impressions of the ice that we navigate through; we back it with the satellite images coming from the Finnish Meteorological Institute and the radar images from the ship; and finally, we measure the propulsion, i.e., how the engine of the ice breaker reacts when moving through level of ice and ice ridges.”

Geometry of the ice ridges, concentration and thickness, temperature and porosity are measured, and this is topped up by the analysis of the compression and tensile strength properties of the ice, all important elements for the modelling work. This information allows to develop the risk maps of the ice conditions in the Barents Sea, a very precious tool for the industries operating there. “I think this type of project without the framework of the Kolarctic CBC Programme would not have been possible – continues Mr Nordvåg – The partnership is solid and strong, and putting all these forces together in a good consortium produces results.”

Of course, when planning project activities, partners did not know that in the second half of the project they would not have had the possibility to cross the bor-



ders and meet their counterparts in the other countries. The COVID-19 pandemic did not allow for joint expeditions; trips had to be carried out as single-country activities. However, this has not prevented from sharing the results among the partners and arriving to joint conclusions for the common benefit.

When asked about the added value of the cross-border cooperation, Terje mentions that the project has allowed to put together a very good team, where each partner brings in its specific competences and perspectives. “One country alone would not have achieved what we have done together. Nowadays challenges are global, and they need a joint response.”

Høeg's Smilla states that “Reading snow is like listening to music. To describe what you've read is like explaining music in writing.” Of course, the power of nature, especially in the Arctic, is majestic and cannot be fully decoded. But Terje and his colleagues believe that it is possible to provide at least some explanations and make some predictions that will serve a greater purpose.



BUSY

Young entrepreneurs, time to cross borders



PROJECT TITLE	BUSY – Business for Youngsters
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	08.10.2018 – 30.11.2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Karelian regional youth Center (Lead beneficiary, Russia); Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Finland); The City of Oulu, Business Oulu (Finland); The Karelian regional institute of continuous professional education (KRICPE) at Petrozavodsk State University (Russia); Development Corporation of the Republic of Karelia (Russia)
PROGRAMME	Karelia CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	523.220 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	470.898 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Growing cross-border business cooperation
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Business and SME development



“A CBC programme is the ideal framework for this project as it aims to offer youngsters and start-ups the opportunity to develop a cross-border business, and to open for themselves new opportunities beyond their country borders.”

Arttu-Pekka Johannes Tavia, Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

How to find a proper financial resource for a start-up? What are young people's needs and fears? Which skills and competences are they lacking? Which support services can help them reach a higher impact? In the last three years, five partners from the Republic of Karelia and Finland have guided Russian and Finnish young entrepreneurs through all these steps, thanks to the BUSY project.

In 2014 the Ministry for Youth affairs of the Republic of Karelia (Russia) had supported the programme “You Are Entrepreneur”, a federal programme for young “to-be” businessmen, which was implemented between 2014 and 2018, As a result of which 100 persons opened their own businesses. In 2017, beneficiaries expressed the need for opportunities and tools to be broadened, also at international level: the framework provided by the Karelia CBC Programme was just perfect for that. Thus, in 2018 the project BUSY was born, aiming at reinforcing the capacities of young entrepreneurs from Russia and Finland to launch their businesses across the border.

The project aimed at creating an international team of young entrepreneurs to exchange experiences and jointly implement business ideas in Russia and Finland. “The main aim was to allow youngsters from both sides to meet each other, to have opportunities to cooperate, to know what they're interested in,

what kind of opportunities they have for financing, training, mutual cooperation, business opportunities, etc.”, explains Elena Kharcheva, Project manager at the Karelian regional youth Center.

The work started with mapping youth start-ups, businesses and potential entrepreneurs wishing to implement their ideas across the border. A wide range of industries were targeted, such as IT, traveling services, food production, marketing, etc. The participants were seeking for support in understanding the market differences between Russia and Finland, as well as in approaching potential partners and clients. The project organised several matchmaking sessions, networking events and forums, aimed to build an international network: Start Up Weeks, a summer project school, Youth Economic Forum, Polar Bear Pitching, just to name a few.

Surveys helped to review the key challenge areas, as well as to understand the most significant bottlenecks in entrepreneurship cooperation between the two countries. Both Russian and Finnish young respondents showed great interest and emphasized the need for support, knowledge, and skills. To meet such needs, the project partners organized educational events and trainings, consultancy services, coaching, mentoring and peer support. The experts from KRICPE (a project partner) shared their knowledge

on the project cycle, business planning, donor and investors relations, external economic activities. Consultancy helped start-ups to gain new knowledge on sales promotion, access to financial resources, use of public support schemes.

Then BUSY tested the available mechanisms for young entrepreneurs to enter the Finnish and Russian markets. Participation in seminars, consultations, international conferences, and forums – including the largest investment forum in Europe “SLUSH” – became possible for youngsters. The most successful format was a business mission for entrepreneurs from Oulu, Joensuu and the Republic of Karelia: the participants were matched with potential partners abroad. As a result of a three-day joint work, three international contracts were signed.

Among the business support services offered by the BUSY project was the opening of a free co-working space for young entrepreneurs and the self-employed people in Petrozavodsk. Equipped with 27 work stations, creativity or meeting with clients, it hosted over 100 residents only in the first year. Right there, young entrepreneurs could receive a full range of services from the Development Corporation of the Republic of Karelia: up-to-date information on grant support, consultations, offers of participation to educational events, etc.

But the most important achievement behind this project, as seen by the partners, is young people's change in attitude. “It doesn't matter if they will start their business now or not – concludes Arttu-Pekka – They have seen entrepreneurship and cross-border business as an opportunity for them and their territories”.





CROBODDIT

*Disruptive technology
at the conquest
of waste management*

PROJECT TITLE	CROBODDIT Cross-Border Dimensions of Disruptive Information Technologies
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	01.04.2019 – 31.03.2022
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology (LUT) (Lead beneficiary, Finland); Forum Virium Helsinki Oy (Finland); St. Petersburg State Unitary Enterprise “St. Petersburg Information and Analytical Centre” (SPb IAC) (Russia); ITMO University (Russia)
PROGRAMME	South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014 – 2020
TOTAL BUDGET	750.552 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	600.441 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Lively, active, and competitive economy
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Business and SME development

The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.



“Our plan is to go through all the disruptive technologies and select the promising ones. Technologies such as Blockchain and the Robotic Process Automation, are expected to be the basis of the project.”

Pekka Niskasaari, project manager (Finland)

What is the meaning of “disruption”? If you interpret it as “creative destruction”, – like a new way to get old things done – you are touching the core of the CroBoDDIT project, the “Cross-Border Dimensions of Disruptive Information Technologies”. The initiative promotes the development and implementation of new technologies to address the old problem of solid waste collection and disposal in Finland and Russia border regions.

In their own times, the automobile or the electricity were disruptive technologies: they were an innovation that altered the way consumers, industries, and businesses operated. A disruptive technology sweeps away old systems, or habits, and replaces them with something whose impact and superior value are immediately perceivable by users. CroBoDDIT – implemented within the South-East Finland – Russia CBC Programme – intends to act as a platform for exchanging best practices and creating cooperation networks between the companies, cities and stakeholders of Helsinki and Saint Petersburg. But most of all, the project proposes to innovate the waste management system using new, disruptive technologies.

When CroBoDDIT started, the interest and enthusiasm around the circular economy was not as high as now. The project’s aim was to go through all the available new technologies and select the most auspicious ones, capable of better integrating the market and bring positive outcomes. In Finland, waste management is controlled by regulations and laws. In Helsinki there is only one company taking care of the whole process, so it is easier to test new technologies for digitalization of the waste management process, and to go beyond the existing ones, for example the process of checking if the bins are full or not or adjusting the trucking system. The city of St. Petersburg is also facing certain issues in waste collection and management: the legislation exists and is demanding, but the implementation of the law is limited. For example, despite the collection of waste, the recycling is limited. At the same time, Saint Petersburg has excellent testing platforms for new technological initiatives, such as smart bins, which use blockchain

communication platforms, and where the whole package is open source operated by the university.

To enhance this knowledge, the project target audience was identified in city authorities, decision makers, operational personnel working in circular economy and enterprises. A survey was launched, and several black holes requiring new solutions were spotted. The first part of the survey focused on what was the level and depth of knowledge about disruptive technologies such as 5G, blockchain, IoT, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, etc. It turned out that the people are quite aware of new technologies, as well as about recycling, waste management and circular economy in general. It was also discovered that their focus was on waste management in urban areas, and there was less concern about other places such as city parks. The findings of the survey were innovative and quite practical: as a first output, an automatic cleaning robot for park areas was identified and it is currently being developed by a small enterprise. The survey also showed that – for example in Finland – people are aware and knowledgeable as they are educated about recycling from the first grade. But practical gaps remain, as people don’t have much concrete “hands-on” knowledge on the process, and get what they know out of websites, books, and YouTube videos.

Many are the activities implemented so far by CroBoDDIT, and one of the most relevant events is the organization of “hackathons”, marathons of computer programmers and other experts in software development, who get together for long hours to create a functioning product by the end of the day. CroBoDDIT or-

ganises hackathons to tackle challenges identified by the survey. One hackathon was organized by the LUT university, in Finland, directed at its students. Another was coordinated by the ITMO university in Russia: it was open to all, but participants were mostly students, who gained internships and certificates as prizes. A hackathon in Helsinki was organised in autumn 2021: SMEs were the target, and the challenges – selected during a specific seminar – addressed the topic of digitalization of urban solid waste management. The event does not provide a monetary reward to the winners, but if the ideas are good, the city of Helsinki may be interested in buying these solutions.

When the pandemic broke out, a demo-center, initially designed as a physical facility, had to be turned into a virtual one. The center was supposed to bring together cross-border companies for an exchange of products and solutions. Now an online portal includes different cities and portfolio-cards, from different companies. An enterprise interested in showing its results or offering its products, will have at its disposal a mini demo room, to be kept live and online beyond the project timeline. The platform will also host a forum, registering the needs of individual cities to which companies will be able to react offering their proposals/products. “The platform will be launched with the expectation of meeting the demand – says Pekka Niskasaari, the project manager – companies aiming to work in Helsinki will be put in touch with the Helsinki Business Hub and other divisions of the city. The tool will also serve PhD students, providing a basis for their research papers.”

Even a start-up with limited resources can aim at technology disruption by inventing an entirely new way of getting something done: the risk of failing or not being adopted by the market exists, but also the opportunity to “disrupt” existing business and gain more customer segments. The ENI CBC is the ideal framework for such a bet.



GB*From simple gateway to tourist destination*

PROJECT TITLE	GB – Green Belt Connecting People
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	01.05.2019 – 31.10.2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Municipality of Virolahti (Lead beneficiary, Finland); Kehittämisyhdistys Sepra – Leader Sepra (Finland); Metsähallitus, Parks and Wildlife (Finland); Leningrad Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Russia); Municipality of Sovetsky (Russia)
PROGRAMME	South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	699.753 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	559.802 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Lively, active and competitive economy
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Business and SME development

The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.



“For us, a very small municipality, this was a wise way to go international, to be part of something big, to set links and make international friends. We are small but we are here. Cooperation with our Russian neighbours is very natural and cross-border cooperation is a very smart way to tell about ourselves.”

Katja Gorelkina, project manager (Finland)

Preserving the shared heritage along the line of the former Iron Curtain is the aim of the European Green Belt initiative, a scheme with the vision to harmonise human activities with natural environment, while increasing the socio-economic development of local communities. Two small municipalities – Virolahti in Finland and Sovetskiy in Russia – have decided to build on this concept to change the way business operate in their area. This is how the project “Green Belt Connecting People” was born.

“The common feature of both small settlements – explains Andrey Nekrasov, the Head of Sovetskiy Town – is that they are lagging behind in their development compared to big cities. They need to take care of themselves, as the needs and problems they face are specific and of local nature”. In this context, the development of tourism has always been a priority for the two municipalities. Before the COVID-19 crisis, Virolahti was becoming a nature destination for neighbours across the border, and despite all limitations, the area managed to attract 10.000 visitors in the summer of 2019. “Our town is normally the place which Russian tourists are going through when heading somewhere else – says Siru Ahopelto, expert from the Virolahti Municipality – Our aim is to change this perception: we want them to spend more time here”.

The first step was increasing awareness about the possibilities offered in the region: the construction of Infocenters – one in Virolahti and two in Sovetskiy – quickly became a key feature of the project. Infocenters translate the “Green Belt concept” into something tangible and broad. “Thanks to its capacity to show how many interesting things we can offer – continues Siru – the Green Belt Infocenter makes us a gate to the rest of the country: in the long run, we could simply become a destination.”

Since it opened in early June, the Infocenter in Virolahti was able to attract people’s attention. For those who wonder about sustainability, once the project is over it will become part of the Bunker Museum, and

it will be staffed according to the tourism seasonality. In Sovetskiy, the summer information point was also open, while the winter one is in its final stage. According to Elena Dyukareva, vice-president of the Leningrad Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Infocenters represent “a possibility for the entrepreneurs to inform the public about their existing products and for the tourism agencies to include the town into their routes.”

While the infocenters act as attraction points, the project’s key challenge is related to tourism services. As the project manager Katja Gorelkina explains: “It is very difficult for local operators to think out of the box, to create new products. They are stuck, replicating the same models, not reaching out to new target groups. The project aims at showing them how they could use their imagination to create something new, not remaining within their comfort zone”. Setting the basis for the development of new tourism services has therefore become a priority. “The idea is not to immediately change the way businesses work – continues Katja – but to support companies to continue to operate locally while thinking globally. This is not a quick or easy process, certainly not something to be achieved in our two years of implementation, but we are laying solid foundations for this change of strategic vision”. Options do exist. For example, the area counts more than 100 bunkers from the time of the Cold War. Operators see them as something that has always been there. “They are nothing special for us – continues Siru Ahopelto – but

people who come from outside have never seen bunkers before: it’s an unused potential! Why not propose spending a night in one of them? It would not be difficult; it all comes to thinking about it.”

Project partners have already organised six workshops and study tours with more than 100 participants, representing a wide range of societal actors. In addition, 17 enterprises have participated in cross-border business events, out of which 12 have received support for new business opportunities and/or modernization of their activities. When it comes to developing skills, there is no pre-set menu for business running in the tourism sector. The project works on expectations, on what operators want, while at the same time addressing the basics, such as dealing with international clients and their needs. In this respect, Andrey underlines that “when the Finnish boats come to our shore, thanks to the Infocenter they are able to receive services like those they receive in Finland. Before the project, this was not possible”. In the end, this approach should create a virtuous circle: “New services will attract more tourists – believes Andrey – thanks to which businesses will be prone to developing additional new products and services, the final outcome being an increase of the entrepreneurial potential of the region.”

Now that the project is finalised, it is also time to draw lessons on this experience, and for Katja the feeling is positive: “Two years is a super-short implementation period. As a small municipality we are very efficient in our own scale, but not for a long-term prospect. We were lucky enough that things ran smoothly, also with the design and construction of the InfoCentre”. Beyond practicalities, applying for EU funding was the right choice: “The European Neighbourhood Instrument was the perfect umbrella for us. It is challenging to have ‘abstract’ cooperation; it sometimes goes nowhere. You need concrete frames, like these projects are. Working on the same ideas and sharing common objectives has been very engaging. And rewarding”.



ACTIVE VILLAGE

The local boost to farming products



PROJECT TITLE **ACTIVE VILLAGE – Improving competitiveness of rural SME’s by teaching innovative eco-technologies and farming practices, fostering cross-border contacts and creation of infrastructure adding value to the farm products**

IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD 01.03.2019 – 10.09.2021

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED The Union of Setomaa Rural Municipalities (Lead beneficiary, Estonia); Röpina School of Horticulture (Estonia); NGO “Centre for Efficient Farming and Gardening” (Russia)

PROGRAMME Estonia – Russia
CBC 2014-2020

TOTAL BUDGET 426.645 €

PROGRAMME FINANCING 383.980 €

PROGRAMME PRIORITY Increasing SME competitiveness and entrepreneurship by fostering cooperation between public, private and R&D sectors

THEMATIC OBJECTIVE Business and SME development



“This crisis has proved to us the importance of having short supply chains, especially in the food sector. Whatever happens in the world, people will always need food, even more when international supply chains are interrupted. Countries should be prepared to provide their citizens with local food products.”

Silja Lehtpuu, project manager at the Union of Setomaa (Estonia)

With the growing popularity of local and organic or ecological products, the demand for fresh and natural products has also increased in Estonia and Russia. Many people who live in the countryside in South Estonia and Pskov (Russia) cross-border regions rely on farming, but they face three major difficulties: the lack of know-how to preserve their crops, to make the packaging and to sell their products. And, more importantly, the lack of resources to do so. Small producers and gardeners in the horticultural sector have limited capacities to process and store the farm produce they grow; at the same time, they cannot implement their own production line because the volume is too small. This prevents them from increasing their income and producing higher-value products, which in turn affects the socio-economic development of the rural border regions.

The Active Village project, co-funded by the Estonia-Russia CBC Programme, is turning this “real-life need” into a business opportunity. The initiative has put together small farmers and product development centres, equipped with some of the best technologies to process and increase the value of primary farming products. This is the solution to the lack of infrastructure, opportunities, and expertise. “This project provides us with the best conditions to find solutions to our problems in a very short period of time – explains Anna Voichen-

ko, head of the NGO “Centre for Efficient Farming and Gardening” – Local financing is possible; however, the process is lengthy and time-consuming. The CBC programme has provided us with funds from the very beginning and, more importantly, with the opportunity for cross-border cooperation, which is very valuable”.

Indeed, thanks to this cooperation, two new centers have been established, offering local farmers and entrepreneurs the opportunity to freeze, dry, process or conserve their products. In Obinitisa (Estonia), a former pigsty was turned into a freezing centre for berries and other forests products. The refrigeration centre allows small horticultural entrepreneurs to quickly cool and freeze their crops so that these do not lose quality and can be quickly converted into marketable products. The R apina School of Horticulture – project partner from Estonia – also acquired a modern irrigation system that keeps the PH level of the water in balance to grow better-quality crops. On the other side of the border, in Pskov, the project partners built a modern centre for drying and packaging agricultural products. Small farmers, producers and entrepreneurs are now able to store, wash, cut, dry, package and deliver finished products, benefitting from shorter supply chains to the end-consumer, therefore increased quality. This means higher profit and better life quality. “We offer real, wholesome and healthy



products. We get supplied directly from the farmers of the Pskov region”, confirms Anna Voichenko.

Project partners have put in place training programmes both for the experienced and young entrepreneurs working in specific horticulture fields. They opted for a sectoral approach and selected rural SMEs and farmers from a concrete crop field so that the training would really meet their specific needs and expectations. On the Estonian side, eight modules were implemented: the entrepreneurs were given practical solutions to develop a business plan, as well as mentoring and counselling for the promotion of ecological products. Finally, Active Village products – like dried mushrooms, tea leaves, jams, vegetables, herbs, or berries – were presented in multiple fairs and fora, such as the Peterfood in St. Petersburg, the international ethno-gastronomical forum “Taste without borders” in Pskov or Prodexpo (Moscow), among others. These events were the perfect opportunity for a wider public to taste Estonian and Russian organic products and appreciate their quality. Some of these products are now marketed under regional or collective brands launched within the project.

Furthermore, the resources created through this project will be maintained and kept available for the benefit of the community. The project has appointed the beneficiaries with higher motivation and interest as coordinators, to ensure that more people keep profiting from the centres’ services. “We are proud of the partnership built under this project, of the partners involved and the budgetary allocations”, explains Anna Voichenko. In fact, the team is now eager to launch the “Active Village 2” project, which will expand the offered services, and develop the “kitchen-garden” model. This time though, taking into account the energy efficiency component.





CROSS-HERITAGE

Take a break, build an ancient boat

PROJECT TITLE	CROSS-HERITAGE – Common heritage of Curonian lagoon: from extraordinary to familiar
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	10.08.2019 – 09.08.2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	NGO “Kintai Arts” (Lead beneficiary, Lithuania); Federal State Budgetary Institution “National Park Kurshskaya Kosa” (Russia); Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (Russia); Klaipeda University (Lithuania); Museum of the World Ocean (Russia); Administration of Šilutė district municipality (Lithuania)
PROGRAMME	Lithuania-Russia CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	591.911 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	309.502 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Restoration and adaptation of historical and natural heritage, promotion of culture, cultural networking and tourism development
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage



“Although geographically the Curonian Lagoon is shared almost equally by Lithuania and Russia, there is a lack of identity in the region. The common history of the area has been explored by academia, but it needs to be translated into attractive educational tourism products and services: we have identified a shared local heritage and the need to look beyond the local borders.”

Eugenijus Kaminskas, project coordinator (Lithuania)



What about building ancient boats for a change? Current tourism trends offer a retreat from fast-paced urban life: many travellers are starting to have a clear preference for small, countryside destinations far away from the stress of big, bustling urban centres. Tapping into the growing interest for touristic activities with a cultural, didactic component, the “Common heritage of Curonian lagoon” project is offering an alternative based on educational products and services.

The initiative – implemented in the territories of Russia and Lithuania adjacent to the Curonian lagoon – stems from previous local and regional activities carried out by the project leader, NGO Kintai Arts, which has put together a balanced consortium, relying on geographers and historians from the regional academic environment. Eugenijus Kaminskas, the project coordinator, explains that “having universities on board is crucial for the development of evidence-based tourism products for the project”. Academic research can make a difference to create real, history-based experiences that underline the common heritage in spite of

border barriers. An example? The ancient replicas of boats used in the Curonian Lagoon in the past: visitors and local communities are discovering how to build them, and they can also use them for trips across the borders.

But we are not only talking about creation of an additional attraction for the area. A comprehensive strategy is implemented through a variety of activities: from new cross-border water to land routes, to a renewed educational crafts centre in Kintai, to joint educational programs for local inhabitants and tourists alike. Overall, the initiative has already resulted in 10,000 visitors’ increase in the region.

In summer 2021, one of the project beneficiaries, the National Park – Curonian Spit (Russia) organised “smart vacations” for children to learn about traditions directly from residents.

The children learnt how people used to fish in the past, or which were the main tools used in traditional fishing. The most curious children could weave ancient nets, they painted old weathercocks and helped the national park workers to reinforce the dunes at the seashore.

Residents are not only transferring their expertise to the children: they are also bringing up their talents to produce souvenirs. Galina Gubanova, a ceramist, is holding a clay modelling workshop for local residents. Valentina Chernyuk is creating gifts from natural materials. Alexander Sizov, a fisherman, converted his workshop into a small museum. They are all just missing one thing: business skills. And this is what the National Park is providing to them: consulting services and support to present themselves and their products to the public. After all, the development of slow, rural tourism and the re-interpretation of the cultural and natural heritage of the Curonian lagoon opens the door to local entrepreneurs and small businesses. The future of the Curonian Spit is in the hands of its residents.

Building upon a successful cooperation initiative, *Cross-Heritage* can pioneer new forms of tourism in the region and, possibly, elsewhere. Nowadays, tourism is reinventing itself, fostering the private, quasi-existential dimension of the tourist experience, particularly for cultural activities emotionally connected to historical environment and a slow living. Future developments in this area will have to account for the ongoing changes in the sector and, overall, in the traveller’s mindsets and motivations. Reinforcing cross-border and regional perspectives to this approach will be key to ensure sustainability, also vis-à-vis the pandemic’s aftermath.





2 SHIPS – COMMON SEA

*From ships to museum:
the second life of legendary vessels*

PROJECT TITLE	2 Ships – Common Sea. Sołdek & Vityaz: Maritime Heritage of Poland and Russia
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	10.09.2019 – 09.03.2022
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Museum of the World Ocean (Lead beneficiary, Russia); National Maritime Museum in Gdansk (Poland); Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (Russia)
PROGRAMME	Poland – Russia CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	2.067.697 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	1.860.927 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Cooperating on historical, natural and cultural heritage for their preservation and cross-border development
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage

The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.



“When it comes to working with big heritage vessels, the relations and cooperation with international partners has a great value. Working together in different sectors with museums abroad is something we would like to encourage in the future.”

Robert Domżał, Director of the National Maritime Museum in Gdansk (Poland)

From ships to museum, from cruising the oceans to hosting fascinated visitors: a new life awaits the Polish “*Sołdek*” and the Russian “*Vityaz*”, two celebrated vessels that contributed greatly to the history of their countries and weren’t signed up for demolition in a shipyard.

“*Vityaz*” had a main role in a 30-year long exploration of the world oceans: within 65 scientific research trips, her expeditions measured the deepest point in the Mariana Trench (11.022 meters), they described over 1000 new species of marine plants and animals, and studied physical, chemical and biological features of the Ocean. The coal-ore carrier “*Sołdek*” is also a unique ship in the Polish history. Being the first sea-going vessel put into operation in Poland after World War II, it contributed greatly to the economic struggle of the devastated country. Within 31 years of service, the vessel made 1.479 voyages, carrying over 3,5 million tons of cargo and calling at more than 60 harbours. In the 1980s both ships were laid up permanently in the harbours of Kaliningrad (Russia) and Gdansk (Poland). Nowadays, they are living their second lives as amazing museums and are narrating to numerous visitors their glorious achievements.

However, floating on water, the vessels wear out, corrode, and deteriorate. Their bodies and bottoms need yearly monitoring. Dry-docking is a must once in every five years: a thorough examination and replacement of materials require big investments and considerable human re-

sources. The preservation, maintenance, and adaptation of the vessels’ interior for exhibition purposes became common challenges for the Museum of the World Ocean (Russia) and the National Maritime Museum in Gdansk (Poland). Thanks to the Poland – Russia CBC Programme the partnership between the museums was born to protect the ship museums and to create new attractive offers for the visitors to both locations, contributing to the development of cross-border tourism.

In the frame of the project the partners completed the dry-dock repair works and the renovation of the decks’ premises. However, the project activities do not stop here. New permanent exhibitions hosted onboard aim at presenting the important role of both ships in the history of the two countries. “The epoch of *Vityaz*” represents an upgraded version of the existing exhibition dedicated to the thirty-year long history of the ship, which searched through world’s oceans from 1949 till 1979.

The exhibition hosts a special focus on the deep-water exploration, and on the international scientific cooperation from the “*Vityaz* epoch”. The “*Sołdek* and its times” exhibition tells the story of the Polish maritime technology, concentrating on the political, social, and economical context of the ship construction and her years of service. Not only both exhibitions are equipped with innovative technical solutions, but the renovations are also making both museums more inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities.

The project partners apply a reciprocal cross-border approach for the promotion of their unique maritime heritage: by visiting the reconstructed “*Sołdek*” in Gdansk the tourists learn that they can also visit the “*Vityaz*” in Kaliningrad, and vice versa. Thus, the mutual promotion aims at stimulating more interest in this thematic segment of the tourism market. Part of the promotional activities have included two “plein-air” – one in Kaliningrad and one in Poland – during which the Russian and Polish artists worked on painting marine cultural heritage sites and objects recalling the ships. Last 10 September the exhibition with 40 paintings by both Russian and Polish artists was opened to visitors in the Museum of the World Ocean, and on 15 October a similar exhibition opened in Gdansk.

“*Vityaz*” entails also a great educational potential: it is equipped with the meteorological lab to measure wind speed, humidity, temperature, river flow directions. To exploit this potential and promote marine historical and cultural heritage among the younger generation, one project partner – the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University – develops training programmes for students on the history of oceanology. Alongside, field trainings on meteorology for Russian and Polish students are planned for October and November 2021.

Altogether, the partners demonstrate a strategic approach at strengthening the tourism potential of the maritime heritage: the development of two unique tourist products is accompanied by the elaboration of an effective marketing strategy. In the long term, the project partners aim at stimulating larger tourist flows to the South-East Baltic. The successful collaboration in the “2 ships – Common sea” project offers the ground to look ahead and expand cooperation about maritime heritage around the Baltic Sea.



52 CARPATHIAN LIFESTYLE EXPERIENCES

Hand-baking to enjoy the traditional craft



PROJECT TITLE	52 Carpathian Lifestyle Experiences: Reinventing Traditional Work Cultures
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	25.10.2019 – 24.10.2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Tourist Association of Ivano-Frankivsk Region (Lead beneficiary, Ukraine); Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture Satu Mare (Romania); Košice Region Tourism (Slovakia); Aba Tourism Association (Hungary); Department for international cooperation, eurointegration, tourism and investments of Ivano-Frankivsk regional state administration (Ukraine)
PROGRAMME	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	576.082 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	518.473 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Promoting local culture and history along with tourism functions
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage

The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.



“Our task is to create reasons to visit the Carpathian region. We do not just want to preserve elements of national culture, we want to package them nicely and present them as a tourist product, which can be sold by tourist operators.”

Lada Malanii, lead beneficiary marketing manager (Ukraine)

How many weeks are in a year? 52. That’s where the idea of the project’s name – and its shape – came from: to produce 52 traditional-life packages for tourists, one for each weekend. So that guests could ideally visit the Carpathian region all year long and never get bored. Always finding new experiences and opportunities to discover.

As times goes by, the traditional lifestyle of Carpathian peoples is gradually disappearing; at the same time, when it comes to the local economy, local cultures are heavily underestimated as a source of development. Additionally, despite the presence of many interesting sites, many Carpathian areas are still relatively unknown as tourist destinations. “Our project, called 52 Carpathian Lifestyle Experiences, helps people to discover the region and to enjoy its local traditions” says Daniela Culic, general director of Satu Mare Chamber of Commerce, a project partner. “This project is unique – she continues – because ENI CBC brought together four countries with equal participation”.

The overall objective of the initiative is to increase tourist visits, to create new income opportunities for cross-border communities, and to promote a unique tourism experience based on traditional cultures and lifestyles as part of the Living Heritage Carpathian Destination. “We do not want to attract crowds – says Lada Malanii, marketing manager of the lead beneficiary – we aim at appealing to a small number of well-off tourists who are interested in the intangible heritage of the region. Those people may even become investors in this type of business in the future.”

Only 5% of the 2.5 million people involved in rural regional activities is active in tourism and employment in agriculture continues to decline: these limited work opportunities result in the depopulation of the territory. As young people leave, losing ties and compromising the transmission of heritage, the cross-border area is experiencing a rapidly ageing population. To reverse this trend, natural and cultural heritage must be creatively integrated into business practices.

The participants of the project are small family businesses, owners of homesteads, individuals engaged in traditional agricul-

ture, food production and craft activities, mainly in remote rural regions. They are the bearers of local heritage traditions, and they are mostly residents of remote rural communities in the border regions. Their daily life, their actions and stories are the basis of the new touristic experience. “For example – continues Malanii – the completion of mowing grass used to be accompanied by a traditional dance. Now there is no old-fashion mowing, so traditional dances have been forgotten”. “Satu Mare is an extremely poor part of Romania – says Culic – Many people who do craft-work in the region do not know how to promote it: this project is helping them to earn money from the routine life they experience every day.”

These intangible cultural resources are turned into commercial products and put on the market: in this way they generate additional income, which motivates communities even more to preserve craft practices, skills, products, etc. Each package-tour is unique, they are designed with traditional working culture and rural lifestyles in mind, focusing on local knowledge and production skills, performing arts, social practices, festive events, etc. For example, the tour “Journey for Organic Tea Herbs and Embroidery Ornaments” offers to the participants basic skills in Spassky embroidery, then people listen

to stories about it, then get acquainted with organic tea production and have a short course in herbalism at the museum. Afterwards, they can relax at the apiary and try making a beehive themselves.

The outcome of the project is a unique all-year-round offer for “cultural gourmets”, providing heritage preservation as well as new livelihood opportunities for local people, young ones included. “We have actually unlocked the potential of our beneficiaries for the local tourism”, adds Oksana Fedorovych, another representative of the lead beneficiary. Even modern technologies are used, namely an online museum of traditional Carpathian craft cultures, and a virtual guide to Carpathian Living Heritage. A series of short videos has also been produced, describing the stories of bakers, herders, cheesemakers, crafters, and others. “The project will have a great capitalisation – says Daniela Culic – It will be promoted through TV channels and other sources, and all the information about the tourist packages will be available online. Other people can use the results of the project and develop their own tourist products.”

The project has helped to establish cooperation between different institutions, chambers of commerce and tourist associations. New partners were met: these are relations which will be continued beyond the project’s life. Unfortunately, during its implementation, it was discovered that many crafts are already effectively dead, and perhaps a separate catalogue will be created for them. Let’s hope that the 52 packages will not let go off any other tradition or skill of the Carpathian Living Heritage.





CERTOUR II

management skills are essential even for a family restaurant

PROJECT TITLE	CERTOUR II – For a better SME management
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	11.10.2018 – 10.07.2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Technical Chamber of Greece – Eastern Macedonia Branch (Lead beneficiary, Greece); Municipality of Xanthi (Greece); Municipality of Constanta (Romania); Development Principles NGO (Armenia); State organization “Regional Fund for the Support of the Entrepreneurship of Zaporozhye region” (Ukraine); Sile Governorate (Turkey)
PROGRAMME	Black Sea Basin ENI CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	827.860 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	761.631 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Jointly promote business and entrepreneurship in the tourism and cultural sectors
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty



“Tourism is not just about history, gloss and glamour: it is a service that companies provide.

Many small enterprises manage their business not based on knowledge, but at the call of their hearts, which does not always have a positive impact on the quality of services provided by tourism companies.”

George Stampoulis, Head of the consortium of project implementers (Greece)

Even a family restaurant would perform better thanks to a business plan. Poor management in small businesses is a common problem for the countries of the Black Sea basin. Take for example tourism: it has an incredibly positive impact on employment and income, it is one of the fastest-growing sectors, and it still has a strong growth prospect. But in terms of numbers. The sector is dominated by many micro-enterprises with low managerial performance, which affects their competitiveness and viability, and therefore the attractiveness of the area. Many owners of small and medium businesses keep making common mistakes: they do not understand the importance of a strategy, of planning, of customers segmentation, etc. Quite often, owners of SMEs cannot explain the key advantages of their services compared to competitors. And here comes the Certour II project – implemented within the Black Sea Basin ENI CBC Programme– with the idea of supporting SMEs to become more competitive and successful thanks to improved managerial skills.

The main objective of the project is therefore to help companies understand and adopt professional management models. Thanks to this initiative, in each participating country 20 small enterprises have been selected to access mentoring support. In fact, the project involves the development and implementation of management tools, the creation of an electronic training platform, the organisation of study visits, and the establishment of a network of companies that could continue to exchange experiences.

Across the different countries, the profile of the target group is quite similar: they are small business-owners aged between 35 and 50, they often have a university degree, but they do not know how to apply that knowledge in real business. And it is difficult for them to recognise the importance of good management, because they cannot see immediate tangible results.

Here experts – mentors – play a huge role, as they are the ones who support companies in business planning, diagnostics, and

evaluation of results. During the project, each mentor meets in person the owner/manager of the mentee SME at least once, because it is very important to establish trusted relationship. But the experts must be careful not to perform the work instead of their trainees!

Mentors are likewise beneficiaries of the activities: they gain new experience and improve their level of knowledge. “In the long term, the project will also benefit tourists, who will receive higher quality services – says George Stampoulis, representative of the lead beneficiary – So, we can say that this project is making a lot of people wiser and happier”. The initiative has in fact resulted in the creation of green tourism clusters, the largest of which are the Green Ring of Melitopol and the Smirnov united territorial community. Before the Certour II project – and its predecessor Certour I – the Zaporizhzhia oblast in Ukraine was not actually perceived as a touristic region, but now it is one of the popular green destinations in Ukraine.

Among the additional benefits, Certour II is helping small and medium Ukrainian

businesses to leave the shadow economy. “Before the project, many small entrepreneurs did not know how to register a business, how to choose the right tax system – says Volodymyr Stepanenko, head of the partner organisation in Ukraine – They were afraid of working officially because they believed in the myth that taxes for small businesses are unbearable”. Another positive – and unforeseen – result of the project was the successful participation of Zaporizhzhia SMEs at a governmental programme for cheap loans: the enterprises which had joined the project were able to develop and illustrate particularly good business plans, and they were all granted the advantageous loans.

Like everywhere else, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a big challenge for the implementation of the project, which originally had envisaged a lot of face-to-face communication. Activities were quickly shifted online, and the funds spared from trips were allocated to different actions, like increasing the number of mentors or improving the mass media promotion.

Now, after a Certour I and a Certour II, the partners have already an idea about a possible future Certour III. Volodymyr Stepanenko sees a big potential in developing medical and wellness tourism not only in Zaporizhzhia but in other areas as well. “The project will not lose its relevance in the new programming period – concludes Stampoulis – also because the accumulated management improvements will require capitalisation. This project is not the end or even the beginning of the end. It is probably just the end of the beginning...”.





STAND UP!
*Weaving eco-threads
 across the Mediterranean*

PROJECT TITLE	Sustainable Textile Action for Networking and Development of circular economy business ventures in the Mediterranean
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	01.07.2020 – 31.12.2022
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Catalan Waste Agency (Lead beneficiary, Spain); Textile Industry Association (Spain); Berytech Foundation (Lebanon); SEKEM Development Foundation (Egypt); Textile Technical Centre (Tunisia); Prato Textile Museum Foundation (Italy); Tunis International Center for Environmental Technologies (Tunisia)
PROGRAMME	Mediterranean Sea Basin ENI CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	3.693.987 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	3.324.588 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Start-ups and recently established enterprises
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Business and SME development



The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.

“Entrepreneurs will be able to put into practice the concept of circular economy in a textile and clothing sector in need of new sustainable business models. STAND Up! knots together the shores of the Mediterranean, connecting knowledge, innovation, traditions and habits.”

Anna Ibañez de Arolas, Project Manager – STAND Up! Coordinator (Spain)

It is a cocktail of past and future, of new technologies and old traditions, of opportunities offered by web 2.0 mixed with knowledge and skills from remote and distant regions of the Mediterranean. It is innovation combined with ancient artisan knowledge and new entrepreneurial visions.

The added value of the STAND Up! project – supported by the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme – is “to promote environmental sustainability within one of the most impactful economic segments at environmental level, with the objective of accompanying the textile sector towards the green transition” says Filippo Guarini from the Prato Textile Museum Foundation, the Italian partner of the initiative. The cross-border element of the project is held in high regard by the project partners. They all are aware of the potential offered by the Mediterranean dimension, with different traditions into dialogue, each with its own important wealth of styles and knowledge. The partnership, with an outstanding track record, combines an exceptional pool of skills between the research and the industrial sectors. It offers particular attention to the artisan tradition, but also familiarity with the new trends in high tech design, interpreting the needs and values of contemporary cultures.

Immediate target of STAND Up! are entrepreneurs and eco-innovative ventures, including newcomers, the many talented young people attracted to the fashion and design sector in Spain, Italy, Tunisia, Lebanon and Egypt. Other recipients are business support organizations and players, ranging from the artisanal/industrial milieu of the textile supply chain to the finance and economic sector, from bodies promoting training and education to the political and legislative context in charge of enabling growth.

On the wave of increased environmental sensitivity and based on life cycle impacts of products and manufactures, new business strategies are identified by the project as ways to accelerate the fashion industry's transition to a circular system. The final aim? To reach sustainable consumption and production, while preventing pollution and saving resources.

“What makes STAND Up! special is that it gets its hands dirty, doing concrete things not only with those who create and produce, but also with those who sell and distribute”, says Francesco Bolli from the Prato Textile Museum Foundation.

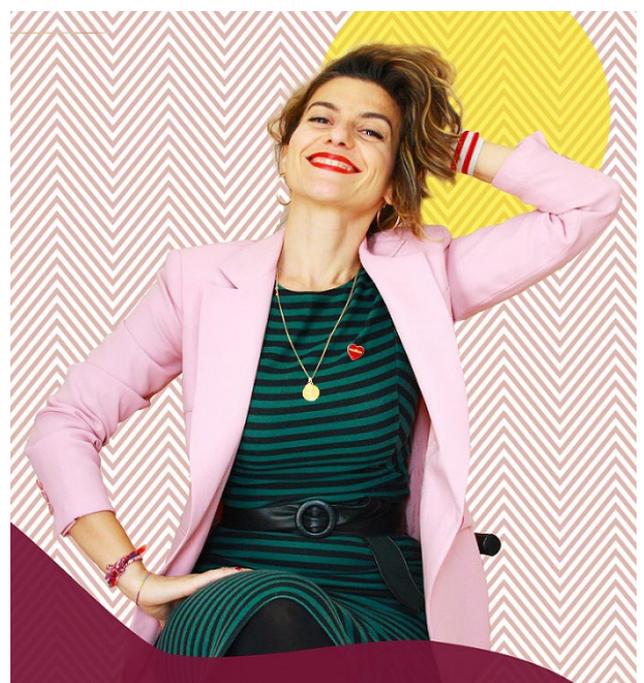
“In summer of 2021 we entered the second year of the execution period, and we are very close to the boom in the activities, despite a physiological delay due to the pandemic,” says Anna Ibañez from the Catalan Waste Agency, the lead beneficiary of the project. “400 entrepreneurs are the final beneficiaries of the project. So far, we have delivered direct support to more than 220 people in the five countries with training and capacitation on the green business model development: a prospect of entrepreneurial growth that takes onboard the environmental impact as a key element”. Based on this capacitation, 20 early-stage ventures are starting a seven-month incubation process, with 18 young entrepreneurs teaming in eight ventures in Italy and Lebanon already onboard. Other 12 ventures are expected soon also in Egypt, Spain and Tunisia.

Beyond that, ventures and entrepreneurs are supported with three kinds of vouchers: 40 intellectual property rights vouchers, equal to € 5.000 each; 20 soft-landing vouchers, equal to € 9.000 each, to expand into an overseas market; and 20 open innovation vouchers, equal to € 20.000 each, that assist entrepreneurs to develop solutions for some of the more burning circular challenges of established companies.

A digital open innovation platform is to be launched in 2021 with the perspective of benefiting from the solutions provided by external enablers. The platform has been designed taking as a reference the SwitchMed project, an initiative funded by the European Union and imple-

mented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Environment Programme and the Catalan Waste Agency-Regional Activity Center for Sustainable Consumption and Production. This connection allows the STAND Up! participants to link with financial investors, entrepreneurs and broker investments also under the Switchers Fund, a successful existing investment scheme. Through its open innovation platform, STAND Up! is in the process of forging cross-border delivery linkages, aggregating the textile and clothing value chain and connecting to existing complementary projects, such as the GIMED project or the TEX-MED project, always within the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme. Finally, between late 2021 and early 2022 the project is going to launch three prizes worth in total € 50.000, addressing the most promising circular business projects for solutions to textile manufacturing and clothing industry.

“The pandemic is getting us to rethink some of the founding values reflected in the entrepreneurial action of the textile industry. Thanks to the evolution of tastes and consumption, the big fashion brands are beginning to express sensitivity to the eco-sustainability of products and production processes” says Filippo Guarini. Making a virtue of necessity or rediscovering the beauty of what is necessary, useful, and important: here is the challenge for a new generation of couturier and fashion professionals from the five corners of the Mediterranean. STAND Up! couldn't have come at a better time.



MEDSt@rts

Financing young people out of the shadow-economy



PROJECT TITLE	MEDSt@rts – Med microfinance support system for start-ups
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	11.10.2019 – 10.04.2022
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Foundation of Sardinia (Lead beneficiary, Italy); Financial Society of Sardinia Region (Italy); Arab Italian Chamber of Cooperation (Italy); Chamber of Achaia (Greece); Sfax Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Tunisia); Leaders Organization (Palestine); Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in Sidon and South Lebanon (Lebanon)
PROGRAMME	Mediterranean Sea Basin ENI CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	2.831.040 €
PROGRAMME FINANCING	2.547.936 €
PROGRAMME PRIORITY	Support innovative Start-ups and recently established enterprises
THEMATIC OBJECTIVE	Business and SMEs development

The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.



“Start-ups and new businesses begin with so much hope, excitement and promise, but the search for capital is often challenging and stressful, whether you’re starting a business from scratches, or you are trying to find resources to push your start-up forward.”

Hijazi Natsheh, Leaders Organization (Palestine)

They are “non-bankable people”, they are young and offer no guarantees: they could hardly receive any monetary support if they knocked at a financial agency door. But now their business ideas could find a way to become a reality. It’s called MEDSt@rts, it’s an ENI CBC project, and it’s giving a chance to young entrepreneurs to start a professional life.

In the Mediterranean region, access to micro-finance for start-ups and self-employment is quite difficult: many studies have raised this issue, which is hitting entrepreneurship hard, particularly in a moment of crisis like the ongoing one. This challenge can be addressed through a multi-institutional and multi-stakeholder approach at basin level, and the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme represents a unique framework to do just so. That is how the MEDSt@rts project came to life: with eight partners working in five countries, the initiative intends to help young people with promising business ideas to overcome the traditional credit constraints and to start or scale up their enterprise. “People expected to benefit from this project are mainly young individuals who are considered high risk business, or who have businesses that have been informally established. The project aims to lift them out from the shadow economy and the black market”, says Maria Giovanna Fara, Foundation of Sardinia (Italy). MEDSt@rts aims at designing an appropriate ecosystem to

help self-employed and small business owners: at the heart of the project, there is a will to create a network of institutions able to define a common strategy and to simplify access to finance for SMEs. The final goal is the support to economic growth at Mediterranean level in an impactful and sustainable way.

Initially, the project targeted 18–35 year-old people, covering basically green and blue economy, tourism, innovation, and technology sectors. But the COVID-19 emergency pushed project partners to enlarge the target to 18–40 years of age, which is supposed to be the age group most impacted by the economic crisis. The sectoral scope of the project was also reviewed and broadened, to include support in the health, logistics, digitalisation, agri-food, eco-design, craftsmanship, cultural heritage and tourism sectors. Additional intervention areas have been identified in the personal care services, the education, the green and social enterprises, as well as sectors dealing with the “isolation economy”, such as remote education, telemedicine, online services. The project is now in its full implementation phase, and many actions have been launched. As a first step, there was a need to map the main stakeholders, so a list of 128 organizations currently operating in microfinance was created: they are private companies, incubators, business accelerators, NGOs, nonprofit, and governmental organisations, microfinance institutions.

This study is also a crucial preparatory action to support the design of the Mediterranean network of microfinance.

Then the selection of aspiring entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas started, 25 candidates in each country: Italy, Greece, Tunisia, Lebanon and Palestine. The potential applicants are unemployed young people and companies, and they are involved in a full process including training, financial advice, and financial subsidy up to €10.000.

As a third component of the project, each partner is organising a series of meetings with local actors to constitute a cross-border network for microfinance. “Networking is at the heart of MEDSt@rts project – says Hijazi Natsheh – The cross-border network for microfinance will help to maintain a permanent dialogue on microfinancing issues, to foster cooperation, learning and best practices exchange. In Palestine the network is in its first stage of creation and all the actors are active and enthusiastic.”

The dialogue and the collaboration among different partners and countries are key to the activities: every partner is bringing a new viewpoint to the project and it’s helping to shape the cross-border perspective. “Given the security and political constraints of our territory – continues Natsheh – we do not always have the chance to access international expertise in Palestine. Hence, the most important achievement for the Palestinian beneficiaries is the opportunity to collaborate and exchange with regional actors, mentors, and entrepreneurs, enlarging their knowledge and developing their tools of access to microfinance.”

In the post-2020 phase, supporting businesses will be crucial. The partners consider that there is still a lot to learn, and that cross-border cooperation remains the best framework to continue collaboration in the microfinancing of start-ups.



SINERT

Smart grid technology
driving renewable energies



PROJECT TITLE

SInERT – Solutions innovantes pour l'intégration des énergies renouvelables sur le réseau électrique tunisien

IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

01.04.2019 – 31.03.2022

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

École Supérieure des Communications de Tunis Sup'Com (Lead beneficiary, Tunisia);
ACTIA Group Recherche et Développement en Informatique Appliquée (Tunisia);
Istituto di ingegneria del Mare del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche CNR-INM (Italy);
LAYER Electronics S.r.l (Italy);
Università degli Studi di Palermo Dipartimento di Energia, Ingegneria dell'informazione e Modelli Matematici – UNIPA-DEIM (Italy)

PROGRAMME

Italy-Tunisia
ENI CBC 2014-2020

TOTAL BUDGET

1.032.438 €

PROGRAMME FINANCING

929.194 €

PROGRAMME PRIORITY

Promotion and support for research and innovation in key sectors

THEMATIC OBJECTIVE

Support to education, research, technological development and innovation



“At the beginning, it was a research project but now it has become a large-scale project with interconnection between universities, researchers and economic actors. In the ENI CBC programmes one is never alone: this is the main added value of this programme.”

Dario Di Cara, Research Scientist in the Institute of Marine Engineering CNR-INM Palermo (Italy)

Solar panels, wind turbines, hydropower plants: they are the key to decarbonisation, but they pose great challenges concerning the integration and distribution through electricity networks. On sunny days, solar panels can achieve their maximum production capacity; however, if it is cloudy, this capacity is reduced, and at night electricity production drops to zero. There are times when panels, or wind generators, or hydropower plants produce more energy than needed, and others when there is no production at all. Balancing this situation is crucial to avoid energy waste and to always dispose of the appropriate amount of energy. This is where smart grids come in, enabling the correct management of excess or under generation of power.

In a centralised grid, the flow of energy is one-way: the electricity passes from the power station towards peripheral nodes but does not travel in the other direction. This system generates waste, as the electricity produced but not consumed by final users, is simply dispersed within the network. On the contrary, a smart grid is a new, intelligent form of network. Basically, through several nodes connected one to another, the grid is able not only to gather information about the consumption, but also to process this information and to redistribute the energy between the various nodes, in case of over voltages or supply shortages. In practical terms, a smart grid is capable of automatically re-

distributing electricity amongst the various nodes, preventing fluctuations, power-cuts, dispersion.

Today, the expansion of renewable energies requires specific measures to achieve a smart management of resources: digital technologies are quite a boost to accelerate the transition to a greener, more sustainable economy. For example, the effort Tunisia is sustaining is to migrate networks from the one-way, centralised system, to smart grids where a real-time, reliable management can optimize production and distribution capacities. The country is working on the integration of generators and storage systems in the electricity networks, a real challenge especially in case of low and medium voltage. And here is where the SInERT project – financed within the framework of the Italy-Tunisia ENI CBC Programme – comes in. The aim of the initiative is to develop innovative, low-cost industrial systems, both in Sicily and Tunisia, facilitating the integration of renewable energies in the Tunisian electricity network. “The Tunisian Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Renewable Energies is pushing for deployment of renewable energy solutions as part of the Tunisian solar programme – says Manel Ben Romdhane, project coordinator – and SInERT fits perfectly with this vision.”

Two pilot sites had been selected, the island of Kerkennah in Tunisia and the island of Ustica in Sicily. Due to the health and travel restrictions caused by the pan-

demic, the Kerkennah site has been replaced with a new one at the El Ghazela technopole, in the vicinity of the lead beneficiary, the Tunisian Sup’Com. Activities are ongoing, the identification of the algorithms to be adopted was completed, measurements and protection places have been pinpointed on the grid. Once the pilot sites performance is monitored and the effects evaluated, the partners are going to explore the replication potential at a larger scale and in other sites.

“The consortium has been extended to the private and industrial sector mainly for this purpose, – says Chiheb Rebai, researcher and member of the project steering committee – so that they can integrate the results of research and the experimentation on the pilot sites, to ensure the construction of the installations necessary for an efficient production and distribution”. The ambition is to develop the necessary sensors and tools, including intelligent control equipment, bidirectional power converters, communication systems on power lines.

The results of the research and the data collected through the smart grids will be of great use for a larger public, mainly students and researchers. The Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas (STEG) – the main supplier in Tunisia – is also associated with the project and is providing access for the project team to the electricity infrastructure for calibration and testing of equipment. Project partners agree that there is still a lot to learn. “We are certainly focused on SInERT, but we are already looking into the future – points out Dario Di Cara, CNR Palermo. The world of research is constantly evolving, and we should capitalise on our common know-how to tackle new challenges, particularly hydrogen solutions.”





Entrepreneurship & Innovation and the COVID-19 pandemic

Almost two years after its outbreak, the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused in many areas, including cross-border cooperation, is beginning to be estimated, with repercussions on the economy and mobility of many regions. The immediate damage is now very well known to all: suddenly the borders were closed, putting a strain on communities and entire regions, showing how fragile our systems are and how interdependent we are all with our neighbors and how much a multilateral approach is more important than ever.

Similarly, it is now clear to all that in April 2020 the European Commission was able to give its rapid response to the crisis, launching the [Team Europe](#) package to support Partner Countries in the fight against the pandemic. The resources made available soon exceeded 40.000 M€. This enormous support was initially focused on an emergency response to humanitarian needs, and then expanded to strengthen health, water and sanitation systems and ultimately turned into mitigating the social and economic consequences of the pandemic. Other measures were introduced to face the challenges posed by the virus: the Commission has adopted two [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives](#), enabling the regions on both sides of the EU external borders to benefit from the same opportunities as the internal EU border regions. Exceptional and useful measures were introduced to use Cohesion Policy funds (2014-2020) to finance initiatives related to the outbreak of the epidemic such as investments in the healthcare sector, support for SMEs and the labour market. The deadline for projects implementation was also extended, and programmes were granted more flexibility, liquidity and simplification in several spheres of implementation.

*Leaving no one behind
in the joint endeavour to
overcome the pandemic
is the challenge stretching
from today's ongoing projects
to the next programming cycle.*

So said, the long wave of the pandemic is now hitting the economy more than before and recovery from the pandemic will be neither rapid nor linear. Responsibility now falls in the hands of the territories, the countries benefiting from aid and their local authorities. In the meanwhile, COVID-19 is far from becoming a memory, as it takes the form of an enemy still present among us. Meanwhile, and over time, the activities against the pandemic are improving. By their very nature, cross-border cooperation programmes, and in particular E&I activities, can be of great help in rebuilding the economic sector of communities and territories, making resources available in the most widespread way possible, building resilience and providing concrete results in the field.

Looking ahead: from ENI CBC to Interreg NEXT

While the new programming phase is in the making and the next generation of 2021-2027 programmes takes shape, several inputs can be analysed to feed the discussion about Interreg NEXT.

As identified under the [European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund Regulations](#), in the post-2020 scenario, the first policy objective (PO) aims at “a more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity”. The inclusion within the regulations of the Partner Countries cross-border territories has allowed to embrace the concept of “Europe and its neighbors”. With this scope, it targets all dimensions of E&I, with a strong focus on targeted research and innovation, digitisation, support to start-ups and SMEs and smart skills’ development.

The five specific objectives under PO1 and common to all the Interreg programmes gather elements matching the main sectors already covered by TO1 and TO2 in the current ENI CBC programmes:

- ◆ developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies;
- ◆ reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities;
- ◆ enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments;
- ◆ developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship;
- ◆ enhancing digital connectivity.

Within the PO1, the orientation currently expressed by the Interreg NEXT programmes favour only two specific objectives, notably “enhancing research and innovation capacities” with seven programmes interested* and “enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs” with six programmes concerned**. The specific objective “reaping the benefits of digitization for citizens, companies and governments” is currently considered only by the Interreg NEXT Kolarctic Programme. As can be seen, the NEXT programmes are preparing to express a certain concentration around the themes of E&I, in strong continuity with the current period.

* Interreg NEXT Kolarctic, Karelia, South-East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Russia, Black Sea Basin, Mediterranean Sea Basin, Italy-Tunisia.

** Interreg NEXT Karelia, South-East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Russia, Latvia-Russia, Mediterranean Sea Basin, Italy-Tunisia.

The tourism sector deserves a separate analysis. Considered rather as a cross-cutting sector, during the consultation process for the drafting of the Interreg Regulation between the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, the sector found its place within PO4 (“a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights”) giving life to the specific objective “enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation”. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have certainly influenced this decision to include tourism and culture within PO4, emphasizing the capillary aspects of the sector, such as an economic activity that is very distributed in the territories, even the most peripheral, and destined to involve large social categories.

It remains clear for all NEXT programmes, however, how much tourism remains a prevalent sector for PO1 “a smarter Europe” but also for other aspects relevant to other specific objectives, for example environmental ones consistent with PO2 “a greener Europe” or for aspects related to the enhancement of participation or citizenship and governance as contemplated respectively in PO5 and in ISO1. In defining their strategies, although these are not yet fully confirmed (data November 2021), 10 are the Interreg NEXT programmes which have included culture and tourism among their specific objectives, and this represent a majority of programmes.

From research to digitalisation, from support to SMEs to tourism enhancement, there are many elements of continuity between ENI and NEXT. A traced path for territories and communities already accustomed to travel together.





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